

CITISTATES REPORT/KANSAS CITY

BY CURTIS JOHNSON AND NEAL PEIRCE

PART 1 A REGION DIVIDED BY HISTORY, POLITICS
AND SHEER DISTANCE.

PART 2 NEEDED: LIVELY URBAN CENTERS TO LURE
FRESH TALENT.

MANY COMMUNITIES — ONE REGION

PART 3 WHY THE KANSAS CITY AREA SHOULD BEWARE
OF OVER-RELIANCE ON THE CAR.

PART 4 THREE PATHS THAT HOLD GREAT PROMISE
FOR KANSAS CITY'S FUTURE.

In the intensifying competition for human talent, the Kansas City area will need good schools, a better transportation system, a lively downtown — and a new determination to bridge the chasms that divide our region.

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To obtain additional copies or for more information,
contact the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation at 816-842-0944.
This report is also available in electronic form at www.gkccf.org.

ABOUT THE REPORT

The *Citistates Report for Greater Kansas City* first appeared in *The Kansas City Star* as a four-part series, edited by E. Thomas McClanahan, in January and February of 2001. The report was funded by the Civic Council of Greater Kansas City, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, the Hall Family Foundation, the Mid-America Regional Council, and the law firm of Shugart, Thomson & Kilroy.

The report is intended to articulate a unifying theme for the Greater Kansas City region, spur public debate, and promote the model of a fully functional region while bringing awareness to challenges that inhibit the strength of our region. The *Citistates Report*, through an independent, expert assessment of the Greater Kansas City region, provides a catalyst for the region to achieve collectively what no single part could achieve alone.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Peirce and Johnson are inventors of a new form of American journalism. They provide challenging "outsider" views in the form of Citistates reports – designed to inform and energize local civic forces – on the future prospects of urban regions across the United States. The reports are intended to stimulate, but never replace, vigorous civic dialogue. The Citistates team interviews a broad range of metropolitan leaders and citizens groups. Then, in a series of in-depth articles, the team draws on what has been learned from community leaders and citizens, as well as its knowledge of regions nationwide. An independent assessment of the region's major problems and opportunities is written and published by the area's newspaper. In preparing this report, the team interviewed hundreds of Kansas City area residents, gaining insights from people in government, businesses, labor, schools and churches.

In addition to this report on the Greater Kansas City region, Peirce and Johnson have most recently focused on South Florida (Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties); San Antonio and South Texas; and Nashville and Middle Tennessee. Other cities they have conducted reports for include Atlanta, Charlotte, Baltimore, Dallas, Denver, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, San Diego, Seattle, and St. Louis. For more information about Johnson and Peirce and the reports, visit the Citistates Group Web site at www.citistates.com.



Johnson



Peirce

FROM THE AUTHORS

Since *The Kansas City Star* originally published this *Citistates Report* in early 2002, has anything changed?

Based on what we hear and read, the answer's yes.

For starters, the *Star* commissioned a major effort to dig deep into one of the reports themes: the sorry state of the KCMO downtown, where the soaring skyline seen from a distance dissolves up close into a sea of scattered and neglected assets. Writers Kevin Collison and Jeffrey Spivak hit readers with some hard-nosed economics. Compared with 16 peer regions, the Kansas City region's sagging urban center had cost the region a significant number of jobs. The region's home values – even in the new suburbs – were stuck with slower growth than regions with good downtowns.

As this sinks in, hopes rise that the Sasaki plan for downtown provided by the Civic Council will not become another dust-gathering dream. Every region wants a share of the knowledge workers. Richard Florida's popular book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, uses data to make it official: the "creatives" are congregating in urban places where technology is respected and diversity is prized. Talent is taking up residence in 24/7 urban centers and nearby neighborhoods. Suburbs get in on this action only if they build real centers of action, where the elements of commercial and civic life are reunited in a mixture of offices and shops, restaurants and bars, and housing you can walk to.

The *Star's* recent poll says 80 percent of metropolitan residents think reviving downtown is a critical priority.

In a region with such scattered if remarkable assets, connections become critical. The new performing arts center is bound to be a homerun hit. But more needs to be delivered: a steady series of singles, small projects that fill gaps. And, yes, transit linkages, notwithstanding voters' constant rejections. Stark fact: this region will not be a thriving 21st century place if it places its all its bets on roads and cars.

Kansas Citians must sustain the will to bridge rivers and take down fences, to think and act like one region. We applaud the public forums conducted by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation after our report was published. Everybody seems to agree: to advance, this community must cultivate a stronger and wider culture of collaboration. The Greater Kansas City Community Foundation is focusing on longer-range strategic priorities. Can a whole region also find the courage to embrace common goals?

We don't buy the theory that suggests this region is too self-satisfied and won't ever change. But proving the skeptics wrong is going to require more of the audacity that Jim Stowers displayed in launching the biosciences center.

Curtis Johnson and Neal Peirce

Winter 2003

PART 1 A REGION DIVIDED BY HISTORY, POLITICS
AND SHEER DISTANCE.

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Divided by history, politics and sheer distance

FROM CITY OF FRAGMENTS TO ONE REGION

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star

Sept. 11, for all its horror, was one of those moments in which all our petty differences suddenly seemed cut down to size. We reached out to our neighbors and we rediscovered our common destiny as Americans. The question now is whether we will once again go our separate ways.

That's also the main question posed by this four—Sunday series: Will the Kansas City communities of the 21st century, fresh from the sudden reminder that we're all in it together, begin to function as one region in the new national and global economy? Or will the metro area continue to splinter, with each community seeking to chart a separate course?

The Census Bureau sees the bistate area as a single metropolitan region. The same is true for demographers and market analysts. Ask anyone — corporate leaders, students, tourists, investors — in New York, Chicago, London or Tokyo about Raytown, Independence, Olathe or Overland Park. You'll get a blank stare. But mention "Kansas City" and they'll say "Oh, yes!"

Do the people of this region understand they're a single labor market area, sharing a common environment and a common future? Some do and are determined that the entire region excel. Others seem irremediably focused on their own small piece of turf — city vs. suburb, Northland vs. south of the river, Missouri vs. Kansas or whatever.

In earlier times, such questions mattered less. But not today. We've entered an era of ferocious competition among large metro areas — or "citistates" — for new technologies, new markets, quality university faculty, research labs, quality arts and sports. And in this competition, a dynamic, attractive urban center is becoming a trump card. A vital center serves as a region's symbol and global calling card — its brand.

For historically splintered regions like Kansas City, competing on these terms is especially tough. The New York, London and Los Angeles citistates, for example, are so huge and dominant they can tolerate deep divisions and still succeed. But not Kansas City-scale regions. They either collaborate internally or find themselves slipping nationally and globally.

The economic stakes are shifting, too: Tax abatements to lure industries — a Kansas City area specialty even for moves within the region — are becoming passe. In an information economy and knowledge century, the primary goal is attracting top human talent.

Talent generates wealth. Promising and imaginative

individuals won't choose to visit — much less settle — in humdrum places. They demand stimulating, livable cities. David Warm of the Mid-America Regional Council nails it when he observes: "It used to be that regions were good places to live because they were good places to work. Increasingly, they will be good places to work only if they are good places to live."

A strategy that views the Kansas City area as one region would be in harmony with the essential qualities of great world cities through history. Almost invariably, the great places traded with other cities near and far. They constantly opened their eyes and spirits to embrace new ideas. They worked hard to create wondrous parks, plazas and public spaces. They acted as unified, not divided places.

Most critically, in a globalized century and economy, a successful one region agenda means celebrating rather than shunning contact with people of other races and ethnicities. It means overcoming ancient hostilities and learning the life-enriching advantages of adventuresome new collaborations and partnerships.

Today, and for the following three Sundays, we'll consider how a one-region agenda could work for the Kansas City region. We'll be reflecting hopes and concerns expressed by literally hundreds of you, individually and in small groups, on both sides of the state line, in meetings over the last few months, as well as what we learned in other interviews going back to 1970.

We'll put these findings in the context of successes and failures we've witnessed and reported in newspaper series similar to this.


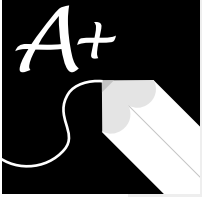

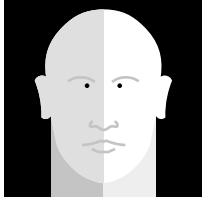


We've found that a river of cliches pours forth quickly in talking with Kansas Citians. Residents boast quickly of more fountains than Rome, more boulevards than Paris, lots of affordable and comfortable neighborhoods for raising families. We've often encountered a "what's to complain about?" attitude.

Some outsiders agree. Joel Garreau, author of *The Nine Nations of North America*, wrote 20 years ago that Kansas City is one of the most underrated places in America. Recently he told us he still thinks so: "The key to the place is the people. They are educated, hard-working, self-effacing and kind, and utterly unaware of how rare that combination is becoming in the rest of the world."

Yet on both the Missouri and Kansas sides, we also caught undercurrents of concern about being such a divided

FACING UP TO AN ARRAY OF BIG CHALLENGES

Forging a one-region agenda for the Kansas City area will require progress on several fronts:

PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS	PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
<p>FRAGMENTATION: Too many organizations and local governments in the region are focused on their own small piece of turf.</p> 	<p>RECOGNIZE that the Kansas City area is a single market with a common environment and a common future.</p>	<p>SCHOOLS: While schools in the region can brag about high test scores, many of those in the Kansas City School District perform poorly.</p> 	<p>UNDERSTAND that a "hero" superintendent or a state takeover won't help KC schools much. A long-term approach must employ techniques already in use that promise real results.</p>
<p>TAX ABATEMENT: Strategies that attempt to lure industries through tax-abatement schemes are becoming less effective.</p> 	<p>SHIFT THE EMPHASIS from attracting industries to attracting human talent – the real source of wealth.</p>	<p>RACE RELATIONS: Racial conflicts and persistent forms of discrimination help prevent the door of opportunity from opening fully.</p> 	<p>TARGET efforts by local philanthropies to deal with struggling neighborhoods, failing schools, racial conflicts and persistent discrimination.</p>
<p>DOWNTOWN: Few creative individuals are interested in living in – or even visiting – humdrum places. Kansas City lags other metro areas in reviving its downtown.</p> 	<p>PROCEED with the Civic Council-sponsored Sasaki plan. Increase the supply of new housing and broaden the range of cultural opportunities.</p>	<p>HIGHER ED: More must be done to improve area institutions; this is the weak link in the Kansas City's area's competitiveness chain.</p> 	<p>DELIVER to the University of Kansas and the University of Missouri-Kansas City the resources needed to leverage the huge biotech investment represented by the Stowers Institute.</p>

Graphics by DAVE EAMES/The Kansas City Star

place. It's true the Mid-America Regional Council creates neutral turf for the area's elected officials to meet. The council's data often underscore the regional connections. The bistate vote of 1996, which funded the Union Station restoration, was a high point of regional cooperation. Yet, to be honest, it was just one vote on one popular project.

The fact is this region is divided not just by the physical fact of great rivers but by history: The state line slicing straight through the metropolitan heart retains its force. It still carries echoes of the struggle between slave Missouri and free Kansas — and the deep, unresolved issues of race evoked by that history.

Other regions have embarrassing divisions, political and economic: Philadelphia and Camden, St. Louis and East St. Louis, for example. But at least it's clear which side is the dominant, ultimately responsible partner.

It's not so simple in the Kansas City region. The "great city" is on the Missouri side. But the most dramatic population growth since World War II has been on the Kansas side, which is now home to a high proportion of the region's rich and powerful families. Across State Line Road, the population is now at or near parity.

When Johnson County power brokers contribute to the arts and civic progress on the Missouri side, they're much appreciated. But when they appear to make decisions for

Kansas City, Mo. — including its big, overwhelmingly black East Side — the crackling tension is almost audible.

The region's divisions are underscored by the geographic spread and immense distances between attractions. To a visitor, the airport, downtown and Country Club Plaza — not to mention the sports stadiums and the corporations tucked into the woods stretched along College Boulevard — are incredibly far from one another.

During the last dozen years, most American citistates have witnessed a surge of center-city renaissance. But after decades of abandonment by residents and businesses, the rather forlorn downtown of Kansas City, Mo., still struggles to lure a critical mass of attractions.

Other stunning contrasts strike an outsider's eye. There's the affluence of Johnson County next to the lean look of Wyandotte County. And the strikingly different atmosphere of older neighborhoods resting comfortably in the rolling terrain not too far from the flat prairie, once host to pioneer farms, now producing seemingly endless crops of subdivisions.

For attitude contrasts, consider Overland Park businessmen complaining that traffic is the No. 1 worry they face — and the next minute boasting about a new convention center and hotels and capturing the new campus-home for Sprint Inc. (which looks bigger than Rhode Island to us).

On the human side, one sees schools with bragging rights about high test scores sharing a region with others so shaky the question is whether they might fall to state takeover. And in a region nationally acclaimed for its efforts to champion children, one also discovers some of the most concentrated poverty in any American metro region.

Looking to the economy, the hard-working industrial plants north of the Missouri River contrast dramatically with the breathtaking biological sciences potential of the new Stowers Center. Sprint anchors the south, but the Northland also claims important regional employers such as Farmland Industries Inc., Harley-Davidson and Cerner Corp.

Here's a region that's kept a big measure of its infectious, easy-going friendliness — a community that actually won an award in the 1990s for having the most helpful citizens among U.S. cities surveyed.

Yet, under the patina of politeness, Kansas Citians often shun openness, candor, real conflict. Issue advocacy, which might clear the air, seems strangely muted. People joke about the real meetings taking place in the parking lot after the official one is over.

Mincing no words, Jackson County Executive Kathryn Shields laments that people of this region “can’t stand the slightest bit of controversy. Like it has to be afternoon tea, all the time. We should have a good fight over some important issues.”

Yet while avoiding risk, this region — we hear repeatedly — has an undying commitment to becoming a major league city-region of America and the world. And if its people are as conservative and slow to change as some say, why do they tolerate, even seem to enjoy, those playful art pieces on the Bartle Hall pylons and the shuttlecocks adorning the lawn of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art?

Is Kansas City urban, sophisticated, “with it” enough to celebrate a true urban agenda for the century?

There are doubters. Michael Zedek, rabbi emeritus of B’Nai Jehudah Congregation, observes that the region’s “can-do” depends on “having a totally agreed on agenda.” Why else, he asked last spring, did it take 28 years of discussion before Union Station was restored? Or a decade to decide on a regional geography for real estate listings?

But check history and great exceptions stand out. Would the region have ever made a Hallmark, or built a Marion Labs, or fostered an upstart telecommunications company like Sprint, or been ready for today’s Stowers Institute, unless some individuals, more often than not in solo acts, were willing to burst out of that total-agreement box?

What if Jesse Clyde Nichols had not been such a restless pusher of a new urban form in the early 20th century? What if Ewing Kauffman had not been interested in major league baseball? More recently, what if Tom McDonnell of DST had listened to the skeptics instead of bringing one whole corner of downtown to life?

What if Julia Irene Kauffman didn’t have strong feelings about having a new performing arts center? What if Kansas City, Kan., Mayor Carol Marinovich had caved in to careful thinkers who said you couldn’t unify the governments of Wyandotte County? What if Overland Park chamber head Mary Birch just went with the flow and didn’t speak her mind?

What if Jim Stowers had gotten stuck between “can-do” and “show me,” unwilling to take a chance, to get out front without closing off every risk?

In every decade, decision opportunities come, and with it an issue for leadership. In this, the first decade of a new century, nothing matters more for the emergent citistate of Kansas City than the relentless pursuit of a multifaceted, courageous and shared agenda.

ASSETS ARE MILES APART

Regional divisions are deepened in a spread-out city: To a visitor, distances between employment centers, such as Corporate Woods in Overland Park to major shopping areas such as the Country Club Plaza are vast. Other tourist areas are scattered widely throughout the metro area, making time and travel a problem.



The Kansas City Star

BUILDING BLOCKS TO A COHESIVE METROPOLITAN REGION

■ Turn downtown's desert into a garden of urban amenities

For the sake of Kansas City-area residents and the image of the region, downtown's emptiness should be replaced by attractions and transformed into a people place.

The Civic Council-sponsored Sasaki plan touches the right bases. Building thousands of new housing units is vital. So is the historic greenway plan and expanded cultural opportunities, including the performing arts center and new downtown library. (The second Sunday of this series explores the idea of a dramatic linear park for downtown — a centerpiece that could make big employers like American Century wish they'd moved downtown.)

Nor should such thinking be limited to downtown Kansas City.

"All of our towns and cities, from Lenexa to Lee's Summit, from Liberty to Leavenworth and points beyond and in between, need to provide more choices in housing and lifestyles," said Kansas City architect Kevin Klinkenberg. "Why should someone working on College Boulevard have to drive to Missouri to find urban life?"

■ Create more transportation choices

Most U.S. regions now have traffic systems that are heavily congested. Kansas City — where major thoroughfares are relatively unclogged — can avoid this future only if it moves to build and operate a truly regional system of alternative transit. Such a system requires the right mix of commuter rail, light rail, express buses and trolleys.

An early move would be to invest in a new transit system from the Missouri River to the Country Club Plaza. This would serve as a kind of spinal transplant — a system that would increase transportation choices and create new connections throughout the heart of the city. Such an investment is critical if the center city is to stand up straight and tall among America's resurgent urban centers. (Transportation is explored on the third Sunday of this series.)

■ Focus philanthropy and collaborative skills on neighborhoods and schools

Where neighborhoods struggle and schools fail, people point to racial conflicts, to persistent forms of discrimination, to gaps in opportunities. The region cannot face race as an isolated concept. It has to deal with it in the streets, in community centers, in the schools. The issue can't be just black residents taking care of their own, or whites deciding on answers for blacks.

Existing institutions such as the Mid-America Regional Council — or community-based organizations like Move Up or COMBAT — can provide vehicles for the area's famously collaborative talents.



DAVID PULLIAM/The Kansas City Star

The Stowers Institute for Medical Research, cornerstone of Kansas City's bid to become a biotech mecca.

