

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021



mission *Kansas*



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the decades

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STAYING CONNECTED

Does anyone else feel like they “blinked” and summer was gone? After giving up so many of our favorite summer pastimes last year, it was great to bring back the outdoor pool, summer camp, music at the Mission Market, and a whole host of other activities to keep us engaged and interacting with friends and family.

In the City’s newsletter you’ll find information on the results of the 2021 Citizen Satisfaction Survey completed in July. The survey confirms what I often hear when talking with people – the overwhelming majority of Mission residents (92%) are satisfied with the overall quality of life in our community. I encourage you to take a minute to read more about the 2021 survey results and explore the full report on the City’s website.

That “overwhelmingly satisfied” rating also seems to ring true for the customers and patrons of Village Inn. Celebrating 50 years in Mission this September, Bob and Melanie McDaniel and their staff have seen a lot of changes through the years. But several things haven’t changed, including their commitment to customer service, the quality of food and the loyalty of their patrons. Stop in to help them celebrate the memorable milestone and stick around for their sought-after pies and other favorites, like the chicken fried steak platter.

This issue also features local author Mark Scheel. A 33-year Mission resident, Mark’s life motto is “live it, then write it!” He writes not only to entertain, but also to encourage people to see things in a different



light. That seems a fitting message as we continue to navigate the ups and downs of adjusting to the new reality in this pandemic environment. This summer, Mark learned that his long-held dream of publishing his historical fiction novel would be coming true with its publication in the United Kingdom. A reminder to never give up on your dreams.

Turning dreams into reality is a specialty for Kansas City’s first destination management company, headquartered in Mission. The team at Agenda: USA has built a strong reputation for quality service (and fun) as they serve both corporate and personal transportation needs for clients throughout the metropolitan area, and for those bringing large events into town. Mission’s central location and easy access to the highway network make it a great fit for the Agenda: USA team.

And finally, our last feature article shares the story of Tyler’s House KC, a safe after-school space for high school students to fit in and find connections. A long-standing dream of two local volunteers, Tyler’s House KC now has a home in downtown Mission. A space that seeks to give high school students a sense of belonging and encourage creativity. Working in partnership with a student advisory board, these dedicated volunteers are working to equip students for future success.

I hope you enjoy the local faces and stories highlighted in this issue. It is always a pleasure to feature the talents, passions and dedication of our Mission residents and businesses. It reminds us of the good in this world, and the importance of staying connected.

-Ron Appletoft, Mayor



On the cover:

Bob and Melanie McDaniel, owners of Village Inn in Mission.

Photo by Denise Elam.

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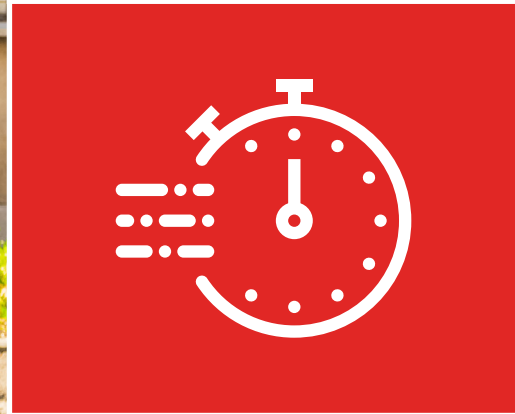
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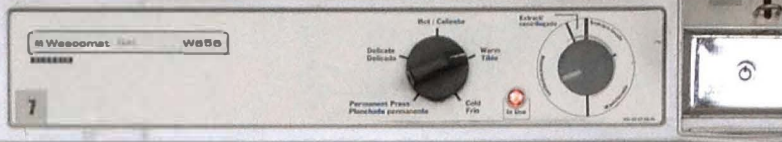
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YEARS
SERVING
MISSION

By Denise Elam

Village Inn through the decades

The 1970s was the era of disco and bell-bottoms, perms and mullets. It was the age of Elton John, Marvin Gaye and lava lamps. A gallon of gas cost only 36 cents and milk was a cheap \$1.15 per carton. But most impressive of all for the community of Mission, Kansas, the early 1970s marked the start of Village Inn's reign on comfort food. This September, the landmark restaurant will celebrate its 50th year of operation in Mission.

