

## **ANNUAL STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**

**January 30, 2020**

**HONOR GUARD**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**Festival of Patriotic Songs**

**Performed by the Leawood Singers**

Good afternoon and welcome to the annual State of the City Address. I really appreciate you being in attendance to hear about all of the outstanding achievements from 2019 for the City of Leawood.

Before I start, I would like to ask all of the elected officials who are here today to please stand to be recognized as I read your names. I would also ask that City Administrator Scott Lambers and all of the City's professional staff please rise to be acknowledged. My sincere thanks to Director of Parks & Recreation Chris Claxton and her team for organizing today's event.

Since we are at the dawn of a new decade, I thought it would be interesting to look back upon the last decade and mention some of the highlights that have transpired over the past ten years.

In 2010, one year after the National Bureau of Economic Research reported that the recession of 2008 had ended, Park Place established itself as the premier new-urbanism development in the entire Kansas City metropolitan area.

Speaking of Park Place, in 2011, AMC Theaters announced that it would be relocating its world headquarters to Leawood at Park Place.

In 2012, Oklahoma Joe's Bar-B-Que, now Joe's Kansas City Bar-B-Que, opened at Camelot Court amid much fanfare and long lines.

In 2013, Leawood resident and owner of Rye restaurant Colby Garrelts was named "Best Chef of the Midwest" at the prestigious annual *James Beard Awards Ceremony*.

In 2014, proving the validity of the adage, "If you build it, they will come," Leawood opened *Leawoof*, the City's first off-leash dog park. And come they did, on both two legs and four legs from all across the metropolitan area.

In 2015, the Leawood Fire Department joined only 218 fire departments from more than 30,000 fire departments across the nation to achieve "Internationally Accredited Agency" status with the *Commission on Fire Accreditation International* and the *Center for Public Safety Excellence*.

Taking us into the year 2016, the City of Leawood Fire Department received the highest "Insurance Services Organization" (ISO) rating a city can achieve by advancing its rating of "Three" to a rating of "One."

In 2017, the Leawood Foundation spearheaded fundraising efforts to raise nearly \$500,000 from generous individuals and businesses to finance the construction of Leawood's "All Inclusive Playground" at City Park.

Finally, in 2018, Leawood was ranked “First” in the country among all of our nation’s cities with a population between 25,000 and 100,000 by *WalletHub.com*.

Quite a bit has happened in the year 2019 and, looking back to last January, it is difficult to find a word or words to describe the year. However, some leading dictionaries have tried. Merriam-Webster selected the gender neutral non-binary pronoun “they.” “Quid Pro Quo” was also selected - but time is too short today to discuss that one.

*Dictionary.com* selected the word “existential.” Now, I’ll have to admit that I needed to Google “existentialism” to better understand its meaning. It’s a philosophy that emphasizes individual existence, freedom and choice. Its perspective is that humans define their own meaning of life, and try to make “rational” decisions despite existing in an “irrational” universe. At this point in our history, this really hits home to me and causes me to wonder how one reconciles the radical differences between the two.

For starters, I believe if we can make a concerted effort to step back from the abyss that is crumbling under our feet, perhaps we can move forward and restore civility to our discourse and respect for those whose opinions differ greatly from our own.

This obviously should start at the national level.

Where is it written that shouting down or demonizing someone with whom you disagree improves the power of persuasion? It is not.

Despite all of the very positive things that have occurred this past year, the House of Representatives’ approval of the two articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump will be the defining moment of 2019. Unfortunately, many will not remember the continuing and ever-growing national economy, approval of the United States, Mexico and Canada trade agreement, a sweeping overhaul of the nation’s retirement system that expands retirement plan coverage, legislation to curb illegal robocalls and an astonishing approval of a budget without going through the political gamesmanship of a government shutdown like last year.

As many of you know, I am an eternal optimist. However, the national scene of this past year has been quite challenging for my philosophical tendencies. Nevertheless, I do look forward to celebrating the tremendous highlight of 2020 with the Kansas City Chiefs winning the Super Bowl!