Established groups like Kansas City Consensus or Kansas City Harmony can help, too. And it seems time for area philanthropies, with their nearly \$200 million a year to invest, to focus on the frustrating, elusive goal of black-white understanding. Just as racial conflict darkened Kansas City's early history and pervaded so many disputes since, it simply must be faced up to for a future worth having.

■ Leverage the Stowers investment

The new institute complex, its endowment and the Kansas City Life Sciences Institute comprise what may be a once-in-a-century opportunity. But it won't pay off unless, right now, the Kansas City region finds ways to ...

■ Pour investment into higher education

This is the weak link in the Kansas City area's competitive chain. It's time to move beyond past state-line games and seize the high ground created by biomedical folks. It's time to deliver — both to the University of Kansas and the University of Missouri-Kansas City — the resources they need to collaborate in the grand new biotech opportunity.

It won't be cheap, but it's critical. UMKC Chancellor Martha Gilliland and KU President Robert Hemenway are humming the right tunes, but success requires more than a duet.

■ Keep expanding the child-advocacy agenda

No other region in America has a decade-long track record of ambitious programs for children in any way comparable to Kansas City's. But this is no time to lapse into self-congratulatory smugness. The Kansas City community is blessed with extraordinary leaders prepared to expand the agenda so that those children also become successful adults. In a region proud of its environment for families, what could possibly outrank this priority?

THE REGION TAKES THE SCHOOLS TEST: PASS OR FAIL

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star



CRAIG SANDS/The Kansas City Star

In 1991, members of Central High School's Class of 1966 visited the new school rising near the site of the old building, then in the process of demolition. Heavy spending for new buildings, however, did not resolve the Kansas City School District's problems.

The crisis of the Kansas City School District has put three centers of power on a collision course.

■ *The State of Missouri.* In state law, the script is already written: Any school district whose student performance scores fall below a set minimum is to be taken over by the state. There's currently a major effort to avoid that, with Kansas City Mayor Kay Barnes' informal "Collaborative for Excellence in Education" playing a role. But the state law will be tough to get around.

■ *The Kansas City School District.* This is the district with the problem scores. With its majority black enrollment and predominantly black professional staff, it's an icon of black power. The tension accompanying possible takeover has risked ripping open the scar tissue built up during 20 years of fighting over schools. And the issue no one seems to

want to talk about, race, is waiting to burst well beyond the norms of Kansas City-style politeness.

■ *The civic establishment of Kansas City.* Even if it wanted to escape deep involvement with the schools, it couldn't. Why? There's zero evidence that state takeovers turn around failing schools.

That means it was virtually certain from the start that big chunks of this civic boomerang would land back in the laps of the leadership establishment, especially the leading foundations — Hall, Kauffman, and the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation.

The quandary: What would make a significant difference in the outcomes for kids, and who should be in charge of whatever changes are made? We asked this question over and over. The most common answer: "Fix the board."

Well, governance at the top of this district is surely part of the problem. But in a place where racial injustice flows like a river through history and persistently poisons the school district's internal politics, focusing primarily on the board is a sure-fire formula for even worse race relations.

We were struck by the history — how most black people were historically confined to a zone between Independence and 27th streets, Oak Street to Prospect Avenue. Later, as black people began moving beyond 27th to the south, Troost Avenue emerged as a new boundary.

In many neighborhoods, covenants preventing black residents from buying homes in white neighborhoods were in force from 1901 onward. When one highly respected school, Benton, was finally open to blacks, white citizens demanded a name change. Later the school was burned.

Whites could live anywhere. Blacks could not. All the great neighborhoods created from the 1920s to the 1950s were off limits to black residents.

When the federal judicial system finally shifted gears in the 1980s, this region witnessed massive school construction and renovation. Yet despite the expenditure of \$2 billion, the region ended up more segregated than ever. And as Latinos settle in significant numbers, yet another pattern of segregation is emerging.

There have been black leadership breakthroughs in the region — even the election in the 1990s of a black Kansas City mayor. Yet what some see as signs of progress are to many black residents mere interludes in the enduring conflict. What's missing, they say, is a culture of mutual respect.

We find it no mystery that Kansas City disappears on the list of cities black Americans say is a good place to live. Anyone who thinks all this history isn't hanging around to complicate reforms will be written off as naive.

To make things worse, enlightened whites who want to make a difference run into exaggerated suspicions among some blacks — a belief, for example, that white business leaders share a plot to destabilize areas close to downtown so they can run out black residents. Or that white leaders want to see the school district collapse so they can step in, take over the contracts and employment powers, and again subjugate black interests.

Yet our impression from dozens of interviews is that a large majority of white leaders, far from plotting against blacks, now find themselves confused and intimidated, parked on the sidelines, highly reluctant to wade in and risk being attacked.

Is the Kansas City School District (and let's note that it's only one of 14 separate school districts serving Kansas City residents) as bad as advertised? We found some voices, even in the business community, willing to say the Kansas City district takes a bad rap.



DAVID PULLIAM/The Kansas City Star

At J.S. Chick Elementary School in Kansas City, staff members try to make success the rule, rather than the exception. In 1999, second-grader Miya Reynolds put her hands up in response to a question about Ghana.

In this view, the legacy of two decades of court-imposed measures is media scrutiny that has become overly aggressive — prone to pounce on every weakness. The district, some say, has about the same proportion of good schools as one might find in eastern Jackson or western Johnson counties. Only a handful of schools are seriously weak, which is understandable when the students come from home situations where instability, poverty, and sometimes violence are the norm.

Terry Ward, a project manager for the JE Dunn Construction Co. and a member of the North Kansas City school board, says: "In any school setting, you create an aura, an atmosphere of expectation. When parents and kids expect success, they're likely to get it. It's the same with failure. If failure's the expectation, teachers get demoralized hearing what a lousy job they're doing."

Many others with whom we spoke, though, were aware of examples all across the country where public schools in tough neighborhoods dominated by families in poverty have been able to produce motivated children.

Indeed, some offered the example of Kansas City, Kan., which has many children from poor families yet doesn't suffer from the same internecine warfare on its school board. Grand old Sumner High School is seen as "the heart of the black community" in Kansas City, Kan., and regularly delivers some of the highest school scores in the region.

"We've worked with the teachers union on every phase of our 'First Things First' program," explains superintendent Ray Daniels. "And, even if our kids come from poor families, we think they should be held to the same, no-excuses standard."

The appeal that charter schools hold for parents draws on those characteristics as well, and if the results elsewhere in the country are a good guide, these charters will show remarkable results with the toughest educational challenges. Right now they seem to make news only when they fail. It's easy to forget all innovations tend to have rocky start-ups.

What about the rigid work rules in the Kansas City teachers' contract? Many cite them as a problem. Some principals are quick to note provisions limiting faculty meetings to one a month and one hour's length. Others say too many principals themselves are clueless about good management.

What the region dare not forget is how much all this matters.

As a matter of reputation, the greater Kansas City area shows up as one region. Chuck Carlsen, president of the Johnson County Community College, told us that the worry is spreading over the state line that the highly publicized problems of the Kansas City schools are dragging down support for public education, even in affluent communities.

And residents of the entire region should not deceive themselves. On the day of a state takeover — even if the takeover seems unfair or doomed to failure — newspapers, along with television and radio, will pump out the bad news. The stock of the Kansas City region will slide. And the takeover story wouldn't fade into one day's news sunset. Like the memory of the stench from the old stockyards, it will linger.

Other communities around the nation have tried but failed to find obvious, quick, painless solutions to the quandaries of failing school organizations.

Chicago, in the late 1980s, condemned by the secretary of education for running the worst schools in America, offers the tempting model of a strong mayor stepping in, taking over the school board's powers, installing a tough management team, and initiating a years-long process of improving student scores. Achievement is still an uphill proposition, but Mayor Richard Daley in Chicago has been able to show progress.

Bishop Mark Tolbert of Christ Temple Church, who has

started a charter school, remembers the Kansas City schools of his youth, with "teachers who cared about us, who taught us values." Today he's so fed up with the school district dilemma he's ready to give the whole thing to the mayor.

Tolbert's despair is easy to understand. But we're guessing the racial tensions in today's Kansas City run too high to hand over power to a white mayor or, indeed, any clearly white authority. Only a biracial group has any hope of success.

Some people also yearn for a "hero" superintendent — search out some outstanding leader and expect miracles. Amazingly, this temptation survives and spreads, despite zero evidence that it works. The rolling-average tenure of big city superintendents is 18 to 24 months.

Some cities have managed to raise educators' eyebrows by recruiting executives from other fields. Seattle had a celebrated military general for three years, who made substantial changes and was succeeded by a strong manager from the business community.

San Diego hired a former local U.S. attorney, who has worked assiduously to shake things up. Los Angeles got a former governor of Colorado, who's struggling in the job. The harsh reality: Just hiring a strong leader with outside credentials is no guarantee of success. Remember Benjamin Demps?

So, say some, how about partition? A quick scan of surrounding school districts suggests that even dissolving this beleaguered central district and dividing the 30,000 kids among districts is not a simple proposition. Unless the community wants even more racial imbalance, the only option might be to split the district's enrollment between Independence and North Kansas City. Are either of these districts ready to take on the challenge of urban black education?

So what to do? For starters, take a close look at what does seem to be working and figure out how to give the apparent formula for success a license to spread. People told us that some schools in this district were shining successes, and one of those mentioned was J.S. Chick Elementary, just up from Swope Parkway. We went to see for ourselves.

The Chick staff knows what it's up against. The general perception, we were told by various members of the staff, is that poor African-American children are incapable of learning. So the goal is not to make the school an exception but to make success the rule — to send the message that students are expected to do well.

How does the school send that message? In a staff meeting we attended, the question prompted a rush of responses — and we noted that principal Audrey Bullard let her staff do most of the talking.

"Well," came one reply, "we help them understand you don't have to let other people determine your reality. That's

what we tell the kids. People don't really know what we do here. They hear us mention African-centered education and they think it's all blackness. Our test scores are good, but school isn't just about test scores. Our kids have to know how to survive in society. We teach the principles of how to live. Respect, that's the key word here."

We found that out ourselves by walking through a couple of classrooms and asking, "What's the word?" Kids would smile and instantly say, together, "*Respect.*"

Chick's staff offers parent workshops, computer classes in the evening, even aerobics. Describing the meetings they schedule with parents, business, and community people, the Chick staff launched into what sounded like a business marketing discussion. "The parents are our customers," they said.

We found Chick staff members who weren't traditional school professionals, including a couple of family therapists, a parent liaison, a behavior specialist, all supported by the state's "Caring Community" program. The state auditor criticized the caring program last October for not being "accountable." Maybe so, but the results we saw were impressive and all-too rare.

Later we visited the Foreign Language Academy, racially mixed with an African-American dominance. Again, we discovered an atmosphere of high expectations and close relationships of teachers and students. Both schools require some effort on the part of parents to get in. There's a lottery for choosing which kids are finally accepted. The percentage on free or reduced-lunch programs, an index of family poverty, is not far from the district average.

We asked ourselves what's going on here? What makes these schools different? Call us simple-minded if you will, but these examples of schools swimming upstream against a tide of district troubles have some obvious lessons: One is the need for a strong principal, willing to go the extra mile, unafraid to break a rule or two if it will make the school a better place for learning. Next, a set of clear expectations shared by parents and teachers.

What does it take to replicate success? Ask Adam Urbanski of Rochester, N.Y., vice president of the American Federation of Teachers and director of a national reform network for teachers' unions.

Urbanski proposes an emphasis on smaller schools, even where that means squeezing more than one into a single building, so that every child is known personally.

His notion of "full service schools," with health and social services as needed, sounds much like Missouri's Caring Communities program. Urban League President Gwen Grant has met Urbanski and agrees that focusing on creating successful schools is the way out of this mess. She says there's no reason why "corporate and grass roots can't make a strategy that works, if we're willing to work together."

No reason indeed. The talent is all around. Just take the Learning Exchange program, now 30 years old and solidly planted as a nationally significant education innovation.

We visited the Learning Exchange facilities on the Penn Valley Community College campus and asked Director Connie Campbell for a quick tour. The program is so impressive that it is starting to spread, franchise-like, around the nation. Its "Exchange City" — a simulation for kids of a community and business experience — provides a memorable learning adventure.

And we've not seen any education experiment comparable to Earthworks, the science and ecology lessons kids get in the caves north of the Missouri River. Virtually every week, staff members say, some teacher accompanying students there just about breaks into tears on seeing an otherwise lagging student join in and experience the joy of learning.

A visit to the Learning Exchange can actually make one angry: If the Kansas City community is able to generate such talent and breakthroughs, why can't it get its act together, instill quality and critical supports, and pre-empt the looming state takeover of the Kansas City School District? The tools, it seems, are just lying around.

One is the eight years of experience with the Local Investment Commission, or LINC, a nonprofit group that grew from the vision of former Tension Envelope CEO Bert Berkley. LINC now has a track record of focusing state funding for child care, health care and transportation on select school areas. It also provides a variety of after-school activities including chess, dance and basketball. It is a model of business and grass roots that already touches the lives of several thousands kids each year.

LINC is the potential infrastructure for building school-based councils. These councils could be, as we suggest in the accompanying letter to Missouri Gov. Bob Holden, ground zero for assembling government and community people, business and foundation help, all aimed at results for these kids that no one wants to lose.

The path to better schools runs through all these places and ideas. Those who stake all on a restructured board or a hero-superintendent — even if such a leader were available — are bound to be disappointed, as former Mayor Emanuel Cleaver recognized. Under the existing system, he said, even the very best superintendent will fail.

"Look, you can put the most powerful engine on a car with no brakes or battery, a malfunctioning starter and leaky radiator, and it still won't run," he said.

The idea of a state takeover may be divisive, but many people close to this district are clearly ready to jettison much of the past and move toward a fresh start. As Cleaver put it, "In order to have a resurrection, there must be a death."

AN OPEN LETTER TO GOV. BOB HOLDEN

STATE OF MISSOURI JEFFERSON CITY, MO.

Dear Gov. Holden:

At the moment it becomes clear that the Kansas City School District has failed according to the state-set criteria, you will face a tough decision.

You should expect loud demands: “Get tough. Dissolve the district. Put it out of its misery. Give the money to the parents. Let them choose any school. They couldn’t do worse.”

Other voices will call for patience toward beleaguered educators and for more money to bolster prospects for improvement. After all, this isn’t the only district in Missouri struggling to meet standards. Why rush in here to undermine local control?

Whatever you decide to do will get national attention. Takeovers are terrible for a community’s image. Today’s business firms are footloose, ready to pick up and head for better places. They do not move to places featuring large, failing schools. Sure, we know, there are 13 other districts serving Kansas City residents. But nobody 100 miles away knows that.

We have repeatedly heard polite talk about changing the governance of the district. Underneath the politeness is a ferocious struggle that is mostly about race. The prospect of the state stepping in now reminds some of the state’s own history of condoning black-white boundaries, along with its persistent push to overturn court orders on desegregation.

But here’s the surprise, governor: This crisis may be a real opportunity. Mayor Kay Barnes and the Urban League have teamed up with the Black Agenda Group, the Kauffman Foundation and the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, along with the Civic Council and the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce.

This unlikely coalition has already agreed on some core strategies — ranging from dramatic expansion of before- and after-school programs to converting 14 schools to be new “entrepreneurial” schools.

Those are good signs. But, after all we heard about mistrust and mismanagement, we cannot imagine any real progress in this district that isn’t the responsibility of the region and rooted in the neighborhoods themselves. Here’s where some bold, imaginative leadership is so critical.

As governor, you could give the mayor’s collaborative partners the blessing of the state, and charge them with

staying on this task until the work’s done. Give the group a memorable name, such as KCKC, or Kansas City Kids Can.

When the district has to appear in Jefferson City, members of KCKC should show up too, representing the commitment of the entire bistate area to make sure the educational opportunity is there for all the region’s kids. It wouldn’t just be the superintendent begging for postponing the June 2002 takeover date.

But what’s most needed are troops on the ground — in the form of some sort of school-centered community councils. There could be action teams composed of parents, community leaders, social-service providers, health-care professionals, principals, teachers and police.

We’d suggest giving them a role in setting targets for improvement and selecting principals and key staff. Around this table would be the power to coordinate and leverage all these forms of assistance.

Your direction to state departments would ensure that they, too, step out of their usual patterns and work with the school-based councils. Combine state and local resources around the problems that get in the way of kids getting the most out of school — whether the subject is intervening on family nutrition, meeting a couple of months rent, closing crack houses or turning kid’s heads toward realistic careers.

The region’s foundations could set up a competitive pool for grants, for situations in which a little money would make a big difference — including opportunities for teachers to start new charter schools and compete for students by offering more quality for the kids.

The way we see it, there’s no getting around where the responsibility of fixing a bad situation lies. The law may say the “state,” but only the community can get this job done. The job is not to save the district, its board or staff but to give opportunities to its children, no matter how much inconvenience that brings. And only a region, working with neighborhoods, can take the spotlight off the board and the bureaucracy and shine it brightly on a new set of expectations for 30,000 kids.

Respectfully,

Curtis Johnson and Neal Peirce

PART 2 NEEDED: LIVELY URBAN CENTERS TO LURE
FRESH TALENT.

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Needed: Lively urban centers to lure fresh talent

AN URBAN PULSE TO LURE FRESH TALENT

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star

A single metropolitan region can have many centers of urban vitality — places where the street is lined with offices and shops and people gather for public events, or linger for a bit of people-watching.

In the Kansas City area, more residents are recognizing the critical need for such places. The Northland, for example, is placing its bets on the Zona Rosa project, an ambitious plan to re-create the pedestrian-friendly ambience of the Country Club Plaza — at Interstate 29 and Barry Road.

In Leawood, Mayor Peggy Dunn says more residents are demanding projects that create the feeling of a village rather than the placelessness of a strip mall. In Roeland Park, Mayor Lori Hiron talks about the need for a new generation of development concepts — focused on the idea of a civic center — for older, inner-ring communities.

From Lee Summit's Main Street to Olathe's efforts to revive its downtown, the prospect of building true civic centers is beginning to stir the region's politics.

But nowhere does the challenge of building urban vitality loom larger than in the region's signature downtown — Kansas City.

In the 1970s, there was an effort to define cities largely in terms of the CBD — the central business district. The phrase was OK, but it failed to capture the larger, historic role of cities.