The Wonder Years

Owners Bob and Melanie McDaniel have owned and operated the spot at 5800 Broadmoor Street since purchasing the location from another franchisee in 1996. Melanie can still remember when the dress code was a bit more formal. Bob said back when the first Village Inn location opened in Denver in the 1950s, managers were dressed in coat and tie.

"When I first came up here (to Mission), I was wearing dresses and heels and pantyhose. Not anymore," Melanie said, laughing. "My feet are really happy about that change."

Perhaps the most noticeable change the restaurant has seen throughout the years is a shift in the lifestyles and demographics of its customers, Melanie said.

"We used to open at 6 a.m. I don't think we'll ever go back," she said, noting that the restaurant now opens its doors at 7 a.m.

In years prior, many customers would come early to smoke and drink coffee before beginning their own shifts at work. Nowadays, Melanie says only one or two people would stop in to sip coffee prior to 7 a.m.

"We used to be open until 3 a.m. on the weekends and until midnight



Sunday through Thursday," Bob said. "Gradually (we changed) just because of demographics and the way people eat and drink — back in the 60s, 70s and 80s, more people went out for happy hour — that really doesn't exist anymore."

Bob said people used to go out dancing and stop in at 2 a.m. for a late-night snack — what he referred to as a "bar rush." Slowly, as the culture shifted away from late-night dining, so did Village Inn's hours.

The indoor smoking ban brought on by the Kansas Indoor Clean Air Act further changed the customer base. Back in the day, Village Inn, like most other restaurants, allowed smoking inside. Melanie can recall the extra work cleaning and removing ash trays from the tables.

"I've always said smokers have rights, but man, I'm so happy we are non-smoking in the restaurant now," Bob said. "You'd go

home after working a shift and you reeked. You never wore a pair of slacks twice."

Back in those days, smoking was universal. It wasn't uncommon to see people lighting a cigarette on airline flights or puffing away on a cigarette while enjoying a meal. Village Inn in Mission did away with smoking in 2008. Melanie said the change was controversial but eventually accepted.

"It was a big deal," she said. "Prior to that, we had started doing nonsmoking on the weekends."

Codes and regulations inside the restaurant industry have changed tremendously throughout the years as well, with changes to the way food is prepared, kitchen certification requirements and more. Bob recalls a time when serving eggs sunny side up was almost a health code violation.

"The Health Department inspector came in about 12-14 years ago ... and said, 'You're going to have to start cooking your eggs more; you can't serve over-easy eggs,'" Bob recalled. "I go, 'That ain't going to happen. If you try to implement this in Johnson County, there's going to be lawsuits.'"

Bob can laugh at the memory now, but at the time he was thinking on behalf of his customers who prefer their eggs on the runny side. In fact, Bob and Melanie have always put the needs of their customers first. The prime example of that being the aftermath of an ice storm in the early 2000s that wiped out power to much of the city.

"In the Kansas City area, I think there were 200,000 homes and businesses that were without power," Bob said. "I totally came to work expecting that we'd have no power ... and we were the only place that had power."



“The City of Mission and the community of Mission have been nothing but supportive of us.”

Melanie McDaniel, Village Inn

Pecan pie is a top seller during the fall.
Photos by Denise Elam.

Country friend steak with white gravy, served with a side of hash-browns, eggs and pancakes.



Continued from page 6

Bob said more than 60 KCPL (now Every) trucks from all over the area were parked outside Village Inn, waiting for the restaurant to open for the day. Each truck was packed with three to four people inside.

"It was amazing ... you couldn't fit another truck in a lot. They were even parked across the street," he said. "Our staff worked around the clock."

People flocked to Village Inn that day and set up fort, trying to stay warm.

"We had people shaving in our bathroom," Bob said. "They were bringing their own towels and soap to wash up."

Melanie said a lot of her staff didn't have power at their own homes but they came in to work anyway.