As for the City of Leawood, I am extremely pleased to let you know that 2019 was a notable year on several counts. First, and I do mean “FIRST,” *WalletHub.com* performed its annual evaluation of almost 1,300 cities with populations between 25,000 and 100,000 across the nation reviewing 40 key metrics on economic vitality, quality of life, education, health and public safety. As you may know, Leawood was ranked fifth in the country in 2015, third in 2016 and 2017, and as previously noted, was “First” in 2018.

After achieving 2018's "Number One" ranking, many might assume that that the only way for the City to be ranked in such a large and comprehensive survey would be downward.

I am delighted to announce that in 2019, we became the *BACK to BACK* "NUMBER ONE" ranked city in the nation with an average ranking of 2.0 over the past five years. I want to thank and congratulate each and every one who contributed to this fantastic recognition.

The City of Leawood received other acknowledgements as well. *HomeSnacks.net* evaluated various criteria to determine the "Best Place to Live" in Kansas. For the second year in a row, Leawood was rated "Number One" due to many factors, including being the City with the "Highest Median Income" and the "Highest Median Home Value" of all of the cities that were analyzed.

While *Bloomberg Businessweek* ranked Leawood as the 75<sup>th</sup> "Richest City in the Country," *The Kansas City Business Journal* reported that Leawood had the first, third, 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> "Wealthiest Zip Codes" in the metropolitan area.

*Safewise.com* ranked Leawood as the fifth "Safest City in Kansas," up three slots from last year. Leawood was also ranked the State of Kansas "Safest City" by *Backgroundchecks.org* and *Alarms.org*.

And *ChamberofCommerce.com*, an organization that refers to itself as the "go-to digital resource" to help entrepreneurs create and run successful businesses, ranked Leawood as the "Best Place to Live in Kansas."

Additionally, the City's Finance Department, under the leadership of Dawn Long, continued their diligent efforts to ensure that Leawood's finances remained solid. The City's AAA bond rating from *Moody's Investors Services* was retained for the 11<sup>th</sup> straight year. This resulted in the issuance of almost \$31 million in Temporary Notes at an interest cost of 1.18% and the refinancing of existing General Obligation Bonds to a new lower rate of 1.89%, creating a savings of nearly \$100,000.

The Finance Department also received the *Government Finance Officers Association* (GFOA) "Distinguished Budget Presentation Award" for the 19<sup>th</sup> consecutive year for the City's annual budget document. In addition, the GFOA "Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting" was presented to Leawood for our annual audit for the 23<sup>rd</sup> sequential year.

I am also pleased to inform you that that the City's tax levy remained constant for the 16<sup>th</sup> successive year while maintaining the third lowest mill levy in the State of Kansas among cities of the First Class.

Before I review the commercial development that took place in 2019, I would like to take another look back in the City's history – but this time to 1951. That historic year saw Leawood's very first shopping center, The Somerset Shops, open at the intersection of Lee Boulevard and Somerset Drive. Developed by George Martin and Cliff Brisbois, it was among the first commercial areas south of the Plaza.

The center was anchored by Martin's Finer Foods, whose clientele was so trustworthy that they could send their children on a grocery errand and run up a tab for their purchases. The other initial businesses included a pharmacy with an old fashioned soda fountain, a barber shop where a child's first haircut was free, a cleaners and a hobby shop.

Although business oriented, the center functioned as Leawood's town center for gatherings amongst the residents for many decades. Last year, the Leawood Historic Commission dedicated a new bronze plaque recognizing The Somerset Shops as "The Corner that Kindness Built."

Fortunately for all of us, Leawood's development did not stop with The Somerset Shops.

In 2019, Community Development Director Richard Coleman and his department issued permits for a total construction value of nearly \$83 million. This was comprised of residential construction with 34 new single-family home building permits, including 15 re-builds, with a residential construction value of \$60 million. There were also 112 commercial building permits, with a commercial construction valuation of \$23 million.