True, cities had always stood for commerce; they are and historically have been marketplaces. But they have also been the historic hearts of civilization. They are centers of culture. They provide their citizens with great parks and monuments, museums and concert halls, and much more.

Yet today, some Kansas Citians wonder why the urban core matters at all. Johnson County labor activist Frank Hiron suggested to us that big centers are “pretty much doomed.”

It's true Kansas City's big talking point is the draw of its lovely, leafy neighborhoods — its quality as a place to raise a family. As ABC reported of Kansas City two years ago, “Real estate is a bargain, traffic is light and there's plenty of green space for Sunday afternoon touch football games and family picnics.”

So, can't the Kansas City region enjoy all that without worrying about an urban center, a downtown of distinction? Perhaps. In neighborhoods spread across an expansive two-state area, this is a fine family place.

Yet at the same time, we've entered an era when virtually every world region is building up its central city — to be competitive, to be distinctive from other places, and for fun.

Today, cities are hell-bent on attracting talent — the human skills that permit a region to build more wealth and influence than it could develop by simply dishing up mediocre jobs or serving as the back office for some other metropolis.

To excel, companies must be able to draw employees who are naturally good at dreaming up creative marketing strategies, making scientific discoveries, or developing venture capital savvy.

But here's the catch: Those are also the people who usually opt for cosmopolitan, urban settings. Indeed, bringing creative people together and providing public spaces where they can spontaneously mix and exchange ideas has been a central function of cities — from the ancient libraries of Alexandria to the technology-rich urban neighborhoods of the Internet age.

Even in fast-growing Johnson County, where the vast majority of movement has been east-to-west, we heard from business experts at a 2000 planning congress that there was real pressure to put high-tech, R&D-type offices close to Kansas City because people want urbanized locations, not a purediet of placid suburbia.

These aspirations reflect today's realities: Lively urban centers are essential for drawing the mobile human capital of our time.

And as one of Kansas City's own architects, Kevin Klinkenberg, told us, “For anyone desiring a remotely urban lifestyle, Kansas City is quickly eliminated from the list.”

“Boring” was a word we heard too frequently. We took a look at the list of America's top “Hot Jobs-Cool Communities” list on the Web and pitched at Generation X-ers. This new bunch gauged a city by such measures as public parks and trails; farmer's markets; natural food stores; fitness centers; vegetarian restaurants; concentrations of designers and artists, musicians and actors; quantities of art museums and galleries; diversity (ethnic, religious, sexual orientation); and — surprise! — bars and nightclubs per capita. The top cities included San Francisco, Minneapolis, Seattle, Boston, Denver — even Pittsburgh.

Kansas City? It wasn't even on the list. The obvious cure: more urban vitality. Or as Kansas City Consensus suggested in a report last year, it's time to build a downtown that exhibits true soul — a place, it was suggested, that is well-maintained and offers a welcoming spirit, scale, interest and true liveliness.

But in a large metropolitan area, suburbs also benefit from having city centers that offer true urban value and potential for real fun. A “smart growth” movement has been sweeping America — not only to protect open spaces but to develop urban centers that encourage walkability, interaction and social contact.

A number of model suburban towns — including Reston, Va., Gresham, Ore., Valencia, Calif. and Mizner Park (a gloriously converted old shopping center near Boca Raton, Fla.) — have achieved just that. Their commercial centers feature stores, housing, schools, businesses and

recreation facilities in a pattern so compact you don’t need a car to go from one to another.

These communities offer an alternative to spread-out, drive-everywhere suburbia. But they also draw many customers and visitors from those very suburbs. Competitive 21st century regions will require such places. That’s why Kansas City’s outlying centers — Independence, Liberty, Parkville, Olathe, Overland Park — are so vital. A great city serving great suburbs is what One Region of success is all about.



File photo

When downtown was alive: Main Street in the heart of the shopping district in the 1950s

DESIGNING A BETTER DOWNTOWN

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star

During his successful campaign for mayor of Denver, Federico Pena adopted the slogan, “Imagine a great city.” At the time — the 1980s — Denver was a city mired in recession. Its downtown had so many office vacancies, people joked that mountain views were visible through the empty skyscrapers.

But Denverites responded to Pena’s call. Hundreds took part in a planning effort, which led to an ambitious center-city concept that mixed new construction with historic preservation. Today the heart of Denver — especially its LoDo, or lower downtown of old loft buildings — throbs with activity from early morning until late at night.

Exclusive busways and now light rail make it easier for many suburbanites to access the center. Denver became a national model of timely, smart renewal.

Could Kansas City do the same? Many cynics say no. They’ll acknowledge downtown has a healthy enough northwest office zone, fine housing on Quality Hill, three or four blocks of an active Main Street, and a fine new Ilus W. Davis Park just north of City Hall.

There are hints of returning life in the Crossroads area and Freight House District, just north of the rail lines that run by Union Station. But scattered through the downtown area, the critics note, are vast zones of blight — acre upon acre of open-air parking lots, cadavers of past commercial enterprises neither leveled nor rebuilt, blocks of abandonment where even the graffiti is fading.

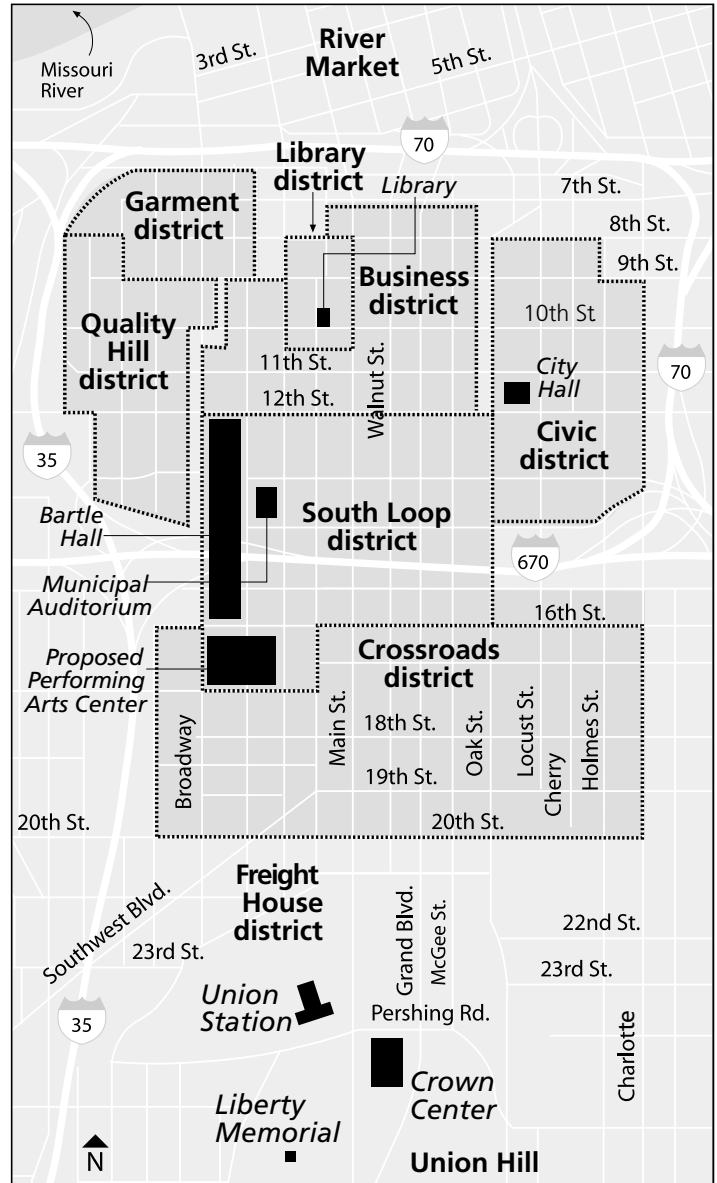
In contrast to the rush of redevelopment in most U.S. cities in the ’90s, downtown Kansas City, as resident John W. Anderson put it, “resembles a post-World War II bomb site — inexcusable.” So extreme is the desolation that some Kansas Citians told us they fear being mugged or shot if they venture downtown.

Yet in interviews around the region, we did detect a rise of interest in a more vibrant center city. That’s true even in the Northland, where many voters are perennially alienated by a perceived back of the hand from the Kansas City establishment.

“Right now, downtown’s not real popular,” Anita Gorman of the Northland Betterment Committee told us. “But if it were booming, it would help the whole region. The City Market there is great.”

We were surprised to find that some of the most ardent supporters of Kansas City and its center live in Johnson County. One of them is the governor of Kansas, Bill Graves of Lenexa, who agrees the bistate region needs a strong center.

Yet he worries: “Passion or interest in a downtown Kansas City renaissance will dissipate as the region grows



The Kansas City Star

westward. Olathe is talking of its own arena. That kind of sentiment will grow and grow and grow. The moment to seize the revitalization of the downtown is now.”

If Graves is right, and we believe he is, the downtown plan released last summer — prepared by Sasaki Associates of Watertown, Mass., and commissioned by the Civic Council of Greater Kansas City — is clearly the place to start.

Though it’s consistent with Kansas City’s own FOCUS plan covering the entire city, the Sasaki approach concentrates on a 300-acre priority district within the downtown loop, generally within a five-minute walking radius of 14th and Main streets.

The Sasaki approach downplays big single attractions such as arenas in favor of districts with a theme — arts, library,

government and finance, for example. It calls for a lively mix of apartments, restaurants, shops and tree-lined streets.

Historic buildings would be preserved for redevelopment. Parking would be tucked inside blocks and away from the street line. After generations of failed plans, how real is this? We can't say with certainty. Still, it's heartening to see two indispensable ingredients of downtown success — housing and a friendly, walkable street setting — receiving major play.

It may be true, as critics say, that fewer than 10,000 people today live within a one-mile radius of the city center. But downtown housing, city officials tell us, has doubled over the past decade. And not just in Quality Hill but River Market, the Garment District, the Freight House District and Union Hill.

"We have waiting lists for loft apartments" in some downtown areas, says Vicky Noteis, the city's planning director. "We're on a cusp, with many people ready to move back in."

Who can blame Mayor Kay Barnes for highlighting downtown housing — where buildings are being converted to everything from luxury lofts to moderate-priced units. Or for her suggestion to squeeze Sasaki down, at least initially, and concentrate on the 20-block south loop area — a district she calls SoLo. The mayor wants immediate attention to housing, offices, restaurants, entertainment and green spaces.

The mayor sees SoLo springing from the new performing arts complex. So what if tax credits and abatements still seem necessary, at least for the moment? At least, after decades of loss, there would be some progress.

As the Sasaki plan notes, new residents can be counted on to create the constituency, now lacking, for top-grade city maintenance of streets and parks — and an increase in the number and variety of downtown restaurants.

Without the burst in employment and good housing nearby, would Kansas City now have the Sienna Bistro — the small, quietly elegant eatery on 10th Street? Or even the brash, burger atmosphere of the Majestic Steakhouse on Broadway, where your server wears a Pendergast Club T-shirt? With restaurants will come more small shops, along with the return of dry cleaners, food markets and other service businesses.

Suddenly the prospect of an urban "there there" returns. Denver proves the point. We recall visiting an acquaintance in a massive LoDo loft in the '70s, before redevelopment set in. Virtually the whole area was empty at night. Yet today some 19,000 people live in downtown Denver, including large numbers of middle-class folks paying market rates for upscale units.

It's true — downtown Kansas City has had many disappointments along the comeback trail. One was August's "no" vote on rail, which we believe would have ignited a



WHITNEY CURTIS/The Kansas City Star

In the 1980s, the Quality Hill development added new housing and a sense of community to the west side of downtown .

wave of strong center-city development, a theme we'll return to in the third Sunday of this series.

But the downtown has had lucky breaks and important supporters, such as Tom McDonnell, a savvy business leader with developer talent.

McDonnell is CEO of DST Systems Inc., which manages data for 28 mutual funds. This is a company, in other words, that could locate anywhere. But McDonnell believes deeply in downtown, and he has taken on the job of redeveloping much of its northwest corner. Over the last several years, he has systematically refurbished old buildings and built new ones. Instead of selling them off, he has kept and managed them. Revitalization of the old Garment District owes a lot to his vision.

Another promising sign for downtown is the plan to transform the old First National Bank building into a new downtown library. Here's an opportunity for Kansas City to join the parade of cities — San Francisco, San Diego, Vancouver, Denver, San Antonio, Chicago, to name a few — that are making libraries centerpieces of urban revival.

For Kansas City to make the most of its opportunities however, downtown needs to boost its organizational backing:

■ The city-center needs a professionally led, business-backed advocacy group to attract new development and stand up for the interests of downtown in City Hall and Jefferson City. Such an organization would work to attract new assets and actively court major employers, such as an American Century or Waddell & Reed Financial.

Kansas City's existing Downtown Council is a logical candidate to fill this role. But its current budget is only

\$300,000 a year, and it must rely frequently on volunteers. For appropriate scale and results, a good model to emulate would be Downtown Denver Inc., which has an \$8 million budget and a 19-person staff — and can boast a solid 20-year success record in sparking attractive new development.

■ Downtown also needs a business improvement district, or BID, that assesses all property owners and then uses the money for improved security and sanitation, marketing and planning. For some 20 years, BIDs have been providing needed services and smart management in downtowns across the nation, including New York, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Seattle, New Portland and Denver.

Nationwide, there are now well over 1,000 such organizations. They're allowed under Missouri law, which calls them CIDs, or Community Improvement Districts. Even St. Louis now has one. Why the need? Downtowns must compete. BIDs' uniformed but unarmed street representatives give residents, business people and tourists an extra sense of safety.

By keeping streets and sidewalks extra clean, improvement districts foster orderliness. By watching the retailing scene, trying to recruit stores where they're needed, they make downtowns more convenient places to shop. In a way, BIDs are a mall management for the center city. But their success depends on backing from business, because property owners must agree, in effect, to a new tax on themselves. Business needs to see the cost as an investment that can deliver real returns.

"The word is commitment," said Paul Copaken, the developer who headed the Civic Council's downtown initiative and shepherded the Sasaki report to public disclosure. "It means money. It means keeping people focused on the endgame."

What endgame? Copaken's answer: "A center city in which we can finally take pride, and get ready to compete in the new century."



WENDY YANG/The Kansas City Star

The former First National Bank building downtown: Soon to be the central branch of the Kansas City Public Library.

CITY VERSUS CITY: THE BATTLE FOR COMPANIES

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star

Missouri has two of America's historically great cities. Yet the downtown heart of each — St. Louis, and Kansas City — appears to be in more trouble, struggling harder for redevelopment than all but a handful of major cities in other states.

Why? Start with the Missouri General Assembly's historic hostility to city interests — a pattern made all the worse, it appears, by the chronic refusal of delegations from St. Louis and Kansas City to cooperate on issues of mutual interest. But to comprehend the Missouri cities' current woes, consider a pernicious habit that Kansas City-area power brokers have supported and defended: The ever-increasing use of subsidies to lure businesses that might locate in some other jurisdiction.

Smart communities know: Build a great place and companies will come, on their own, unassisted. Retailers like tax breaks but they won't ignore a fertile market.

Missouri's perplexing broth of tax breaks was primarily intended to encourage redevelopment of blighted areas. The menu of subsidies includes multiyear property-tax abatements under Chapter 353; tax-increment financing (expanded since 1982 to include sales, earnings and other levies in addition to property taxes); enterprise zones, and Chapter 100 deals. The latter procedure allows cities to own buildings and capital improvements, which are then leased back to businesses. The arrangement lets a business use the improvements tax-free.

Many area projects have benefited from these measures, including redevelopment efforts in Independence and the historic 18th and Vine district. Many of the loft-revival projects in downtown Kansas City receive tax relief under the Missouri statutes.

But diversions of tax benefits ballooned to an alarming extent in the 1990s — a trend encouraged by a Kansas law that also permits very generous tax breaks. And while the Kansas City region may not share St. Louis' notoriety for abusing TIF, the situation is clearly ripe for reform. *The Kansas City Star's* landmark 1995 series on regional sprawl by Chris Lester and Jeffrey Spivak as chief authors highlighted the issue dramatically.

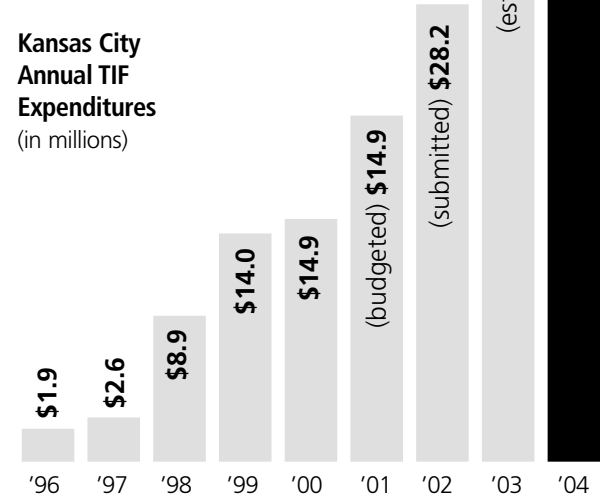
Lester, in an article co-authored by Steve Nicely, showed how affluent suburbs such as Lee's Summit, De Soto and Overland Park were using tax inducements to draw jobs out of Kansas City.

Later reports indicate that the pattern continues. In Olathe, officials are rapidly dispensing tax abatements to build up the city's commercial base. In Kansas City, Kan., a single General Motors plant has accounted for more than half the tax-exempt property in fiscally strapped Wyandotte County.

TROUBLING NUMBERS

They show an astronomic rise in local TIF expenditures — from \$1.9 million in 1996 to \$21 million in 2001 to a projected \$45 million in 2004.

Kansas City Annual TIF Expenditures
(in millions)



Sources: Submitted Budget 2002 and Kansas City Office of Management and Budget

The Kansas City Star

In Kansas City, Farmland Industries — to cite an outstanding example — received local tax breaks worth about \$10 million to relocate to a different location farther north — but still within the city limits.

Kansas City has become the state of Missouri's most generous dispenser of such tax breaks, with sometimes perverse consequences. As a top city official acknowledged to us, "Sometimes we're even bidding against ourselves. Even though our city plan says facilities should go downtown, we don't have the political will to push it."