"They didn't call in; they were all here," she said.

'One Big Happy Family'

John Lopez has been working with Village Inn for 41 years, but transferred to the Mission location from Anchorage, Alaska around 21 years ago. With a career that long, he has worked in a variety of capacities for the restaurant throughout the years, but his role as server is his favorite.

"You get to meet a lot of people," he said, noting that every manager he's worked under has been a great boss.

Fellow server Amanda "Mandy" Jacobs echoed John's sentiments. She's worked alongside Bob and Melanie for the past 10 years off and on. Something always brings her back to the restaurant.

"The people are my favorite part," she said. "A lot of customers we have are regulars; the more you get to talk to them, the more you find out which ones you can be funny with."

Mandy said she knows most of her regulars by name.

"I try to," she said.



Derek Pfeiffer, dining room supervisor, is one of several Village Inn employees who have worked there for more than two decades.

The opposite is true for Derek Pfeiffer — most of his regulars know him by name. An employee for 21 years, Derek serves as the dining room supervisor but pitches in elsewhere as needed.

"Everyone knows Derek," Melanie said. "He can't walk into Hy-Vee anymore (without being recognized). He's like a superstar. When he does go on vacation, people say, 'Where's Derek?' Like I've done something with him."

Derek describes Village Inn as "one big happy family."

"The customers are like family. My employees are family here too; everybody has everyone's back."

Just Getting Started

As Bob and Melanie reflect on the years

gone by, they can't wait to see what the future holds. The restaurant went through a complete renovation in August of 2021, with new carpet and a new roof, and the addition of LED lights to the Village Inn sign out front.

After 50 years, some things never change — like the supportive customer base, and the absence of WIFI at the restaurant.

"We're still not going to put the TVs in," Melanie said. "We don't have WIFI. There's a sign I want to put up that says, 'We don't have WIFI. Talk to each other.' We have a lot of grandparents who come in with their grandkids, and it's a time for them to connect."

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic hurting their numbers in 2020 (they described it as the most challenging time during their 50 years in business), Bob and Melanie are hopeful for the return of their customers and another busy holiday season selling their sought-after chocolate peanut butter and pecan pies.

Other favorites, like the ultimate skillet or the chicken fried steak smothered in country sausage gravy, served with red-skin mashed potatoes and gravy and a buttermilk biscuit, aren't going anywhere.

"The City of Mission and the community of Mission have been nothing but supportive of us," Melanie said. "We can't be more grateful. If it wasn't for them, we wouldn't have stayed in business. Like Bob said, we have customers who come in every day or a couple of times a week — even twice a day. We're just very grateful."

To accommodate a nationwide staffing shortage, Village Inn's hours are currently 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Monday and Tuesday, with longer hours, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday. For more information, visit villageinnmission.com