Overall, the City issued 1,883 permits for retail, office, residential and business park uses. As a result, there were a number of new entries into the Leawood business community which included the following:

- Ranch Mart North Shopping Center celebrated the opening of Mathnasium;
- Mission Farms welcomed Paros Estiatorio, a Mediterranean restaurant;
- Park Place added Panache Chocolatier;
- Town Center Plaza brought in Anthony Vince Nail Spa, ARRAY – a collection of shops, Chase Bank, Organic Hemp Botanicals, Hudson/Hawk Barber & Shop, Red Door Home Store, Revocup Coffee and Tempur-Pedic Mattress store;
- Town Center Crossing saw Lovesac Furniture store open;
- Leawood Square celebrated Conroy's Public House and Goodwill Donation Center;
- Village of Seville welcomed the New Apostolic Church and Opulent Massage Spa;
- Market Square brought in Kumon Math and Reading Center of Leawood;
- Plaza Pointe added Prevail Innovative Wealth Strategies; and
- Ironhorse Center welcomed Ironhaus Bierhalle & Garten, a German Pub.

There were a number of major projects concluded in 2019. In Park Place, construction was completed on the 50,000-square-foot headquarters for Tortoise Capital Advisors. Directly west of that building, construction is

underway for an 81-unit apartment building that wraps a parking garage, providing 249 parking spaces for the apartments and the office building.

In the Cornerstone development at 135<sup>th</sup> and Nall Avenue, construction will soon be finished on the Element Hotel providing 110 rooms in its 73,000 square feet.

In Town Center Plaza, we said goodbye to the On the Border restaurant and welcomed two new retail buildings which house the popular Shake Shack restaurant as well as Helzberg Diamonds and Verizon.

Johnson County's construction of the new Tomahawk Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant broke ground in the spring of 2018 and made considerable progress in 2019. The plant consists of 12 buildings and a new Evergy substation. Construction is scheduled to be completed in 2022.

The City also approved a plan for extensive remodeling and new construction, along with a companion Community Improvement District [CID], for the Ranch Mart North Shopping Center.

Construction of the new Brookwood Elementary School was completed in 2019. The school's new 76,000-square-foot facility is located along 103<sup>rd</sup> Street and reopened to students in March of 2019.

And, speaking of schools, The Barstow School purchased the former Hy-Vee Grocery Store and has approved plans for converting the building to provide for the school's STEAM facility called the IDEA Space, which stands for Innovation, Discovery, Entrepreneurship and Arts.

On the residential side, Hallbrook East Village has started construction. The development consists of 33 single-family villas on approximately nine acres located between Overbrook Road and State Line Road. And the Hills of Leawood development at 151<sup>st</sup> and Mission Road broke ground with an approved plan of 70 single-family lots. Finally, on the north side of the City, near 89<sup>th</sup> and Sagamore Road, construction is close to completion for the Village of Leawood including 23 turnkey, single-family homes.

The City has also approved a mixed use development known as The Regents on 135<sup>th</sup> Street. The development will include twin villas in its first phase.

So, whether it was honoring our first shopping center, breaking ground on current projects, or approving plans for future development, Leawood had a very busy 2019.

Of course, sometimes we're glad certain departments aren't quite as busy.

Police Chief Troy Rettig and the Leawood Police Department reported that property crimes were down 18% in 2019 with an almost 50% reduction in thefts from automobiles. On the other hand, as you may recall, last winter was quite severe and very taxing on our police resources. For example, during a 72-hour period last January, there were 352 calls for service which included 25 crashes. Unfortunately, two of the crashes involved drivers hitting stopped police cars who were helping other motorists.

The Department's Animal Control division experienced an unusual, newsworthy event regarding a loose dog. It became newsworthy due to the fact that the dog in question had been shipped to our area from Egypt. After the dog escaped, it was reported that it had potentially been exposed to rabies while in Egypt. As you can imagine, that changed everything for the media and the public. The dog was very skittish and it took several days before it was captured, unharmed. Later, it was determined that the dog was not infected.

The Police Department hosted two Drug Takeback events in conjunction with the Drug Enforcement Administration taking in 640 pounds of unwanted or expired prescription drugs. The Department also joined the Paws Enforcement program with Great Plains SPCA. This program brings an adoptable dog into a City facility each month for socialization and, hopefully, to find a potential owner.