Meanwhile, Independence has become a heavy user of tax-increment financing to lure big-box retailers, but the new stores aren't built in the city's troubled older neighborhoods. Instead, they're built in the newly developing east side of town. Meanwhile, downtown Kansas City scarcely has any retailers of note left.

The pattern suggests a bidding process careening out of control. Because tax breaks cost governments money, they divert critical revenues from schools, fire, police and libraries. Small businesses routinely end up holding the bag for big firms with the clout to force tax concessions.

Individual taxpayers get bilked for the tax burden that should, equitably, fall on the new Wal-Mart or Office Depot down the street or out in the suburbs. And insiders tell us there are few follow-up controls on whether firms are making the actual commitments (in terms of jobs added, for example) that they promised in return for tax breaks.

Mark Funkhouser, the Kansas City auditor, has compiled some troubling numbers. They show an astronomic rise in local TIF expenditures, from \$1.1 million in 1995 to \$21 million this year to a projected \$45 million in 2004.

Under these projections, the annual fiscal cost of Kansas City's business tax breaks will soon exceed the yearly capital and operating cost (about \$30 million a year) of the light-rail system voters rejected last year, at the urging of the business community.

Used responsibly, tax breaks can encourage redevelopment that otherwise wouldn't occur. Used responsibly, tax breaks can bring dead deals to life where blight or brownfields discourage investment.

But how does one explain tax breaks so a Fortune 500 company (Sprint) can consume a pristine greenfield, next to a blue-chip real-estate corner, across from a major retail center, in the wealthiest county in Kansas?

Or as one Kansas City area official put it to us: "It's not a crime that we spend so much on incentives. But it is a crime that we get so little in return. The incentives are seldom tied to clear public benefits ... If these incentives were, in fact, treated more as investments, with a clear understanding of the purpose of the investment and a clear analysis of the expected return on the investment, they might make more sense."

The area's elected officials, through their positions on the board of the Mid-America Regional Council, tried to deal with the tax abatement issue in the late 1990s.

But they struck out. The Alliance for Metropolitan Cooperation they formed came up with an anti-poaching pact — a promise not to recruit businesses from other communities in the region. There was also agreement to report yearly, city by city, on abatements and TIFs offered and a cost-benefit analysis of the deals. Nineteen cities and five counties signed on.

But the negotiations were so torturous that no energy was left for follow-up. When jurisdictions failed to submit the agreed-upon reports, nothing happened.

The entire effort expired. More recently, the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council in St. Louis — horrified that TIFs were being used for strip malls — Wal-Marts, Sam's Clubs and the like, took on the issue.

One TIF, notes Les Sterman, the Gateway Council's director, was even being used to refurbish a shopping center in the St. Louis area's second wealthiest ZIP code. The Gateway Council drafted a proposed statute that carefully defined blight. It clarified TIF-eligible areas. It specified the goals TIF projects must accomplish, such as construction of middle-income housing or development of manufacturing projects over retail. Then it persuaded a thoroughly bipartisan, liberal-to-conservative group of prominent state legislators to be sponsors. But the bill went nowhere.

"We were confronted by Jefferson City's highest-paid lobbyists — bond counsel, underwriters, developers, municipalities," notes Sterman. Why? "There's so much money to be made on these retail developments. Literally millions of dollars turn over in a short period of time, making already prospering big-box businesses still more lucrative. This comes often at the expense of small businesses who have to compete without the benefit of tax subsidies. And it often hurts adjacent neighborhoods or cities that lose employers and tax revenues."

Did Kansas City help, we asked? No, Sterman replied, "Kansas City bitterly opposed our effort. They claimed they make good use of TIFs. They said whatever you do, stay away from Kansas City. So we took Kansas City out of the bill. Even so, they worked behind the scenes to kill it."

The reader must understand that as outsiders, we find all this strangely perverse. A policy born to rescue blighted, abandoned communities has turned into a device to: (1) Pick the pockets of all taxpayers to pad the wallets of developers, and (2) accelerate the kind of sprawl that eats the heart out of urban economies.

Full revival of downtown Kansas City and Kansas City, Kan., of troubled areas of Independence, may never be possible until approval of tax breaks is confined to truly blighted areas. Like many cases of drug or alcohol addiction, the only cure may be a dramatic intervention. For that intervention, we nominate the region's center and heart — downtown Kansas City.

Why not reserve all economic subsidies — the abatement and TIF devices — for all areas of the region in true economic distress? Here's a possible action plan:

■ Kansas City proper could vote a long-term, perhaps 10-year, embargo on tax favoritism for development outside the defined downtown and other depressed urban core areas.

Then it could suggest all of Jackson County, as well as Cass, Clay and Platte Counties, adopt a similar policy, forbidding abatements except in truly distressed communities.

With funds targeted, some exceptionally worthwhile projects might benefit — for example, private-sector investments to upgrade the historic but bedraggled Truman Road Corridor that links Independence and Kansas City.

■ With its own house in order, the Missouri side could then challenge its friends across the state line in Kansas. The Kansans should be asked to institute their own embargo: no abatements for a decade except for Kansas City, Kan., and other economically depressed areas of Wyandotte County.

Tax breaks could also be allowed for communities with special historic value, including old Overland Park, old Shawnee, old Lenexa and the like. Despite its wealth, Johnson County is now developing some pockets of decay.

In time, everything ages. A wise community treasures where it came from. But the basic rule should be: no abatements without exceptional need.

The economic development crowd will cry out it's losing a powerful tool, but it has to learn that high quality public services are what count the most. Tax abatements aren't neutral acts. They force government to say good-bye to significant chunks of the taxpayers' money. They degrade schools and other services. They doom some communities to failure while subsidizing others.

Big employers make decisions on workforce and logistical grounds or the presence of great research institutions. Rarely if ever do local tax breaks switch their location decisions. Similarly, retailers must locate stores near customers. They have no choice. Offering tax breaks to these firms is akin to bribing teen-agers to show an interest in sex: You don't need to do it!

By tight targeting of its tax incentives, the Kansas City region could bolster its city heart while saving cash for vital services that now lag in quality and scope. Simultaneously, it would telegraph a message to the world that it's a mature 21st century citistate, ready (at last!) for serious national and global competition.

PLANNING FOR AND BUILDING A GREEN FUTURE

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star

Imagine an outdoor Kansas City downtown where you spend a lot of time, walking along pathways lined with greenery and seasonal flowers, glimpsing public art, reading markers depicting the town's early settlement. It may seem an unlikely dream, but not to Vince Bilardo Jr., who directs a federally funded effort to clean up old industrial sites in Kansas City.

Bilardo has focused on Kansas City's brownfields recovery program and now enthuses about plans for a set of interconnected walkways and small parks along the bluffs of the Missouri and Kansas rivers.

Walk as we did along portions of this route, especially between Berkley Park and the West Bottoms, and it takes a leap of faith to see it as a people-friendly area. Today it's bleak by day, intimidating by night.

But after a 10-minute walk along the bluffs with Bilardo, you're a believer. You see where the bike and pedestrian trail will carve paths through old manufacturing sites — now being cleaned up with the help of brownfield project money.

"People will be able to just walk through Kansas City's past," says Bilardo, "from the fur trappers' haunts to the marks of the great floods and the Civil War to the coming of the muscular industries of our past."

Indeed, well-planned paths and parks that evoke Kansas City's first days could ignite a wave of fresh interest in downtown. All this will be part of the Riverfront Heritage Trail for Kansas City and Kansas City, Kan., a plan calling for 18 miles of walking and biking trails linking the region's birth places with today's employment and commercial centers, as well as residential neighborhoods in the area.

The first phase of the plan, targeting the swath of river front where the region began as the Town of Kansas, is already funded. It should be open for walkers and bikers by the end of next year.

So far, the money — \$19 million to date — is coming from a federal transportation law aimed at reducing automobile reliance and the congestion it brings.

Contemplating a stunning centerpiece for the region's broad greenways plan, Kansas City pushed this project in close cooperation with a committee that's been working on the proposed system since 1997.

We believe that if Kansas City follows through on these plans, it will be blazing a trail. We know of no other city that's transformed an old industrial area into a catalyst for urban rejuvenation by turning it into greenways and parks. Is there a gamble here? Sure, there's real risk — something Kansas Citians are often said to abhor.

But just let it go forward, says Vince Bilardo, and some day the resulting Town-of-Kansas ambience will be a drawing card for the downtown area.

And while Kansas City may not be a bike-crazy town, Bilardo sees the trails drawing cyclists, especially among young people. As we talked with him, we found it easy to imagine field days for school classes across the region, biking the Heritage Trail while absorbing their community's history and culture.

Nor need the downtown system be isolated.

The Mid-America Regional Council commissioned Greenways Inc. of North Carolina to plan for a connected system of trails — Metro Green — which could eventually result in hundreds of miles of connected trails all over the region. Even so, permit us, as outsiders, to suggest that even new pathways and mini-parks may still be too timid for downtown Kansas City.

Downtown desperately needs a dramatic statement of connection, a way to fill the corridor from downtown to Union Station with activities and create a true "people place."

We asked ourselves: How would George Kessler — the tireless visionary who a century ago designed parks and boulevards in Kansas City — restore these lost connections?

Kessler's legacy may seem somewhat distorted by concessions to cars. But he left an impressive legacy, including the formal landscaping of the Paseo and the broad sweep of Ward Parkway, which Kessler designed between the Country Club Plaza and 59th Street.

We think Kessler would take the Sasaki downtown plan one more step: He would call for a long, winding, linear park to create a people-friendly connection.

A pedestrian park might start at Barney Allis Plaza on Wyandotte and, using Wyandotte as its spine, extend to Union Station, where it could link up with the Heritage Trail system.

Kessler would say: "Close this street to cars. Dedicate it to walking and bike-riding."

Rejuvenation would spread on both sides of the park as the market heats up for more restaurants, shops and tucked-in townhouse complexes.

The park's walking and biking paths could meander around points of interest like rivers, and join at the extended landscaping being planned for the \$300 million Metropolitan Kansas City Performing Arts Center.

The park should include broad, winding sidewalks for pedestrians and lanes for bicyclists. Like the Heritage Trails project, displays of public art and cultural signage would

allow each section to salute its own corner of urban space. At 18th and Wyandotte, the park could be extended to the east, all the way to the Paseo, where it could link up with the 18th and Vine district.

This park should be designed to attract urban housing, art galleries and professional offices — and more additions to Kansas City’s already grand list of eateries.

The keys to making it work: first, a policy of putting people ahead of cars, which means designing and managing downtown spaces so that they attract people. Light rail and trolleys or sleek electric buses — whenever they finally come — would add immensely to the allure of new walks and parks. Smart cities like New Orleans and Portland are bringing back the old-fashioned streetcar to add nostalgia and fun to their downtowns.

Maybe Kansas City voters (as we’ll discuss next Sunday) will get over their anti-rail bent. In the meantime, creating walkable spaces is the best step possible. A people-oriented policy would also focus on how a linear park is managed.

If experience elsewhere is a reliable clue, business will congregate along the edges of the winding parks. In return, businesses should commit to taking care of their share of the park’s edges, using a Business Improvement District model to pay the bills.

So, what — beside a considerable pricetag — would be the downside?

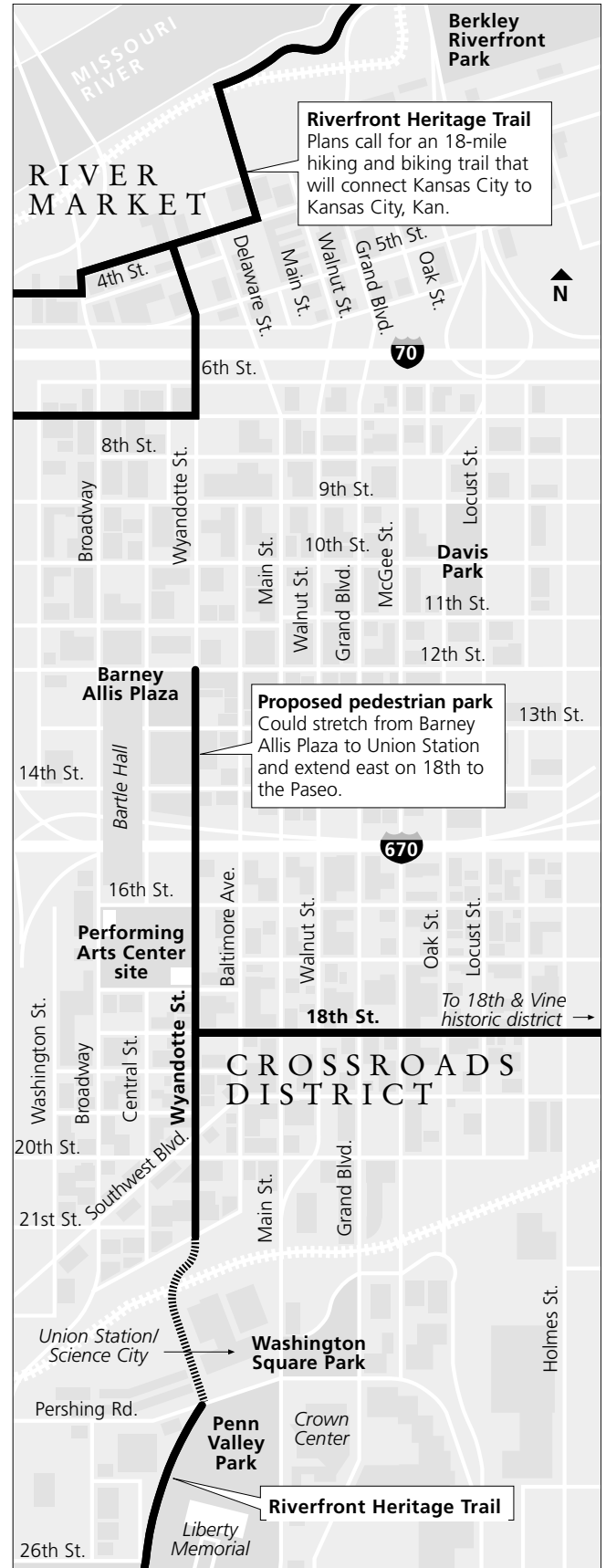
We suppose there would be upset among some of today’s downtown commuters, folks accustomed to the maze of one-way streets dedicated to the rapid in-and-out movement of their vehicles. But forgive us if we point out that a real downtown is supposed to be a place, not a raceway. What’s more, downtown has an abundant system of streets — still mostly in a classic grid — offering a variety of alternative routes.

Other cities and towns around the world prove how powerful an attraction and economic stimulant a fine park can be.

And often, unlike Kansas City, these parks are right at the center. There’s San Francisco Golden Gate Park, dating from the 1860s, a national treasure and a daily delight to thousands.

A generation ago, Portland, Ore., had a humdrum downtown with blocks of declining buildings. No one thought it would become one of America’s most lively and livable center city space. So what was the turning point?

It came in the early 1970s, with citizens demanding the demolition of an eight-lane freeway that passed through downtown right along the Willamette River.



DAVE EAMES/The Kansas City Star

The highway establishment predicted monumental traffic tie-ups.

Tom McCall, Oregon's governor of the time, took the citizens' side. The freeway was demolished. The cars found alternative routes. Today Portland has a long and roomy public space — the Tom McCall Waterfront Park — in the heart of the city. It was only later, incidentally, that Portland built its transit mall and regional light rail system.

Sometimes the window to the future needs to be green — and we don't just mean dollars. Great places are not made from small, timid steps. They take shape only when visionary people make bold plans for a place where a region's peoples and communities can come together.

PART 3 WHY THE KANSAS CITY AREA SHOULD BEWARE
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Why the Kansas City area should beware of over-reliance on the car

AVOIDING THE RISKS OF A TRAFFIC NIGHTMARE

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star



A light-rail train cruises through downtown Denver.

MATHEW STAVER/Special to The Star

The light-rail question has been asked four times in Kansas City, a little differently each time. Each time, the answer has been “no.” In August 2001 the margin against was 60-to-40 percent — the most decisive ever.

On this issue, however, Kansas City voters are swimming against the tide of American cities — from Charlotte to San Diego, Dallas to Denver, Salt Lake City to Seattle — as those places embrace light rail.

A week after the Kansas City vote, Denver’s transit authority even had the nerve to propose a “FasTracks” light-rail expansion plan that would cost \$4.4 billion over the next decade.

Are Kansas Citians smarter? Or simply complacent?

Make your own judgment.

What’s clear is that the private auto still cuts it for most people in this region. The reason: Why change? Why not assume the lifestyles we’ve enjoyed for the past several decades won’t just roll on into the future?

This region’s spread-out development pattern brings with it an interesting set of bragging rights: highest number of freeway lane-miles per capita in the nation; convergence of three interstate highways; average commutes of 21 minutes, a number that’s changed little in the past decade; eight federal highways and 49 state roads; an eastern Kansas highway-building momentum that’s proud of staying out ahead of development — while welcoming it, and perhaps causing it.

So it's easy enough to assume that fresh land will always be there for the capture at nationally low land prices; that commutes will remain sane and short; that congestion — the sort that foment fingers in the air and sometimes firearms in the shoulder lanes — is a story about other places, never to happen here.

The attitude is familiar. We heard it for years in such regions as Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas and Phoenix. No cause for worry, folks thought, we can always move out even farther, find our little place in the sun, and drive back a few more miles to work and shop and see the doctor. The highway builders will always create the roads we need.

But check those regions today and you'll find the complacency has disappeared in the ozone. More people are experiencing the consequences of an auto-only, roads-only scenario — and moving to find alternatives.

For many people, attitudes changed only after bitter experience. The Atlanta story (see story next page) exemplifies the serious trouble awaiting a region that continually expands. The negative consequences show up not only in declining air quality but eventually in the business base.

An Atlanta-like scenario, you're probably saying, is unthinkable in the Kansas City region. In hundreds of interviews, we heard it again and again: This is a region that practically invented the good life. Residents whiz to work over fast roads, rarely impeded by traffic jams. When congestion appears, it quickly evaporates.

We tried, time and again, to see if there was any concern in the Kansas City region about the region's spread-out pattern and near-total dependence on automobiles. But we couldn't catch even a hint of concern.

And, after tasting the traffic here ourselves, over many weeks (we had to rent a car to get around — how else?), we understood: Traversing Kansas City and its environs, compared with virtually every other major city region we know, is a breeze.