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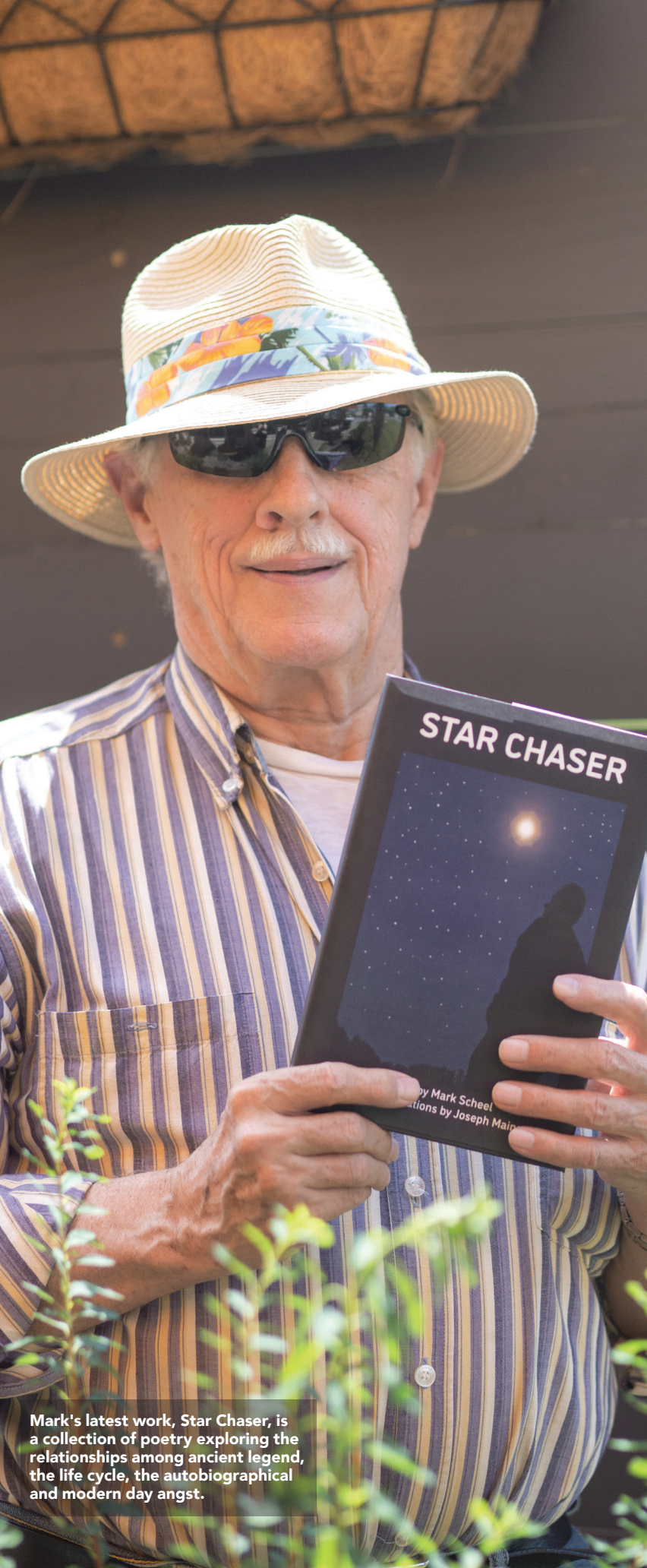
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Mark's latest work, *Star Chaser*, is a collection of poetry exploring the relationships among ancient legend, the life cycle, the autobiographical and modern day angst.

LIVE IT, THEN WRITE IT

MISSION AUTHOR MARK SCHEEL ON A LIFETIME OF WRITING

Story and photos by Denise Elam

Mark Scheel has been thinking a lot about what he wants his tombstone to look like.

The published author, poet, blogger and most recently, novelist, said he's at an age where pondering an epitaph is considered normal. He wants his to share his life motto: live it, then write it.

"I write from experience," he said. "My credo is: Writing of yesterday for the reader of tomorrow because life today makes no sense."

And boy, does Mark have a lot of life experience to write about. Born in 1943 and raised on a farm just north of Emporia, he grew up in a household that appreciated a good book. His mother, a former schoolteacher, was a "bibliomaniac" who read to him often.

"Books were an absolute part of my life," he said. "Books were as natural to me as a young child as the cows in the pasture and pigs in a pen."

Like fellow author Ernest Hemingway's World War One experience, Mark spent a chunk of time from 1968-1973 serving with the American National Red Cross in Vietnam, Thailand, Germany and England.

"I was a great admirer of Hemingway," he said. "Of course, his service in the Red Cross was an ambulance service while I was doing communication for the troops."

In a time before cell phones, Mark acted as the link between troops in the field and their families back home by sending messages using wire communications — sometimes even under fire.

"That was a good foundation for being able to sit down with a typewriter and compose case file narratives quickly; you have to get it down in detail," he said.

Although possessing a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Kansas University, upon returning to the United States Mark took a second major in English at Emporia State University (ESU) and later enrolled in graduate studies there.

In an independent study graduate course, Mark wrote the first draft of his debut novel, *The Potter's Wheel* — a book depicting Hollywood in the 1960s. When told he couldn't use the novel as his master's thesis, he ended his graduate studies and looked to start his career as a published author.