In 2019, the Police Department, with the assistance of our Parks & Recreation Department, revived its annual Fishing Derby bringing together over 100 citizens, police officers and volunteers, not to mention some very large fish.

Finally, the Police Department initiated a joint venture with the City, video doorbell maker *Ring* and private citizens to allow residents to purchase *Ring* products at a discounted rate. Nearly 125 people visited the event at Ironwoods Lodge to take advantage of this program.

The Leawood Fire Department continued to demonstrate its high level of excellence by retaining its "International Accreditation" ranking and its ISO rating of "One." The Department also participated in the Church of the Resurrection annual health fair by providing CPR training and partaking in some fun activities at their "Wet n' Wild" event.

In a display of compassion beyond the call of duty, Captain Joe Sullivan, Lieutenant Curtis Newman, Master Firefighters Mason Fiate, Steve Miller, Brian Bartlett and Rick Schulze ran a call for a traumatic injury. The homeowner was putting up holiday lights on his roof and fell off, seriously injuring himself. Later that day, units E32 and T32 returned to the house and finished putting up the display lights. It took them a little longer than anticipated because some of the lights had burned out, and the firefighters had to go purchase replacements.

This is not unusual for the Leawood Fire Department. In another example, firefighters responded to a medical call for a resident who had fallen while shoveling his driveway. After attending to his injuries, the firefighters finished clearing the driveway for him. As Fire Chief Dave Williams has mentioned on numerous occasions, they consider themselves part of the community and just want to be good neighbors. Would all of our firefighters here today please stand to be recognized?

The City's Public Works Department and Director David Ley had a very active year disrupting the lives of our citizens. Some of their street activities included the Lee Boulevard improvement project consisting of street widening, storm sewer and bike lane work, and the installation of LED street lights. Additionally, the Department worked on 15 miles of residential street mill and overlay reconstruction and replacement of 9,000 feet of residential streets. They also started work on the first phase of the expansion of 143<sup>rd</sup> Street east of Mission Road.

Other activities included the placement of 135 LED street light fixtures, planning for the 12-mile South Bike Loop route, collecting over 600 tons of street debris, preventing it from entering our natural waterways, and restriping 24,000 linear feet of pavement markings.

Finally, the Public Works staff logged and reported to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 626 hours of work from various City departments on the recovery project from the flooding that occurred in 2017. To date, the City has received almost \$650,000 from FEMA.

City Attorney Patty Bennett in the Legal Department announced yet another first for the City of Leawood, and for the State of Kansas for that matter. Our Assistant City Attorney, Marcy Knight, was named the "Prosecutor of the Year" by the *Kansas Highway Patrol Drug and Alcohol Evaluation Unit* in recognition of her dedication and commitment to successfully prosecuting traffic safety laws. Marcy, please stand and be recognized.

In Information Services, Director Ross Kurz and his Department are completing the Mission Road fiber project that will directly connect Fire Station Number 2 and Fire Station Number 3. The IS staff is also working on installing upgraded technology to establish redundant paths to the internet to enhance the City's public safety access.

Human Resources Director Nic Sanders and his staff processed over 1,000 applications for 60 City positions. The department also redoubled its efforts in wellness. To that end, the City had over 100 employees participate in the Garmin challenge with over 90% successfully achieving the minimum of over two thousand steps per day. Furthermore, the department supported a Weight Watchers On-Site group of 20 employees who lost a total of 415 pounds.

Human Resources also facilitated a city-wide Mental Health/ Suicide Prevention training. Finally, they once again coordinated the City's annual Employee United Way Campaign resulting in a 16 % increase in giving over last year.

The Parks and Recreation Department, overseen by the capable leadership of Chris Claxton, continued its work with the Leawood Rotary Club on a beautification project to plant 60 trees over a three-year period. This joint project is another demonstration of the City's commitment to retain its "Tree City USA" designation.

The Art in Public Places Initiative of the Leawood Arts Council installed a new sculpture titled “Walking Woman.” The piece was created by California artist Michael Stutz and is located in the City’s sculpture garden on the east side of Tomahawk Creek Parkway across from the Justice Center. A kinetic sculpture by artist John King, “Skywriting 1,” was installed as part of Leawood’s “Art on Loan” Program. The shimmering aqua blue piece is located on the west side of City Hall. The previous “Art on Loan” piece, “Point Defiance” by sculptor Beth Nybeck, was purchased by the City and relocated to the Ironwoods Park entrance.