Some congested road stretches are appearing, but not many, at least, not yet. Small wonder that area developers see the "go" sign when they seek to devour green spaces for new office parks or big houses on big lots, with spacious lawns and wide streets.

Developers are now salivating over fresh land in eastern Jackson County, where some see potential for the next Johnson County.

Every economic strategy, every chamber wish list in the Kansas City region says "Let's grow bigger and bigger." If it's a company offering jobs, local officials offer tax abatements, even for suburban green-field locations. Area residents say this is a great place to raise children, so the more development the merrier.

Fine. But what happens if the economic-development folks succeed — and draw in multiple big employers in the next few years?

That old bromide about being careful what you wish for could apply with a vengeance. If the Kansas City area breeds the nightmare congestion now blighting many U.S. regions, no one would know whether a 10-mile commute would take 20 minutes or more than an hour ... simple trips to the supermarket would become stop-and-go ordeals ... the ability to meet simple appointments would become uncertain ... workers would arrive at their jobs stressed and grumpy ... desperate drivers would begin cutting through once-placid suburban neighborhoods. And of course, air quality would decline.

Light rail is no cure-all. It can't prevent congestion. But one or more stretches of rail is practically indispensable to building the alternative mobility system every great region is finding it needs.

In region after region, the first rail line, often emerging from a fiercely contested election, leads quickly to demands for more. That's been true in Denver, as well as Dallas, where voters last year decisively approved long-term financing to accelerate construction of new rail lines. This plan will add 53 miles onto the first 40, including service to the Dallas-Fort Worth airport.

It's interesting to note that supporters in Dallas include the business community — which credits the first rail lines with generating \$800 million in development — as well as the NAACP and Dallas Black Chamber of Commerce. The latter groups note that DART extensions have provided job access for low-income workers.

In Denver, the huge system additions under discussion — including an extension to the city's distant airport — would require a .4 cent sales-tax increase. Three years ago, voters in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, N.C., endorsed a half-cent sales-tax increase to pay for five major rail and busway lines, each running on an exclusive right-of-way alongside clogged interstates or major arterials.

During the recent Kansas City light-rail debate, much was made of projections that predicted relatively low ridership for the proposed system. Those numbers, said the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce and other critics, couldn't justify the \$783 million cost.

But projections are always debatable. What was apparently lost in the shuffle, despite clear, full coverage in *The Kansas City Star*, was an even more critical point — that light rail, in almost every city, generates hundreds of millions of dollars of new development. It draws stores, offices, residences. Over time, it creates its own residential and business nodes and its own ridership.

LIGHT RAIL CITIES

Some cities that have embraced light rail, with varying degrees of success



The Kansas City Star

Example: The 24-mile light rail system defeated in Kansas City on Aug. 7 was projected to generate 4 million square feet of office development, 13,000 jobs and 2,300 housing units close to station stops. Overall, it would have generated over \$1 billion in development, a godsend for downtown.

In their “no” vote, Kansas Citians lost three ways. They sacrificed economic development, including a fresh restoration thrust for their beleaguered inner city. They said OK to ongoing sprawl, in the process bowing to construction interests bent on grabbing tax dollars for road building. And they ducked out, at least for the moment, of the race to be a great city of the new century.

We’ve rarely seen, in covering regions across North America, a more pressing need to reverse course quickly.

The next steps to be taken are critical, not merely for the city but for the region’s long-term transportation strategy. But it is the city that is on the spot. Even the success of Johnson County’s plan for a commuter rail line to Union Station depends on the quality of the connections awaiting commuters willing to use the service.

Kansas City Mayor Kay Barnes has the problem in focus when she says, over and over, the key is to connect the riverfront area with Union Station-Crown Center, and the Country Club Plaza. She calls it “River-Crown-Plaza.”

She also knows the voters spoke strongly: The proposition on the ballot struck a solid majority as a too-large and too-costly first step. One way to scale back: run light rail only from the northern edge of downtown, through the Crown Center area and hospital district, south to a central point near the Plaza.

A permanent spine connecting the urban dots would

attract many riders during the day, inspire more development along that corridor and send an unmistakable signal of future intent. We’d urge making it a very short walk from another project deserving consideration: a long, linear downtown park for walkers and bikers. The estimated cost for the initial rail line would be two-thirds less than what the voters rejected.

Nor is it essential that this first step involve steel rail. Give the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority credit for the recent capture of \$12 million in federal funds for a dedicated busway project that would run from River Market to the Plaza. That service would represent a serious upgrading of the current Downtowner buses.

Then again, for a fifth of what it costs to build rail, the region could have electric buses running in exclusive, protected lanes. The system could have all the amenities people associate with rail, including comfortable stations and waiting areas.

Check Chattanooga for the proof that a low-cost system can actually catch on with the public. Chattanooga’s downtown is ringed with parking garages, which discourage more car traffic in the interior. It’s easy to get all around downtown using these super-quiet, zero-emission buses. Operating costs are paid by parking revenues.

For a little more money, Kansas City could at least rebuild the streetcar system of old in a style to match the fountains and grand boulevards. Buy new streetcars; they’re a third smaller than light-rail vehicles, and while significantly slower, they’re just as comfortable and operate more cheaply. They differ most sharply from light rail in that they lack exclusive rights of way, so their tracks share the streets with the cars and pedestrians.

In other words, lift and modify the trolley facet of last year's proposal: It called for downtown loop service extending over a 2.5 mile route. The distance from the Missouri River to Brush Creek and the Plaza is six miles.

Add the 2.7 miles along 18th Street — where last week we suggested the extension of a linear park — and you have a circulator system more than 11 miles long. These aspects of last year's plan were expected to cost about \$100 million.

Last summer, New Orleans announced plans to spend \$157 million to restore streetcar service on its main downtown corridors. A second stage, connecting nearby neighborhoods to the industrial district, calls for an additional \$115 million investment.

Portland, Ore., recently restored streetcar service, using vehicles that circulate in the central core and link downtown to nearby neighborhoods. In mere anticipation of the streetcar restoration, the Pearl district, home to a stretch of old rail yards and warehouses, has become the hottest neighborhood in the city. Thousands of housing units are coming as conversions or new construction in dense, low-rise buildings.

Trees are showing up along the same streets. Traffic is slower but calmer. It feels even more like a people place.

Ironically, the streetcar, abandoned in the 1950s all over the country in deference to the dominion of the American automobile, is returning in a bid to tame streets teeming with too much traffic and danger for pedestrians. Portland officials say streetcars, combined with their two light-rail lines going east and west, have spared them building more than 200 decks of full-block parking downtown.

Taking a bold step, if a smaller one — but right away — would mean Kansas City could at least hold its head high among U.S. regions, signaling its move into the new American rail era and sending an important signal to corporations and individuals about improved prospects for the urban core.

Mayor Emanuel Cleaver once dismissed such a limited rail system, which failed to provide a link to the East Side, as a “touristy froufrou.” But if that plan had been embraced then, perhaps an extension to or along Troost Avenue would now be in the works. And one ought to be: as Freedom Inc. and some other East Side groups acknowledge, rail connection is vital for the city's African-American community.

Time's a-wasting, Kansas City. There will be losers among regions bidding to become strong 21st century citistates. Delay is not your friend.

NOT BY RAIL ALONE: BUSES, MONEY, LEADERSHIP ARE CRITICAL

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star



FRED BLOCHER/The Kansas City Star

A Metro bus rolls south from downtown Kansas City.

As attractive as it sounds, light rail should never be seen as more than a single element of a regional transportation system.

For the Kansas City region, a regional approach should mean just that — serious engagement in the debates about mobility among officials on both sides of the state line.

When issues are framed in terms of one region, new possibilities become apparent. Consider the Mid-America Regional Council's "transit investment strategy," drawn up with input from the council's regionwide board of elected officials. Also involved were transportation officials from around the region and representatives from the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce.

From a regionwide perspective, three goals deserve top priority:

- First, push ahead on the first leg of what could become a regional commuter-rail system.

Johnson County has a plan to use existing track for passenger rail cars. Planners are counting on bistate

participation and the cooperation of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad to provide the needed access to rails in the crowded Interstate 35 corridor. If the plan becomes a reality, stations as far out as Olathe would offer passenger service to Union Station.

- Second, adopt specific plans for transit corridors and start looking for long-term regional financing.

We'd limit light rail to corridors where it's likely to attract more development, which would quicken commerce and support urban lifestyles.

In the meantime, planners should make creative use of existing rail lines where shared service is feasible. Isn't this an old railroad town? Why not for passengers as well as freight?

The goal is to create a regional transportation system with all the pieces hooked together. In some corridors — possibly those leading to Kansas City International Airport or those connecting the urban core to major suburbs — exclusive routes for rapid bus service might be built faster and find a growing market.

■ Third, make a radical improvement in the region's existing bus service.

Buses are a critical element of an integrated transportation system. Mainline service may be by rail — as in Denver, Dallas, Sacramento, St. Louis, Portland and elsewhere — or by exclusive rapid busway. But local bus service must provide a full network of connections through neighborhoods or around city centers.

Buses needn't be the old, high-to-climb-on, diesel-belching vehicles of old. Today there's a whole new generation of vehicles with different designs. Some are smooth and sophisticated enough to be likened to trains on tires. Others are smaller and appropriate for feeder lines. One city, Chattanooga, started its own manufacturing company to build quiet electric vehicles.

The bottom line of an effective system should be customer service. It must offer comfort, reliability, computerized geographic tracking and electronically displayed schedule information, and travel times that start to compete with the private auto.

Communities that denigrate bus systems as something just for "them" — minorities or the poor — fail to rally the support, or funding, for the quality, competitive systems successful regions will demand in this century.

Or as Los Angeles County Supervisor Adam Yaraslavsky puts it: "To get people out of their cars, you have to give them something better. And what does that mean? Reliability, dependability, speed, comfort, and the knowledge that when you get on that bus every day, rain or shine, barring an act of God, it's going to take you the same amount of time every day to get to your destination."

With average daily ridership at around 50,000, Kansas City's bus system already handles a significant number of passengers who'd otherwise be driving cars. But it's an anemic, seriously underfunded system, very small compared with other regions of similar size.

Part of the problem is the hostile nature of the region's growth patterns. As one transit official told us, "We find ourselves dropping people off acres from their destinations, where they're more likely to find sprinklers spraying them than sidewalks to carry them home."

The good news is that a well-structured regionwide agency in place already exists — the 30-year old Kansas City Area Transportation Authority. Johnson County officially withdrew from ATA in the early 1980s and runs its own limited transit routes. But ATA has five Missouri and five Kansas board members, a professional staff, expertise in bus operations and strong consumer orientation. In operation 30 years, it has been laying plans for regional rail service since 1975.

ATA is actually a decent vehicle, but it is running low on fuel. Forced to genuflect before other bodies for cash, it has

no taxing authority — a glaring exception to transit agency practice across the nation. Kansas City's half-cent transportation sales tax yields some \$26 million a year, but authority for even that must be renewed regularly by the legislature. As for regular state aid, Missouri ranks abysmally low — 44th among the states — in per capita state aid for transit. It sends Kansas City a paltry \$2.3 million yearly.

St. Louis seems to do better. Imagine what the two regions could conceivably do if they went to Jefferson City as real partners.

Sometime, somehow, the scattered pieces of the region's transit organizations ought to be assembled. If not for day-to-day operations, at least for planning and finance, for building a true regional system. Only a real regional plan with the organizational capacity to carry it out will have any luck in finding the cash it takes to make it real.

This, we'd guess, is what some future regional tax vote ought to be about — financing a balanced transportation system to assure the mobility that traffic congestion may well destroy. Not just rail but a total system. Of course such a measure would be harder to pass than money for a refurbished Union Station, sports or the arts. But as transportation moves steadily up the chart as the regional issue that people can no longer deny, isn't this the way to tackle it?

All transportation investments require long lead times. As many other regions have discovered, if you wait until traffic is an everyday horror, it's too late to do very much about it.

Staying ahead of that horror means getting political leadership on this task — articulate, focused champions with vision and public credibility. The Mid-America Regional Council, for all its well-acknowledged professionalism, is directed by elected officials whose priorities are in their own home cities and counties.

The regional council could and did formulate the excellent transit investment strategy for the whole region. But in this ferociously scattered and disjointed region, who is around to publicize it, run with it, champion it?

The same fate has befallen the regional council's excellent report — "Transit Supportive Development" — issued earlier this year. This document is a state-of-the-art rundown on how communities can be designed so that walking, cycling, riding transit and driving a car work harmoniously together.

Concepts of pedestrian-friendly streets, interconnected street networks, shared parking, bicycle circulation, mixed-use buildings and neighborhoods are laid out in clear form. The principles are directly in line with concepts of "new community design" and "smart growth" development recently laid out by the National Governors Association.

Running counter to these principles is the region's

strategy of reliance on the car. Just last month, the Kansas City area made the nation's top 10 for traffic fatalities. Half of all fatalities occur on streets with supposedly low speed limits, according to a Washington-based nonprofit group that analyzes national road safety data. Yet where's the leadership to get the Kansas City region talking about such ideas?

If it hopes to compete with other city-regions, the Kansas City area may require elected, regionwide leadership. The Mid-America Regional Council is the logical, qualified agency to do the hard planning. But it needs the clout and accountability of an elected chairman and board.

This doesn't mean a regional government. It doesn't mean increasing the regional council's existing (and quite limited) powers. It does mean a voice with the legitimacy of a publicly-elected office.

Such elected regional leadership could only be authorized by the Missouri and Kansas legislatures (ditto for a regional tax for transportation).

To achieve that, the civic-governmental leadership on both sides of the state line would need to throw their energies behind the idea.

In the absence of such a move, the region may continue

to drift — not only on transportation alone, but the closely associated issues of land conservation, environmental protection, planning for major public facilities and focused attention on new frontiers like biotechnology.

None of this sounds easy. The Kansas City region's history of deep rivalries and suspicions lives on, the 1996 bistate vote notwithstanding. Even in the Aug. 7 light-rail vote, one could smell a "What's in it for me?" attitude — whether it was Northlanders, people of modest means living east of Troost Avenue, or financial moguls working downtown.

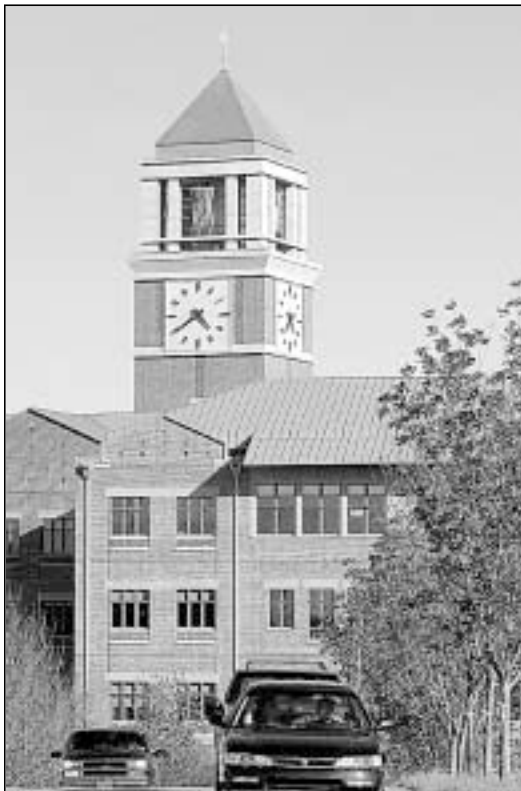
As a couple of outsiders, we're scratching our heads, wondering who or what could breathe life into this cause?

It almost makes one wish for the return of Tom Pendergast. His tactics were surely questionable, but you can bet that once he saw the need for a transit system, he'd have called for the plans, and got the thing built. With a concrete foundation, of course.

The real problem is that no one is elected to be the leader of the whole region, which means that perhaps it's time to start looking for some way — over time — to develop an institution capable of solving major regional problems.

RETHINKING THE DIASPORA: SPREADING OUT IS SO 20TH CENTURY

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star



File photos

Development decisions in the Kansas City area have dispersed major assets to all points of the compass: From left, above: Sprint World Headquarters campus, Kemper Arena, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

It has been called the Kansas City diaspora — flinging assets to every point of the compass, neglecting the historic downtown, creating a region one could say has a spine but no heart. Starting with J.C. Nichols' decision to locate his Country Club Plaza on Brush Creek and later to jump the state line for housing, this region has perennially flung its energies and attractions outward.

Crown Center was built around J.C. Hall's original office and factory, with hotel, shopping, and residential towers creating a separate urban center 1.3 miles from downtown. Earlier, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art was built on a site 5.3 miles away from the center.

Likewise, Crosby Kemper wanted to build his arena in the West Bottoms. Some people raised questions and urged selection of a downtown location. But the Kemper money talked and West Bottoms, two miles from the center of downtown, is where it went.

No one, of course, could have suggested the airport stay downtown. But whatever propelled the city to locate it 20 miles to the north? We were told this location — odd in the extreme for such a lightly populated region — was an effort to draw development northward, balancing the area's southern and western drift. OK, maybe. But again, why so far from the region's center? Again, downtown and environs were judged expendable.

Recent years have seen the pattern persist, with huge concentration of employers gathered along College Boulevard in Overland Park, from Corporate Woods on the west to the gargantuan Sprint complex on the east. In tightly packed regions like New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco or Los Angeles, this outward ooze of major businesses might have seemed normal, even inevitable.

But in Kansas City? Where the land area within the freeway loop is two and a half times that of the famed Chicago Loop? In a city of nearly 320 square miles — as large in total territory, as Mayor Kay Barnes likes to point out, as London, Paris, Boston and Miami *combined*?

As Barnes puts it, "We have 450,000 people to support an infrastructure that millions support in other cities."

We viewed the site of the Sprint campus under construction on 119th Street in eastern Overland Park, an area that already has 3,500 employers and more than 60,000 employees, not to mention Johnson County's largest shopping center.

We were puzzled. Why here? If one is fleeing density or potential traffic congestion, this area — ground zero of the

Johnson County economic boom — is a contrarian choice. It's wholly dependent on a few arterial roads and lacks the network of streets, laid out in a traditional grid, that helps keep a city mobile.