By 1980, he had come close to publishing *The Potter's*

Wheel several times — but ultimately that never happened. Dejected but against the idea of giving up, Mark focused his efforts on refining his skills and gaining more experience. He came to Kansas City looking for work and spent many years at the Johnson County Library as an information specialist, his dream job.

Mark's been a Mission resident for the past 33 years. The centrally-located city has been a godsend in his writing career.

"It was very handy for me in pursuing my writing," he said, noting that literary events and groups are just a short distance away. "It's a good location for making writing

connections."

Mark's works soon began appearing in Kansas Quarterly, The Midwest Quarterly, Cincinnati Poetry Review and The Kansas City Star. His first published book of stories and poems, *A Backward View*, won the J. Donald Coffin Memorial Book Award from the Kansas Authors Club in 1998.

In 2015, Mark published *The Pebble: Life, Love, Politics and Geezer Wisdom*, a collection of his own 60 blog posts on poetry, short stories, current-event commentary and more. His debut work of fiction, *And Eve Said Yes: Seven Stories and a Novella*, was published in 2019

by Waldorf Publishing. In 2020, Mark published a collection of poetry titled "Star Chaser" and dedicated it to a former editor of the Kansas City Star who frequently declined Mark's poems for publication.

"Nothing I sent in seemed to suit, even though several of my efforts were accepted for publication elsewhere," Mark wrote in the author's note of *Star Chaser*. By the time one of his poems was published in the Star, Mark had amassed nearly enough poems to constitute an entire book.

"It therefore only seems fitting that this collection of poetry be gratefully dedicated to the late John Mark Eberhart," Mark continued. "And to his protracted and unrelenting series of rejections without which many of the poems in this collection might never have been written."

In July 2021, Mark received his biggest break yet — a word from his agent that his long-beloved work, *The Potter's Wheel*, had been accepted for publication in the United Kingdom. The publication date is to be announced. Set in the late 1960s, the book is considered historical fiction.

"*The Potter's Wheel* is a street scene of Hollywood in 1967, with war protests and hippies," he said. "I was in Hollywood in 1967 myself, so I witnessed a lot of this stuff and experienced a little bit of it."

Since retiring from the library, Mark writes full time and has served as a volunteer on the editorial staff of Kansas City Voices magazine. He plans to continue writing what he considers "literary writing" — that which gives insight about life, people and the world to make readers think and see something in a different light.

"I want to entertain, but I also want to inform and make people see something differently than they might have (previously) about life and reality," he said.

Having no children of his own, Mark considers his works precious to him like children.

"When you create something, it's like raising a child," he said. "You try to input values, love, attention and understanding to bring something to maturity. Then, once it reaches maturity, you have to let it go. So when you publish something, you let it go. You have no control over it after that. People will read it and they may like it, hate it, criticize it or praise it. But it's out there. And if you've done a good enough job the way you raised it, you hope that after you're gone it will still be out there with a life of its own, just like a child."

For more information about Mark and his books, visit his Amazon author page at https://www.amazon.com/Mark-Scheel/e/B00EY1BPXM%3Fref=dbs_a_mng_rwt_scns_share.



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First Wednesday every month, 6:30 p.m.
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CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

Third Wednesday every month, 7 p.m.

COUNCIL WORK SESSIONS

Fourth Wednesday every month, 7 p.m.

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In September, Mission voters will have the opportunity to consider renewal of the existing dedicated street sales which helps to fund essential street maintenance and infrastructure projects city wide.

PAVING THE WAY

Street maintenance remains a high priority for Mission residents. In the 2021 citizen satisfaction survey, 89% of residents expressed support for increased City investment in the maintenance of neighborhood streets, and 79% indicated support for increased investment in Mission's major thoroughfares.

The sales tax, approved by voters in 2011, will expire in March 2022. This summer, the City Council voted to place the renewal question on a special mail-ballot election to be held in September.