The City could not do what it does nor be what it is without the help of many. Leawood is extremely fortunate to have a devoted, civic-minded citizenry who volunteers their time and expertise to the betterment of our community. I would ask all of you present today that are involved in various endeavors, whether in Service Groups, or on Commissions, Advisory Boards, Councils or Committees to please rise and be recognized.

In addition to all of you, there are some Leawood residents and guests here today that warrant special recognition. As I call your name, please come forward and join me on the platform.

Ty Toney, a star soccer player for Pembroke Hill, tore his ACL for the second time in his sports career while preparing for the State’s soccer semifinals. Very cognizant of the recovery path that lay ahead for him, Ty created a website, [aclconnect.org](http://aclconnect.org), to provide tutorials, references and step-by-step videos that are immensely encouraging for individuals going through the ACL repair process. Ty, hopefully, you will be able to compete athletically in college without having to access your own webpage!

Boy Scouts Alexander Buck and Nathan Whitaker each received the “Medal of Merit” for rescuing a fellow Scout who was struggling to stay afloat on a lake. Together, their efforts prevented a tragedy from occurring. The “Medal of Merit” is awarded to Scouts who perform an act of service of rare or exceptional character that reflects an uncommon degree of concern for the well-being of others. There are only 100 of these awards given to Scouts annually.

Asaria Lopez, a sophomore at Blue Valley North, has been a recipient of the “Presidential Volunteer Service Award” from 2017 through 2019. She is on the Principal’s Honor Roll and active in pole vaulting. Last summer, she earned the “Academic Achievement Award” at the *National American Miss Kansas State* pageant which qualified her for Nationals as the “National All-American Miss Johnson County Junior Teen.”

Forerunner Christian Academy seventh grader Arden Peterson was able to come up with the correct spelling of “dolomite” propelling her to the Scripps National Spelling Bee in Washington, D.C. Since this word was not covered during her training, Arden had to rely on her innate talents to come up with the correct spelling. Dolomite, by the way, is a type of limestone - but I am sure you all knew that - as well as to how to spell it.

Leawood resident Rita Blitt, internationally acclaimed artist and filmmaker, gifted 130 pieces of her original artwork, consisting of abstract drawings, paintings and sculptures, to the University of Kansas Edwards Campus. Her art is also on display in public and private collections across the globe. The overriding theme behind her artistry is “the joy of life.”

Mackenzie Thornton, a microbiology and pre-medicine major at Kansas State University, was one of three Wildcats to receive the prestigious “Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship.” This award is considered the premier undergraduate scholarship for students interested in research careers in engineering, mathematics or the natural sciences. Mackenzie is researching regulation of translation in cancer cells. She has also worked at the University of Kansas Medical Center studying head and neck cancer.

Rick Robinson, President of the Leawood Rotary Club, led the Club’s initiative to have the City of Leawood be designated as a “Purple Heart City” by the *Military Order of the Purple Heart*. This designation is to recognize the citizens of our community that have earned the “Purple Heart Medal” decoration honoring their sacrifices while protecting the freedoms enjoyed by all Americans. Rick, will you and Purple Heart Recipients Walt Schley, Glen Leonard and Ted Wakeman please join me on the stage?

In 2019, the Leawood Singers celebrated 50 years of bringing musical harmony to civic groups and residents of senior living facilities. While, the initial concept for the organization was to bring music to nursing homes, their talents have resulted in performing before a wide variety of numerous audiences. My thanks to leader Dr. Stephanie Henry and all others for performing today. Ladies, here’s to another 50 fabulous years!

Please join me in a well-deserved round of applause for these extraordinary individuals.

As the Leawood Singers prepare to sing one final song for us, I want to thank each of you again for coming today. I consider it a true honor to serve as Leawood mayor and wish you all good health, prosperity and peace in 2020!

GO CHIEFS!