Yet as an official of the Kansas City Downtown Council told us, "Just think of how different the attitude would be toward Sprint if they had come downtown." Rejuvenation of the entire center city would have been sparked, and the company would be celebrated as a civic leader. "Now," said the official, "they're trapped on their own island."

The next corporation considering a mega-headquarters site, we heard, is American Century. It's said to be comfortable in midtown, but if it does move, the most likely direction is farther out.

If true, that would be unfortunate. A decade from now, corporations that didn't pick up the downtown stock when it was selling on the cheap may well regret it. Midland Loan Services' announced move to Corporate Woods, unless that location really is nearer to the company's 450 employees, could end up not looking smart. Even modest fulfillment of the visions now emerging for Kansas City's downtown could start the city on the center-city revival course so many other U.S. cities are now following to their immense advantage.

Take the example of Bell South — the telecommunications company based in Atlanta. Two years ago, it announced a dramatic move to close 75 scattered suburban locations and consolidate its nearly 11,000 employees at three locations along Atlanta's inner-city rapid-rail systems.

This was hardly a low-cost move. Bell South executives said it was costing them some \$750 million. So why the shift? Earlier, they analyzed where their employees live. No surprise; it turned out they were commuting from every direction, which meant downtown was the most convenient area for everyone to reach, especially in a region of limited public transit and fierce congestion on suburban freeways.

Bell South's internal marketing turned up another interesting fact. The young, highly-skilled knowledge workers they hoped to attract from around the county strongly preferred an urban environment to suburban living. Company executives picked areas around transit stations because they were already zoned for high density — locations where there would be likely amenities such as restaurants, shopping and other urban services.

This is the new business message, simply waiting for Kansas City enterprises to hear the new century's music.

THE BOOMERS ARE COMING, AGAIN

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star

Is the scattered housing pattern of the Kansas City region a smart one for the years ahead?

Maybe not. “Traditional” dad-and-mom-and-the-kids families account for a much smaller percentage of the population now.

And then there’s the baby-boomer phenomenon. Missouri and Kansas today lead the nation in the proportion of older adults in the population. People tend to grow up here and stay. Demographers see much longer life expectancies, resulting in a doubling of the population over 65 and a quadrupling of folks over 85 in the next 30 years.

Indeed, across the nation the post-World War II baby boomers are now turning 50 at the rate of about one every eight seconds. And many are having second thoughts about the rigors of running those suburban houses. Maybe it was good for the kids — big lawns and great schools — but the kids are gone. The dog just died. The lure of low-maintenance living becomes palpable.

We’re not expecting a bonfire of SUVs and lawnmowers anytime soon. But there is change in the air. Boomers are now hearing from their doctors that walking would be good. But where in J.C. Nichol’s good green earth are you going to do that?

Look out across the standard suburbia the developers are dishing up these days and one wonders what happened to

those historic neighborhoods that helped make Kansas City famous — the ones with sidewalks, boulevards and parks nearby?

Our colleague, Robert McNulty, president of Partners for Livable Communities, predicts that America’s communities will become much more friendly to folks graduating to their senior years. That should create pressure for a radical redesign of towns and suburbs for people no longer able (or inclined) to drive.

Specifically, McNulty suggests communities will find ways to restore the walkability of their neighborhoods and rebuild their town centers. Even today, in many cities the real estate market is showing this trend. How can it do anything but accelerate?

Boomers are already showing up in significant numbers where communities have expanded good quality transit service. Watch for demands to change local zoning laws to allow “granny flats,” or accessory apartments that localities often forbid.

Implementing these concepts implies a development pattern radically different from the standard suburban model. As demand increases for a broader range of housing choices, the real estate market will drive the change, altering today’s definition of a good place to live. But smart communities can begin preparing right away.

FAST GROWTH, FAST SPRAWL: ATLANTA'S AGONY

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star

It all started like a chamber-of-commerce dream. Atlanta was the robust, dynamic leader of the New South. Corporations scrambled to be there.

By the mid-1990s, Atlanta had been honored by nearly every list imaginable: best city for business, best place for families, you name it. The 1996 Olympics put the city on the international stage.

But all the while, the Atlanta region kept oozing farther and farther out across northern Georgia. A swarm of subdivision, mall and office-park developers took command. They cultivated local politicians and called the tune on land use, with few whippers of opposition.

Wherever the developers went, the Georgia Transportation Department gladly poured concrete in their path. More freeways came — both inner loops and outer loops — but somehow the traffic got worse and worse. More than once, proposals were made to extend the MARTA fast-train system into fast-growing suburbs like Gwinnett and Cobb counties. No, said folks, we won't pay, and anyway, "they" might come riding out.

But by the late '90s, the harvest was at hand. The region was devouring field and meadow more rapidly than any other region in world history. Another record: Atlantans boasted the longest commutes on the planet, an average of 36.5 minutes a day — well ahead even of Los Angeles, at 20.5 minutes.

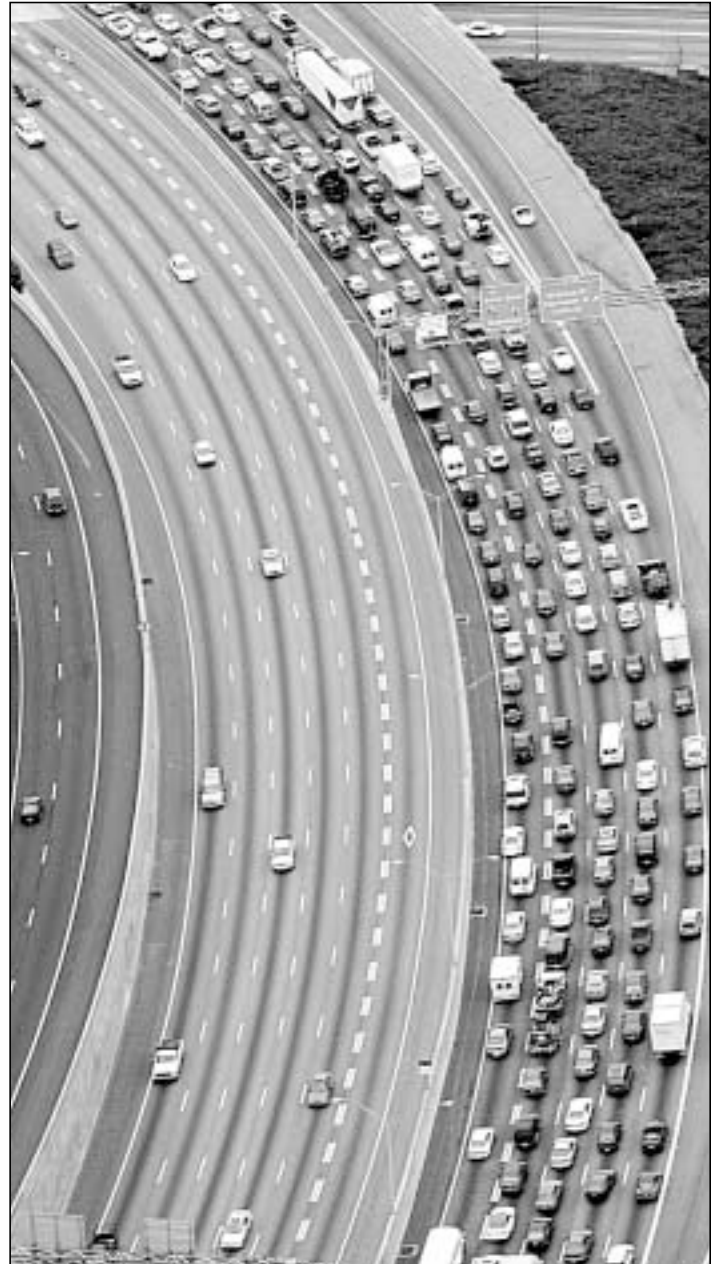
And the air quality was getting steadily worse. It was so bad that in 1998 the federal government made future federal highway funding contingent on development of a credible plan to reduce gridlock and pollution. That shock was compounded the same summer when the Hewlett Packard company called a news conference to announce cancellation of a \$700 million expansion project. Atlanta, HP executives told reporters, was becoming an unlivable place.

The response? An alarmed Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce came up with the idea of a state-mandated regional super-agency that could control land uses and build new transit lines. Roy Barnes, the incoming governor, embraced it.

Now a new Greater Atlanta Regional Transportation Authority is up and running. It has unprecedented powers to design and dictate new transit investments and, when it chooses, overrule local government land-use decisions that would make the region's traffic or air quality even worse than it has become.

"The local elected officials are wildly nervous about

this," Helen Tapp of the Atlanta Regional Business Council told *Governing* magazine. "It flies in the face of home rule, property rights, and an absolute dependence on the single-occupancy vehicle. Until recently, anything that messed with those would have been dead on arrival."



RICH ADDICKS/Atlanta Journal-Constitution

In Atlanta, chronic congestion extended commuting times and worsened regional air quality.

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Three paths that hold great promise for Kansas City's future

PATHS OF GREAT PROMISE FOR THE KANSAS CITY AREA

With its resilient economy, the region can pursue opportunities in biotechnology, broaden its audience for arts and culture, and transform itself into the nation's best place for raising children

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star



The far-flung and conflict-ridden Kansas City region has its share of challenges. Over the past three Sundays, we have shoved some of the most troublesome issues onto these pages.

But here's the other side: In few places between America's two coasts can one find the magnitude of opportunity that exists in the Kansas City area. We're not talking about mere dreams but real, ripening opportunities for great achievement. Kansas City is well-positioned to:

- Transform itself into an important national center for research and development in the fast-developing biological-sciences field.

- Build on its already extraordinary base of arts and culture by broadening access to the arts for all population and age groups.

- Write a bold new chapter in the story of children by expanding the No. 1 Question Campaign and transforming this already family-friendly set of communities into the best place in America to raise a child.

The Kansas City area can afford to pursue all three of these goals. The economy is stronger than most; Kansas City is not dependent on the fortunes of a single dominant industry. Whether it's assembling cars, baking bread, designing greeting cards or developing the next generation of telecommunication companies, the region has a solid, diverse economic base. Today, with the national economy softening, the metropolitan area behaves like a value stock: It's resilient, durable.

Per-capita income is \$30,225 a year, compared with the U.S. average of \$28,542 — and well above Missouri's \$26,376.

The Kansas City area is also creeping up on charts that attempt to measure a regional economy's technology component. While the U.S. Conference of Mayors data show the region only 54th for "high tech output," census data show technology jobs approaching 10 percent of the workforce.

Today's diverse economic base offers a wide range of opportunities for the region's tomorrows. Consider the new NASCAR facility in Wyandotte County and its huge implications for broadening the region's income and job base. And don't ignore the quiet but serious effort to build an intermodal transportation center near the city of Belton. This development promises to greatly expand the region's traditional role in freight hauling by leveraging the extensive rail network controlled by Kansas City Southern Industries Inc., which stretches from Canada to Mexican port cities.

Despite the clouds of recession, looming opportunities clearly outshine the region's problems. Today we point to three paths that hold great promise for the future.

REACHING FOR A SLICE OF THE BIOSCIENCES FUTURE

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star



JEFF ROBERSON/The Kansas City Star

The Stowers Institute for Medical Research represents an important step into the biosciences future. Meanwhile, funding is also increasing for other life-science efforts in the region, including those at KU Med Center.

The Kansas City region is moving fast to develop an important biological sciences sector. This is an exciting prospect for two reasons.

First, the science and economic developments of the new century are likely to be based in large part on biological research. Recall how much attention was devoted to the stem-cell issue before terrorism and war ate up the news pages. Regions with a piece of the biology business are likely to become cutting-edge places.

Second, regions where biosciences thrive can offer their residents far more choices in jobs and careers — from lab technicians to scientists.

The region's chances of becoming a recognized center for biosciences would probably be mostly talk if not for the determination of one man, Jim Stowers Jr., founder of the American Century mutual fund company.

At a crucial moment, Stowers stepped forward with a \$2 billion commitment — enough money to construct a gleaming facility on Brush Creek and fund an endowment to keep the Stowers Institute for Medical Research operating in perpetuity.

In the early going, attorney David Welte reminded us, many obstacles had appeared, not the least of which was raw skepticism, even from Stowers' friends. "It's nice you want to do this, Jim," some said, "but it won't work." Nobody believed that top-ranked scientists could be lured away from any of today's centers of biomedical excellence.

Welte recalls the reaction of Jim and Virginia Stowers: "Let's go talk to the best ones we can find and ask what their needs are." The scientists said their problems were not enough space or equipment, too much bureaucracy, too much time wasted chasing research dollars. Stowers reaction: Those are problems we can solve.

After a visit to the institute, we harbored no doubt that Stowers had done his homework. He has molded a workplace that's not only a scientist's dream but a place that's pleasing to the eye. Stower's chief facility officer, Jeff Johnson, showed us around the impressive building near Brush Creek, with its Italian limestone floors and walls paneled in African wood.

Beyond its physical presence, the institute has already made strides in building credibility. In the weeks after the official opening, the announcements of prestigious hirings came in a flurry: The first six scientists had said "yes."

The list included Arcady Mushegian, who left Akkadix Corp. in San Diego to head up Stowers' effort in bioinformatics, or computer analysis of biological data. Also making the move to Kansas City was Kent Golic, a leading researcher in genetics from the University of Utah at Salt Lake City.

These acceptances ensured that the Stowers Institute would be far more than a grand edifice on Brush Creek. Other researchers agreeing to move included Paul Trainor of the National Institute for Medical Research in London and Chunying Du from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

Yet as promising as all this seems, there's no guarantee that Kansas City's bioscience sector will achieve its true potential. Will bioscience become a driving force in the regional economy — a seedbed for tens of thousands of jobs? It all depends on how many people, firms and institutions get in on the act and how smoothly the region makes the shift from Old Economy to New Economy modes of operation.

On one level, the region has long experience in building collaborative networks among key decision-makers. Yet these efforts have been largely limited to a few well-placed institutions — the Civic Council, the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, the Hall Family Foundation, the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, the Mid-America Regional Council and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

But regions that operate on the New Economy model — including places like Silicon Valley — develop and depend on networks that reach far beyond the civic institutions of the local establishment.

Our colleague Doug Henton of Collaborative Economics in Silicon Valley has done some of the best research on the human connections that breed today's culture of innovation. Innovation, he said, thrives in networks that encourage close relationships among a broad array of participants — entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, university researchers, lawyers, consultants, foundation executives, government officials and others.

These networks are built on openness, creativity and face-to-face interaction. They comprise a sort of citistate mega-team able to transform ideas into new products and services — and do it fast enough to stay ahead of the innovative curve, thus assuring a globally competitive region.

The Kansas City region of the past has tended to operate within a decision-making model much more closely held. Moreover, its customs and conventions are based on a civic style almost baroque in form and structure — a classical civic music. What's needed now is an atmosphere that fosters the improvisation and spontaneity of jazz — an environment that thrives on uncertainty, with backing from more than the usual half-dozen organizations.

Now's the time to widen and complicate the web of institutional assets, nurture new relationships, and let the energy of entrepreneurial networks fuel forward progress.

The biosciences opportunity is a major test for how connected the Kansas City region can become and whether it is able to address its shortcomings.

One of the most obvious is the region's lack of real academic muscle, compared with that of competitor regions.

As one area civic leader put it, "Just try to name any region that's known for its scientific research that doesn't have one or more top-ranked universities." We couldn't.

Fortunately, there's change in the air. Under the leadership of its new chancellor, Martha Gilliland, the University of Missouri-Kansas City seems poised to grow in stature. But compared with the universities in top-tier bioscience regions, such as North Carolina's Research Triangle or California's Bay Area, its current efforts represent a very humble start.

But despair's not in order. A generation ago, the notion that the University of California branch in San Diego could become a top-tier public university seemed wildly improbable. But it happened. San Diego's scientific community, including the Scripps Laboratories, set out to attract the top scientists to the university. Today the San Diego campus is on a par with the flagship Berkeley campus.

The University of Kansas is also making strides. Bill Hall of the Hall Family Foundation points to the proximity of the Lawrence campus and the buildup of the sciences at the Edwards campus in Overland Park.

"KU seems destined to be the university for the Kansas City region," he told us.

Last summer, the Hall Family Foundation invested heavily in this conviction by approving a record \$42 million grant to KU. Most of the grant will go to life-science affiliates at KU Med Center.

Meanwhile, KU Med Center has begun rising on a funding list maintained by the National Institutes of Health.



JOE LEDFORD/The Kansas City Star

Parents, grandparents and students awaited the opening of residence facilities at the University of Missouri-Kansas City as the 2001-2002 academic year began. UMKC seems poised for an increase in stature, but its current effort in biosciences represents a very humble beginning.

Last year it appeared in 89th place. While that may seem low, no institution on the Missouri side even made the list.

KU's steady rise from the biosciences funding basement seems well assured. The Hall Family and the Ewing Marion Kauffman foundations have pledged \$150 million a year for 10 years as part of the "10 Giant Steps" series of projects and improvements announced by civic leaders in 2000. That list included the goal of training a work force for the growing bioscience industry.

Meanwhile, the Kansas City Life Sciences Institute — a regional consortium with Stowers as the keystone — intends to push the level of funded biosciences research in the region to \$500 million a year.

With the Stowers Institute rooted on the Missouri side, KU on the Kansas side, the New Economy-biosciences frontiers ought to make mincemeat of state line divisions.

But the dream will be half-born unless the opportunity chain is extended to all the region's communities — all its class and age groups. There's a new life-sciences option at Olathe's North High School, but will high schools across the region provide their students with the same chance? And how about the Kansas City-based Learning Exchange's nation-

leading effort to bring science into the hearts of kids from their earliest years? Will support appear to make that exposure routine for every student of the Kansas City region?

Pursuing the bioscience goal will demand long-term focus, said Jewel Scott of the Civic Council. The area's leaders, she suggested, must understand how relentlessly the goal must be pursued and how it needs to be woven into everything else the region cares about — its children, its schools, its infrastructure and quality of life.

There's no guarantee the strategy will work. For example, we heard rumbling that KU Chancellor Robert Hemenway had been criticized for "looking too much to the east."

Last summer, Missouri Gov. Bob Holden declared to technology executives that the state was committed to life sciences — efforts that include the "BioBelt" initiative being launched in the St. Louis area to advance research in plant science.