For more information on the sales tax renewal, the projects completed over the last 10 years, and projects proposed for the next 10 years, and information on how to vote, please visit the City's website at www.missionks.org/pavingtheway or contact Emily Randel at 913.676.8368.

Fall Yard Waste Tips

As the leaves begin to fall you may be wondering what to do with your yard waste. Mission residents have several options for Fall yard clean up, such as mulching the leaves, composting the leaves, or disposing of them through the weekly trash pickup.



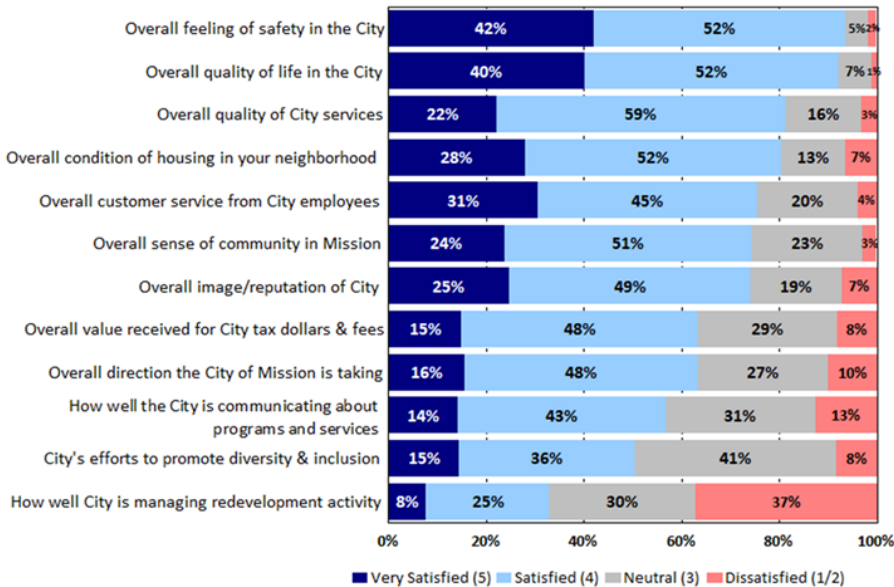
If you decide to bag your leaves, please ensure the yard waste is in biodegradable paper bags or in containers clearly marked "Yard Waste." Plastic bags will not be accepted for yard waste and set outs should not weigh more than 40 pounds. Each household is allowed 10 bags or bundles of yard waste set outs per week.

If you choose to compost your leaves, make sure to regularly turn the compost pile to prevent it from becoming a nuisance to neighboring properties. While leaves blowing from one property to another is not a violation of City Code, please consider doing your part to keep our neighborhoods looking clean and tidy!

2021 Citizen Satisfaction

Q1. Overall Perception of the City of Mission

by percentage of respondents who rated the item as a 1 to 5 on a 5-point scale (excluding "don't know")



Since 2007, the City has conducted a citizen satisfaction survey every few years in partnership with the ETC Institute. ETC's DirectionFinder tool is a comprehensive, public opinion survey instrument developed to meet the unique information and budget needs of local governments. The 2021 Survey results were recently presented to the Council and they are definitely worth sharing!

Overall satisfaction with perceptions of the City that had the highest levels of satisfaction, were an overall feeling of safety in the City (94%), overall quality of life in the City (92%), and overall quality of services provided by the City of Mission (81%).

Other Findings:

Satisfaction ratings for the City of Mission **rated the same as or above the U.S. average in 30 of the 40 areas** that were assessed. The City of Mission rated significantly higher than the U.S. average (difference of 5% or more) in 26 of these areas. Specific highlights included high satisfaction with:

- ◊ Overall quality of police protection (89%)
- ◊ Quality of the Powell Center (78%)

- ◊ Snow removal on City streets (86%)
- ◊ Overall cleanliness of City streets/public areas (80%)



Survey Results Are In!