The state's two largest city-regions need more money for higher education, changes in tax law to encourage development of research parks, and assistance in building partnerships between business and the academic world.

Notably, Missouri is devoting 21 percent of its tobacco settlement money to a life-sciences development fund. Even so, the Missouri decision falls far short of a big-league biosciences commitment. Michigan, for example, has dedicated \$1 billion.

Extra effort is justified because so much is going right on the New Economy front:

■ The Kansas City area's medical complexes, in universities and hospitals, are working together more closely. In contrast to the arm's-length relationships of the past, said KU Med Center's Don Hagen, "Now we're cooperating on students, services, teaching sites — even our struggles with ethical questions." From a tradition of separateness and competitive protectionism, institutions like Children's Mercy and St. Luke's and the medical center find biosciences a common interest.

■ The number of bioscience commercial enterprises in the region is growing. At CyDex in Overland Park, where technicians are working on new forms of solubility to introduce drugs into the body, CEO Peter Higuchi exults over this trend. "It's like golf," he said, "you play better when you play with better players."

Cerner Corp. is right here, too, and nationally known around the country for its revolutionary medical data management systems. The list goes on, and includes growing biotech companies such as Avax Technologies in Kansas City, JRH Biosciences in Lenexa, Flint Hill Scientific in Lawrence or the KU Med Center spinoff — XenoTech — which specializes in safety tests for new pharmaceuticals.

■ Other high-tech sectors are expanding — witness the big presence of Sprint Corp. In a highly significant recent move, a new organization called KCCatalyst was formed out of Silicon Prairie, a technology association that had grown to more than 200 members. KCCatalyst will help entrepreneurial firms in the region make connections with support functions — legal, accounting, patents, and sources of angel or venture capital.

■ The Kansas City establishment is very much in on the game, with the Civic Council the region's chief advocate for entrepreneurial technology and biosciences in particular. The Kansas City Area Development Council has marketing savvy to offer. Between the Midwest Research Institute and the fresh energies of such area groups as the Enterprise Center in Johnson County and the Brush Creek Enterprise Center, it's clear the jazz is starting to play.

But who will pay the musicians? Stowers' generosity is a big play, but the critical test will be profit-making ventures. It's critical, said venture capitalist Abel Mojica of Kansas City Equity Partners, to be geared to commercialization of results. Yet investors, he notes, will have to adapt to biotech's longer development cycles — from invention to product. That cycle can take a dozen years, compared with the seven or so typical in most fields.

In terms of economic risk, biotech is treacherous. It's notorious for its failure rates. This is not a game for the faint of heart.

Nor will success come through the Old Economy game of offering low costs for labor or real estate along with tax breaks to attract new companies. Success in the New Economy requires attracting talent — knowledge workers — and keeping them happy with fine schools, attractive towns and cities and a high quality of life.

Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina tells audiences: "Keep your tax incentives and highway interchanges. We will go where the highly skilled people are."

What the 21st century is offering is victory for smart collaborators — communities that learn to share risks and opportunities while overcoming old divisions, such as the state line.

In an interview, Kansas Gov. Bill Graves hammered this home. The biosciences initiative, he said, is "one in which we all come at it as equal stakeholders, with much to gain on each side."



KEVIN ANDERSON/The Kansas City Star

Wayne Williams of Oak Grove, left, was tested during a study at KU Med last year by medical engineer Jason Long and therapist Laura Hughes Zahner.

ARTS FOR A CONNECTED CULTURE

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star



File photo

The region takes a back seat to few in cultural opportunities: The Kansas City Symphony led by conductor Anne Manson in a 1999 performance with guest artist Yo-Yo Ma, left.

The Kansas City area feeds its soul from the fertile cultural soil prepared by its early 20th century civic giants.

In the early 1900s, who would have guessed that William Rockhill Nelson's \$11 million gift, combined with Mary Atkins' fortune, would in time produce a truly world-class art museum?

In the 1920s, retailers scoffed at J.C. Nichols as he spent lavishly to jazz up his new Country Club Plaza district with 50 fountains and sculptures. But Nichols knew that a connection with art would add value to his economic ventures.

All sin and saxophone — that's what many people must have thought in the 1930s, when the likes of Charlie "Bird" Parker and Count Basie held forth east of downtown. After all, portions of downtown and nearby environs were places where people forgot their grueling daily work and engaged in all kinds of distractions.

No one could have imagined that jazz, with its misbehaving notelines and moody rhythms, would become a gift that kept on giving. Or believed that, early in the 21st century, the district along Vine Street would be undergoing redevelopment. Or that the legacy of that era would come to include the Charlie Parker Memorial Foundation, giving first chances to young black musicians.

Today, people all over the region gather in Penn Valley Park to celebrate the Blues and Jazz Festival, an occasion in which differences of class and race fade to the background.

As visitors from afar, we couldn't help notice that art, once a glimmer in Nelson's eye, has spread like prairie ground cover across the Kansas City region. The area boasts 40 galleries, a number constantly growing.

One can find art for children in a museum in Kansas City, Kan., and Latin murals along the 23rd Street Trafficway.

Small galleries have appeared in Westport, the River Market and now in the Crossroads District south of the downtown freeway loop. Drop in at the trendy Zin restaurant, at 19th and Main streets, and you will be encouraged to come again on one of the coordinated “opening” nights for area galleries.

If anyone doubts that art is popular, just try wading through the crowds at the annual September art fair on the Plaza. In Brookside, a smaller but also popular event takes place — along with similar events in Olathe. Even Corporate Woods holds a major arts event.

A recent Deloitte & Touche study revealed that arts and culture draw nearly twice as many patrons in the region as all the professional sports combined. Put in economic terms, the arts pour \$300 million into the regional economy.

From our experience in watching regions, the Kansas City area seems to take a back seat to few in overall cultural opportunities. The region boasts a top-rated symphony and long list of musical and theatrical organizations — including the Conservatory of Music and the Kansas City Chorale. The list of venues is impressive as well and includes the Lyric Theatre, Folly Theater, Quality Hill Playhouse, Starlight Theatre and Sandstone Amphitheatre in Bonner Springs. Ask about programs for young people, and you’ll hear about Hallmark’s Kaleidoscope program or the popular Coterie Theatre in Crown Center.

The Kansas City Symphony conducts itself as a truly regional resource, with events scheduled in eastern Jackson, Wyandotte and Johnson counties, along with summer concerts in area parks. It’s so admired that the only complaint we heard was from some Johnson Countians, who suggested that its musical selections sometimes undershot the sophistication of the audience.

Right now, the regional arts scene is eagerly anticipating completion of a new performing arts center, to be built on a site southeast of 16th Street and Broadway.

Meanwhile, civic leaders Jonathan Kemper and John Laney are pushing for a new downtown library at 10th Street and Baltimore Avenue in the old Bank of America building.

The list, if you dare to make one, goes on and on. But the message is obvious: The Kansas City region has all the makings of a strong regional community of arts. The challenge is to connect the dots and realize the opportunities. Now is the time to broaden the reach of the arts to encompass audiences well beyond the traditional patronage of elites and begin using culture as a powerful medium for the development of the region’s children.

First, why not make the most of Kansas City’s history and historical figures?

Consider the 18th and Vine restoration effort, begun in the Emanuel Cleaver mayoral administration as a \$27 million

city allocation. Now housing is being built in the area, and 18th and Vine is attracting new public and private investment.

The 18th and Vine area boasts the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum as well as the American Jazz Museum. We hear that 85 percent of the visitors to these facilities come from the “white” community; the memorabilia of historic black teams and players are the biggest source of revenue for both museums.

Yet the region as a whole is still in the process of discovering these treasures. Clearly, more could be done to develop a deeper and wider audience for these two facilities, which are major facets of the region’s common heritage.

Next, make arts and culture an even more prominent theme for the region.

Kim Walesh of the California-based Collaborative Economics firm points out that the “creative” industries associated with arts and culture are growing rapidly.

“The technology buzz has been about hardware,” she says, “but the steady growth is in media, design, animation, graphics — the soft side of technology.”

During his recently completed tenure as mayor of Seattle, Paul Schell believed this so strongly he pushed for the biggest arts-driven construction boom anywhere in the country. Seattle poured money into libraries and new museums dedicated to art, history and industry, and music.



KEITH MYERS/The Kansas City Star

Xavier Fleming, left, Ronnie Jackson and Aaron-Brooke Harris practiced in 2000 with the Paseo Academy Jazz Ensemble.

Today, Schell describes Seattle as a place where, “You have telecommunications, biotech, software and the Web all coming together with great music, architecture and art. It’s at the intersections of disciplines where sparks fly. That’s where ideas come from. We are creating a place where the creative experience can flourish.”

Kansas City already has a widely admired policy requiring that 1 percent of the costs of public construction projects be set aside for art. And we heard the buzz about downtown’s Avenue of the Arts, centered on the Central Avenue corridor, as well as a serious effort by the Municipal Art Commission to use art to enliven the otherwise sterile spaces of Kansas City International Airport.

But, as we see it, the scene is wonderfully set for a bold maneuver. The area has many parks and a central downtown district desperate for something that would draw more people.

Last year, the Cow Parade in Kansas City drew widespread interest. St. Paul staged something similar but played off a well-known local resident who had become famous: the late Charles Schulz, creator of “Peanuts.”

In 40 square blocks of St. Paul’s city center, 102 large, three-dimensional images of Charlie Brown were scattered at corners and doorways, and tourists flocked to see them. Last fall, when most of the figures were sold, they brought in a bundle of money for a scholarship fund.

Who’s bigger than Charles Schulz? Walt Disney, for one, who spent a good portion of his youth in the Kansas City area and emerged from the Kansas City Arts Institute with a sense of how to combine animated drawing with theatrical storytelling.

The cows around Kansas City last year were OK and reminiscent of the cattle drives and stockyard complex that once covered much of the West Bottoms. And this year, organizers are planning “The March of the Teddy Bears,” in which 150 to 200 decorated fiberglass bears will be scattered through the area and then auctioned for charity.

In subsequent years, however, similar events could be based on some facet of Disney’s Kansas City background; if not Disney and his special family of imaginary creatures, someone else. Make your own list: J.C. Nichols, J.C. Hall, Charlie Parker — maybe even Jesse James.

We suggested two Sundays ago that Kansas City build an eye-catching walking and biking park from the interior of downtown to Crown Center, with a spur along 18th Street over to the Paseo. What better place to celebrate the legacy of Disney with a collection of his creations to grab every generation?

We asked people about the art objects on top of Bartle Hall. Were they fancy radar antennas? Or were they disguised microwave towers for cell phones? No, we were told. Just some art. Just fun.

OK, why not take that attitude to serious scale? It might be the antidote to the region’s usually somber civic face — and a means to boost the Kansas City’s image in the wider world.

In any case, nothing the Kansas City area could do would outrank the chance to connect two of the area’s opportunity agendas: arts and children.

One rainy morning in early May, we watched the children at the Foreign Language Academy in their gymnasium, decked out in festival costumes, practicing for a special day of dances and music. Nothing adults can do comes close to the electricity that charges kids in a setting of that sort.

The Mid-America Regional Council, in a recent survey, found that area residents have a high regard for the arts yet also feel arts are disconnected from their daily lives — so disconnected that survey respondents put the arts next to last on their personal quality-of-life scales.

Yet 81 percent of those surveyed said some connection between the arts and children should be made early. We heard Johnson County officials speaking of a growing need for more day care; many would like to see more facilities organized around arts programs.

Apparently there’s strong interest for such a concept at the Cultural Education Center at Johnson County Community College, if funding can be found. Some supporters are so high on this idea, they see prospects for franchising a kids-and-arts agenda, taking it to venues such as the new Sprint headquarters campus, where no child care is yet planned on-site.

The United Way, we hear, may use culture in newly creative ways as a strategy for youth development. The Kauffman Foundation is pledged to help young people, and while it doesn’t fund culture directly, it’s easy for us to imagine support for using arts and culture as a primary tool for more positive youth development.

But charitable funding sources probably won’t suffice. If the region is to capitalize on its head start with children’s programs, and use arts in a major effort for youth development, it will need a substantial and steady source of revenue. One clear possibility: Using the same bistate taxing authority that funded the restoration of Union Station.

Will this fly with the voters next November? Some area experts at taking the public’s pulse say “yes” but only if any such initiative is combined with fixing up the Truman Sports Complex. In other words, an inelegant but potentially successful combination. Or as political maven Jack Craft put it to us, “It’s a nose holder deal both ways — the arts folks will vote for it even if they don’t like sports, and it’s the same with the sports nut. He’s not much for the piccolo player, but he’ll vote for the quarterback.”

Still, there’s evidence the people of America’s regions will

vote their pocketbooks to sustain cultural assets. The Denver region did it as far back as 1988, approving a 0.1 percent sales tax for the zoo, museums and performing arts. And it's not just for the big institutions. The money flows also to smaller arts organizations, most of which are outside the city of Denver.

In the first campaign, the zoo's polar bears were the symbol. The polar bear signs were so popular, kids were stealing them for their bedrooms.

The magic lies in what Denver's Scientific and Cultural Assets District does for kids. As our colleague John Parr of the Denver-based Center of Regional and Neighborhood Action puts it, "You see all these buses lined up in front of the Performing Arts Center, and you know they're packed with kids from lower-income neighborhoods. The district buys truckloads of tickets for these kids to see plays, hear the symphony."

By law, the tax sunsets every few years. It always rises again as voters renew it.

In the early 1990s, the citizens of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, Pa., came to a similar conclusion. Most

of their cultural assets were in the city of Pittsburgh, while the population and patronage had shifted to the county. They passed a 0.5 percent tax for a Regional Asset District, which yields more than \$60 million a year. A third of that is available for innovative new programming.

Even Kansas City's cross-state rival, St. Louis — with all its fractious and fragmented ways — was able to win approval in 1968 for a small, city-county property tax for the arts, which was earmarked for the science center, art museum, zoo, and botanical garden.

Arts groups in the Kansas City region seem poised for bold steps. Witness the energy apparent in the Metropolitan Arts Council as living organizational evidence. Now what's needed is a compelling mission. What better than a nation-leading program of arts and culture for kids?

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art will be a star, in good times and bad. But an arts for kids program sounds just the right note and could be the critical connecting link to the entire region's future quality of life.

Why? We think the answer's simple. Do it for the kids.

A MODEL REGION FOR CHILDREN

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star



TODD FEEBACK/The Kansas City Star

Fourth-graders from Nativity Parish School visited the EarthWorks complex in 1999.

“Child opportunity capital of the United States.” “Shining star.” “Right on target.”

Those are just some of the superlatives tossed at the Kansas City region’s remarkable, decade-long series of initiatives to make itself a model area for children.

But is the reputation earned? Are real results apparent? Will the children’s initiative make a real difference for 21st century life in the region?

To help answer those questions, we interviewed many Kansas City leaders engaged in building a children’s agenda. And we enlisted the assistance of a colleague, San Diego-based journalist Richard Louv, a nationally recognized expert and author of *Childhood’s Future* and other books on kids.

Our conclusion: Kansas City’s children’s agenda is well ahead of the pack among U.S. regions. The agenda is critical to the region’s future. But more work needs to be done to ensure long-term success.

So where, you may ask, has Kansas City been ahead as a national leader for children?

Kansas City foundation and civic leaders became concerned in the late ‘80s with discouraging reports on children’s health, the lack of quality day care for children in their early years, and the high incidence of teen-age pregnancy and teen-age crime.

In 1990 a Kansas City Partnership for Children was formed, led by Janice Kreamer, president of the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, along with several of her board members. Kreamer found a partner in the Heart of America United Way.

The partnership became a children’s advocacy organization for a five-county area and provided an annual report card on conditions for kids. The report card still exists.

As Jim Caccamo, former partnership director recalls: “The first three years’ grade was a D+. The first year we all

said 'awful'. The second year we again said 'awful,' we must work harder. The third year we said 'Now we get it, this is really hard work.' ”

In 2000 the grade rose to a “B,” in part because of better school performance, with the exception of the Kansas City School District. Other reasons: declining infant mortality and more mothers receiving prenatal care. Last year, however, the grade dropped to a C+.

In 2000, the report card's teen years grade was a “D+,” with the Kansas City area above the national average for youth alcohol and drug use, teen-age pregnancy and teen homicides. Everyone agreed: that's not satisfactory. Last year, some improvement was noted: The teen years grade rose to a C-.

Despite these mixed results, Kansas City's children's initiative has hit some home runs. Example: The No. 1 Question Campaign launched by the Partnership for Children in 1997 — an idea that grew out of a speech by area public relations executive David Westbrook.

His idea was to make the question — “Is it good for children?” — a litmus test for decisions by parents, teachers, business and faith community members and neighborhood leaders. With sponsorship by the Heart of America United Way, the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, and the Kauffman and Hall foundations, the No. 1 Question was plastered across billboards, newspaper pages, and bus kiosks. It was discussed on television, at school, from the pulpit, at work and among politicians.

Most U.S. children's initiatives, notes Louv, go for such bromide slogans as “The Year of the Child.” But Kansas City's No. 1 Question has edge. It makes it clear kids' welfare is everyone's — not just some peoples' — job. “It's extraordinary in the world of child advocacy,” said Louv.

The widespread appeal of the message carried by the slogan, Westbrook believes, makes it possible to achieve the long-term goal of a broad political and cultural constituency for children.

Has the No. 1 Question campaign worked? Surely it has proven memorable. A recent five-county survey by the Independent Global Strategy Group showed more than half of residents had heard the No. 1 Question. More important, 85 percent supported the idea of people asking “Is it good for the children?” when making decisions.

One example: immunization for Kansas City area children. The Partnership targeted that issue with phenomenal results: The immunization rate for children under the age of 3 soared from less than 50 percent to 84 percent. As part of the effort, Caccamo persuaded Hallmark Cards to create a birth immunization card for new parents.

Initially, it flopped. But then the partnership urged Gov. Mel Carnahan to send the card to all newborns in Missouri.

He agreed and was so pleased he subsequently convinced other governors to follow suit. Today 39 governors send the immunization cards to parents, reaching an overall average of 89 percent of infants' families in their states.

Rarely does one see a single metro region make such a contribution to the entire nation.

Indeed, seen from outside, Kansas City's effort for children does seem remarkable for its persistence and high-level attention.

That persistence these days means a major push to increase the rate at which the region's child-care workers stick with their jobs. Currently, because of low pay and haphazard working conditions, turnover is 42 percent each year. Result: less quality care, training, continuity — a clearly undesirable outcome for children.

“We need to increase the compensation of staff; we need to improve the preparation of teachers,” said Abby Thorman, director of the Metropolitan Council on Child Care at Mid-America Regional Council. “Right now about 20 percent have any formal schooling in this industry, which means we have a poorly educated workforce, and that can't adequately prepare kids for school.”

Supporters believe universal, high-quality child care can produce bottom-line economic dividends, especially as small and medium-sized businesses benefit from reduced absenteeism and ability to attract the best and the brightest workers.

The region has some model programs to tap as it tries to professionalize child care. One is the Francis Child Development Institute, a nationally respected laboratory school for training professionals in early childhood education. The center works with more than 100 family child-care providers to offer regular home visits to families with children from 9 months old to a year or more.

Another bright spot: Dwayne Crompton's Thomas Roque Child and Family Development Center, which the regional council's Thorman praises as “a model child and family center in one of the toughest neighborhoods of the city.”

Such achievements are all the more noteworthy in the light of Missouri's mediocre record on child care. The state did give birth to the remarkable “Parents as Teachers” program, featuring monthly home visits by a parent-educator for the first three years of a child's life. Evaluations show the children enrolled in the program score significantly above average in intellectual and language development.

But Missouri, unlike Kansas, doesn't require child-care workers to receive early childhood training before they work in child-care centers.

Kansas City fights obstinately against child-care mediocrity. Consider its Local Investment Commission program. The commission is not only a true national model

in helping former welfare recipients succeed longer-term in their jobs. Now, says director Gayle Hobbs, “We’re in 61 neighborhoods, with full-service centers (schools that provide an array of social, medical and educational services to children and families) in 21 of those neighborhoods.”

The investment commission has succeeded in reducing the number of children without health insurance in Jackson County from 22,000 to 5,000. In partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and others, the group has started a business-mentoring program. “We now understand,” said Hobbs, “that child care, transportation, health insurance are related.”

Again, one sees an achievement few regions could match. It’s a pattern that Thorman, who has designed and run programs for children, sees as a building block for a broader system of child care to serve an entire region.

One example: A child-care-linked transportation hub is being built at 39th Street and Troost Avenue to provide early education to children of the lower-to-moderate income riders dependent on the city’s bus system.

Also available at the hub will be social services, a playground and community room, so riders will be able to leave their children while they ride to their jobs. The sponsor is the Kansas City Model Cities Child Development Corp., which already has community centers serving 2,500 Jackson County kids.

In recent years, Yale’s Edward Zigler has been intimately involved in transforming 13 of the Kansas City region’s schools into pioneering education centers as part of his national campaign for Schools of the 21st Century. The campaign envisions a school-based services model with a child care/family support program for children from birth to 12 years old.

In fact, Zigler himself exemplifies Kansas City’s originality in the world of children. Six decades ago, he was selling *The Kansas City Star* on Kansas City street corners. Today he’s Sterling professor of psychology at Yale University. He’s widely regarded as the country’s leading academic expert on child care and respected as one of the fathers of Head Start.

A dozen years ago, his national campaign was launched in Independence. Now it has spread to more than 1,300 schools in 20 states. The effort, Zigler can now boast, has made Independence “a model for the country.”

Yet at the end of the day, is it all enough?

We heard doubts and concerns. One was that too many children are untouched by the child-care programs. Another asserted that the report card on children, however laudable, reflects mixed government statistics from various political entities rather than a clear picture of children’s overall progress.

The report card misses, some told us, a full measure of how much communities truly care and are trying to improve



STEPHEN PINGRY/Special to The Star

Students Sperlynn Byers, seated, and Morgan Shellenberger tried out the broadcast center at Exchange City, a Learning Exchange program, in 2000. Adults viewing the demonstration were, from left, Irv Belzer, Jeanne Bates and Sue McCord Belzer.

children’s lives. And it doesn’t reflect progress from the kids’ side — how much they’re gaining a sense of connection to their neighborhoods and society as they grow.

The tribulations of the Kansas City School District and the racial tensions lingering behind it cloud the future for area children. Crime, pregnancy and substance abuse statistics among youth indicate troubling unmet needs.

Then there’s the perversity of the region’s form, which makes it tough to devise a coherent regional policy on any subject.

“The Kansas City metro area includes eight counties, and 114 locally incorporated municipalities, and over 50 school districts,” said Thorman. “Few urban areas have this problem of a state line.”

What’s so tantalizing is the thought that the children’s campaign, over decades, might actually lead not just to happier, thriving children and more well-adjusted, studious teenagers, but to a Kansas City metro area of successful adults.

The new century will reward maturity, thoughtfulness, intelligence, discernment — for economic success and for full lives of the mind. Strong, consistent child care, developed over decades, could create a true standout region of succeeding adults.

Perhaps it’s with a glimpse of that possibility that Helen Blank of the Children’s Defense Fund in Washington refers to Kansas City as “a shining star” in early childhood education. Or that Tom Kingsley, principal research

associate of the Urban Institute, credits the Kansas City region for its “right on target” approach to childhood issues.

Yet, ironically, many residents of the region — notwithstanding *The Star's* regular and careful treatment of the issues — don't seem to grasp the full and exciting scope of what's being attempted here for kids or what the rich dividends of success might be.

Success-story telling may be one part of the answer. But our guess is that spirited debate about evolving issues may help even more. For example, some see the region's natural environment of rolling hills and woods as mental space for young imaginations — indeed, that Kansas City can “sell” itself as a region specially desirable for raising a family.

“If you ask people in KC what makes our community unique, it's not mountains or beaches,” said Pete Levi,

president of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. “It's because Kansas City is a great place to raise a family.”

Others, by contrast, are concerned that a region so spread out, so automobile-dependent, with such dramatic differences in peoples' incomes and lifestyles, deprives young people of the traditional village and town life, in which they learn to mix easily with people “other” than their own circle.

Our object here isn't to settle this debate but to encourage the region to have the debate. The Kansas City area is reaching for some sort of edge, something to give it that special advantage. Forging ahead on the children's agenda just might be that edge.

EPILOGUE: BRIDGING THE AREA'S BIGGEST DIVIDE

By CURTIS JOHNSON and NEAL PEIRCE Special to The Star

What is it about sports that seems to get past race, when little else does? Athletes tell a common story about sharing pain and glory, traveling together, forging the bonds that turn individuals into a team.

Who among us can't recall a major sports event at some stadium or arena, where our team did everything we'd hoped? Later, we might marvel at how little race mattered in the outcome — and wish that someday, the same could be said of all human undertakings.

Obviously, we have far to go in that regard, but the need for change is especially great in the Kansas City region. As we've noted in our *Citistates* series over the past four weeks, this is a metro area that still bears racial scars that date back to the era of slavery.

A fresh approach to this obstinate problem is imperative if the Kansas City region hopes to be a serious player in a 21st century world; diversity will be at the center of global communications and commerce.

So where does the change begin? Not merely with harmony and hand-holding in the ballpark but with how the region organizes to prepare young people for a productive future — and how it strengthens neighborhoods and deploys its major assets.

In the last few months, we've seen hints of what might be possible.

Former Mayor Emanuel Cleaver's face lights up when he recalls last fall's Chiefs game against the New York Giants at Arrowhead Stadium — a game that was played on the first football Sunday following the terrorist attacks.

"I said a prayer in an atmosphere I've never felt before — one I can barely describe," Cleaver recalled.

Cleaver remembers buckets being passed around among 78,000 people to collect money for New York victims. There were no reports of anyone trying to steal the cash.

Richard Ruiz of El Centro — a Kansas City, Kan.-based social-services organization — has a similar memory of the atmosphere at a mariachi concert at Municipal Auditorium, right after Sept. 11.

"When they played 'God Bless America,' you should have seen everybody standing, saluting, singing their patriotism," he said. "Some of them may be undocumented workers, normally wary, but yes, they're Americans."

But the atmosphere of crisis cuts more than one way. Some people in the Kansas City area from regions such as the Middle East, India and Pakistan feel they've gone from being invisible to feeling exposed and vulnerable.

Tanweer A. Papa, with the Kansas City office of the Center for Islamic Education in North America, says he hears people asking "Who are these people. What are you doing in our country?"

"Flying while Arab" has joined "Driving while black" as a new burden, though Joseph Melookaran of the Asian-American Chamber of Commerce of Kansas City says the effects of Sept. 11 aren't all negative. The Islamic school at 105th Street and Grandview Boulevard got five or six hostile calls but more than 1,000 unsolicited calls of support and more than 700 letters.

"I don't know how these foreign extremists managed to bring us closer," said Marvin Szneler, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Bureau/American Jewish Committee. "But they did. We immediately sent messages of support to the Muslim community."

But Szneler wonders how long the feeling will last, and Cleaver, for one, believes it has already passed. "Our community," he said, "has surrendered to its former self."

In the mid-1990s, FOCUS Kansas City issued a call to action, laying out in detail how the region could rise to the opportunities that flow from greater diversity.

Kansas City Harmony consistently produces the nation's most ambitious array of programs aimed at building better relations across racial lines. Church congregations share faith experiences. Workshops and roundtables on diversity are taking place in every kind of organization — big corporations, governments, nonprofit groups and schools.

So, which is reality: The scene inside the stadium, where race and class matter not at all, or the scene outside, where people retreat to "the real world of our segregated communities and lives?" as Henry Guerry, president of the Olathe branch of the NAACP, put it to us.

Cleaver thinks the reality is inside the stadium.

"It's God's way of showing us what we should pursue," he said. "Without these small interludes of trust, we wouldn't know what we were striving to do."

Could anything else unite the region? What about all the energy building around the area's effort to become a leading center for bioscience research and development? What about arts and culture — or arts in combination with sports?

The Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, with the help of the Fleishman Hillard public-relations firm, conducted a survey last fall. A cross section of community leaders was asked what could unite the region.

Carol Grimaldi, executive director of Brush Creek

Partners, suggested that “education and economics are the great unifiers.” Many echoed this theme: Fix the schools, create good jobs, that’ll do it, they said. Others suggested imitating Chicago’s current program to get people reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* or greatly expanding the Ethnic Enrichment Festival held yearly at Swope Park.

Most who answered the community-leaders survey agreed diversity was a key strategic issue for the region’s future. Many suggested using the arts as a medium for bringing young people together, in the hopes of building a new culture as today’s children grow into adults.

And that is our own best guess about how to proceed. Planes crashing into tall buildings brought tears even from hardened cynics. But kids — those doing well and those not doing well — bring smiles or tears in good times and bad.

So, tighten the focus on this region’s kids. The youngest haven’t yet seen their natural ideals overrun by societal hang-ups over skin color.

One day last fall, we were talking with a Kansas City woman, and she began telling us about her granddaughter — a girl we’ll call Carla.

Carla attends Holliday Montessori, one of the Kansas City schools considered successful. At Holliday, when it’s your birthday, you’re at center stage to say something. Then come the candles and cake.

Carla told her grandmother she used the time to tell about her life but then turned to her classmates and declared how much she liked all of them. For emphasis, she walked around the room and hugged each child.

Carla is one of maybe four white kids in a class of mostly black and Latino kids.

Kids may represent the region’s best shot at overcoming generations of dysfunctional relations. If we let them, maybe they can build a bridge to the better side of our nature.

WHY NOT A REGION-WIDE 'DEVELOPMENT' POLICY FOR CHILDREN?

By JANICE S. ELLIS Special to The Star



Ellis

How well this community prepares its children will define the quality of life in the Kansas City area and the entire region.

The final installment of the Citistates Report in Sunday's *Star* posed the question of whether children's initiatives during the last decade will make a real difference in the region's lifestyle in the 21st century.

While many would readily answer, "Of course, they will," the immediate follow-up response

should be, "But, those initiatives are not nearly enough."

We have a long way to go in addressing the needs of our children and youth. This is particularly true for many of our most vulnerable children.

The 2001 *Report Card & Data Briefing Book*, published by the Partnership for Children and released last November, compiles local, state, regional and national data to evaluate the status of children and youth in the Kansas City area. As president of the partnership, I think that the areas in need of our attention are clear.

The first critical area is education. One could argue that we have failed generations of children in our urban core on both sides of the state line when only 62 percent of kids in Jackson County graduate from high school and just 46 percent graduate in Wyandotte County. This has been a consistent trend since 1996. These graduation rates are significantly lower than the average for both states as well as the nation.

While other counties in the region have higher high-school graduation rates — Clay and Platte counties both have an 85 percent graduation rate and Johnson County, 91 percent. However, the quality of education regionally will continue to be undermined until we make educational improvements in the urban core.

A second area is substance abuse. There was a slight decline in the use of alcohol, marijuana and cocaine among our youth. However, substance abuse in the metropolitan area exceeds the national rate in *all* categories. This is

especially true of eighth-graders. The rate of alcohol use for this age group is 30 percent compared with 22 percent at the national level.

Substance abuse rates are slightly higher in Kansas than in Missouri. For 12th-graders, it's alcohol, marijuana and cocaine abuse. For eighth-graders, it's alcohol and cocaine abuse.

Violent crime is also cause for concern. The violent crime rate in the Kansas City area is still significantly above the national average, and the youth homicide rate in Kansas City is higher than the combined rates for Missouri and Kansas.

How will we ever truly compete with other great cities, let alone regions, if the future for our children has been shortchanged by poor education and substance abuse?

We are presented with elaborate economic development plans to improve the downtown and suburban landscapes. We are often ready and willing to do what it takes to move such plans forward, often involving bistate collaboration and funding. Yet, we do not have for our children a development policy at the city, county or state levels of government.

Currently, there is legislation in Congress, the Younger Americans Act, that would create a national policy for youth development. Bills in both the House and Senate declare that young people must be assured access to the programs and resources they need to become well-adjusted adults and effective citizens. They also call upon communities to provide mentoring and recreational programs as well as after-school enrichment and development programs.

If communities would commit to providing such programs and services, they would become eligible for funding under the proposed Younger Americans Act.

Meanwhile, where is the local plan to ensure that our young people have programs and activities to enrich their development and help make them effective citizens?

We need to be providing positive alternatives to cigarettes, drugs, alcohol and other destructive behaviors.

If we fail our children, our greatness as a city will escape us, no matter how many great structures we build or how much green space we preserve.

To reach Janice S. Ellis, send e-mail to jsellis@kc.rr.com.

A GOOD EDUCATION FOR EVERY CHILD

By BOB HOLDEN Special to The Star



Holden

I read with interest your open letter to me printed in the Jan. 6 *Kansas City Star* in the Citistates Report series and find we are in agreement on almost every idea you presented. In fact, I have already taken action on many of them.

As you may know, I recently presented my accountability plan for improving education in Missouri.

Kansas City Mayor Kay Barnes was one of the first to receive my proposal because the Kansas City School District would be designated as a priority district — a district that needs the state's help.

Barnes and I have already agreed to work cooperatively on using the power and resources of our respective offices to help improve education for Kansas City children.

Also included in my accountability plan is a requirement for school accountability councils composed of parents, teachers, staff and, yes, community leaders. These councils will not be successful unless — or until — the community leaders step forward and play a role in improving local schools.

If you had been at the December meeting of my Cabinet, you would have heard me say to each department director, "I want you to tell me how you plan to help improve your

services in the areas where we have priority schools and school districts."

I know that children who are mentally and physically healthy are better learners.

Parents who are employed will know the value of supporting their child's schools. Economically, strong communities will have the tax base to support their school district.

I publicly want to thank the foundations that are helping our schools. You may not know that the Kauffman Foundation funds the Kansas City Teaching Academy, which is recruiting individuals interested in making midcareer changes and training them to be teachers in our urban schools.

At the same time, Northwest Missouri State University, the Kansas City School District, local colleges and universities and foundations have joined hands to develop an internship program. Their goal is to recruit well-trained, highly motivated young people to teach in our urban schools.

I have said repeatedly when discussing the Kansas City School District that I have only one constituency — the children. My accountability plan gives local schools, school districts, parents and communities the tools and technical assistance they need to provide every child with a quality education.

Sincerely,

Bob Holden, governor of Missouri

MORE CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT NEEDED

By JANICE C. KREAMER Special to The Star



Kreamer

I hear it all the time from many diverse community partners — we want to be a world-class metropolitan area. But how do we get there?

We believe that the Citistates Report is a solid first step. It challenges the community to think differently and create a new kind of conversation for Greater Kansas City, one that is highly inclusive and provides a set of key issues that will determine the future of our area.

The sponsors of this report will be reading the final version along with *Star* readers each Sunday in January. With you, we may not agree with the authors.

However, true success for this process will be more citizen involvement and a dialogue between institutional leadership and grass-roots leadership. Maximum social effect occurs when the citizens, government, educational sector and private sector (philanthropy and corporations) work in unison to address critical issues.

Incredible things happen in our community when citizens are engaged and working together with civic leadership. Think about the positive outcomes on issues such as childhood immunizations and the beautiful restoration of Union Station.

While there is no magic formula to move our community

forward, there are several building blocks identified by the Citistates Report — building blocks dependent on a combination of public will and civic leadership — that will vastly improve our standard of living.

We have an opportunity to invest in the MetroGreen, and literally link our metropolitan area together with a series of trails and bike paths. We must expand the children's agenda to provide our children with quality early education to ensure that each child is ready to start school. And we must continue to improve educational opportunities from kindergarten through college in the area.

That means universities and colleges must speed up their attempts to meet the demands of the new economy. As the Citistates Report says, higher education is "... the weak link in the Kansas City area's competitive chain."

Citizens and civic leaders working and talking together, bringing their combined energy and passion to the issues we face, can build on our opportunities and meet our challenges.

I can hear the critics wailing — "all we do in Kansas City is talk" — and they may have a point. However, an open dialogue process, on these issues and those that will be raised in the weeks to come, is only the first step.

We must quickly create a common vision for a world-class metropolitan area, and then we can move forward, together, to make it a reality.

Janice C. Kreamer is president and CEO of the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation.



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