TOP COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

- Condition of neighborhood streets
- Condition of curbs, gutters and sidewalks
- Condition of major thoroughfares
- Police Department efforts to create cooperative relationships with the community
- Fairness and impartiality of police when enforcing the law
- Condition of park amenities
- Availability of walking/biking trails

The DirectionFinder survey helps City leaders:

- Monitor performance consistently over time
- Objectively measure and evaluate the impact of specific programs
- Prioritize resources
- Save dollars

Residents identified several top priorities which should receive attention over the next 2-3 years, and it was no surprise that street maintenance ranked at the top of the list!

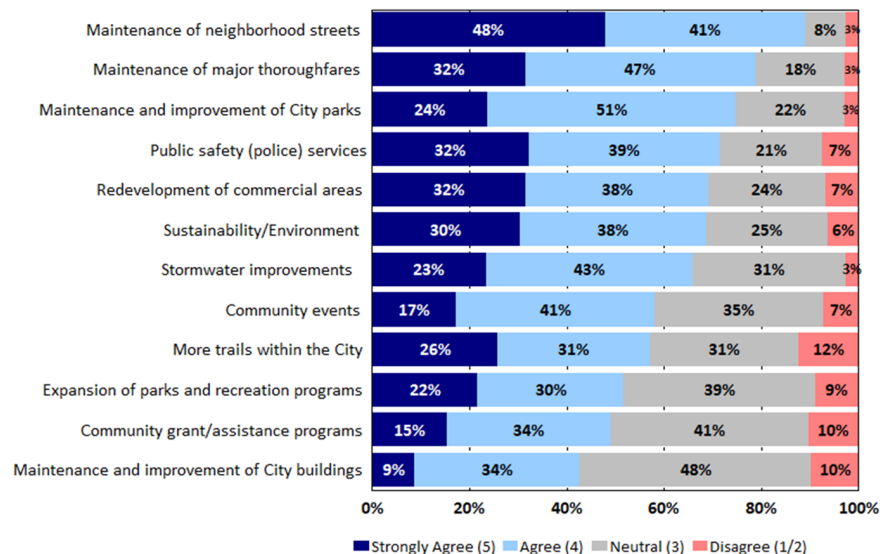
The Council and staff will use this information to allocate resources toward those priorities important to Mission residents.

For complete 2021 DirectionFinder results, please visit the City's website at www.missionks.org and search "surveys."



Q19. Agreement with Statements of Support for Increased City Investment in Current and Future Unmet Needs

by percentage of respondents who rated the item as a 1 to 5 on a 5-point scale (excluding "don't know")





Celebration Tree Challenge

Remember that “70 Trees in our 70th Anniversary Year” challenge we put out there this spring? We’re making great progress having planted more than 25 new trees in and around Mission since we asked you to join us in helping protect and improve our urban canopy. But we aren’t there yet, and there’s still time for you to help us reach that goal!

Have you planted a tree and not reported it? Would you like to plant a tree in a park or other public space, or maybe even in your own yard? Is there a special person or event you would like to honor with a celebration tree? Please contact Parks + Recreation Director Penn Almoney (913.722.8210 or palmoney@missionks.org) to learn more about our Mission Tree Challenge and take advantage of the fall planting season. Let’s see if we can’t get those 70 trees!

Neighbors Impressed with “Taps Across America” Performance

This past Memorial Day, residents of the Cheshire Court cul-de-sac were treated to a special Memorial Day event by one of their own neighbors. Bob Abbott participated in a national “Taps Across America” event, observing a moment of silence at 3 p.m. CDT followed by playing Taps on his oboe.

According to Abbott, in 2000 Congress put into law what it had earlier proclaimed as a call to “Honor. Reflect. Remember.” on each Memorial Day. At 3 p.m. local time, Americans are asked to pause for a minute of silence which then may be followed by the playing of Taps. The 24-note bugle call of Taps has been used since the time of the Civil War. While its playing initially marked end of day, it is now also played to honor end of life. Marking the 150 year anniversary of its use by our military, in 2012 Congress designated Taps as the country’s National Song of Remembrance.

Thousands of instrumentalists across the country joined in Taps Across America 2021 on Monday, May, 31. Representing many ages and skill levels. They participated with the varieties of their individual instruments. In registering for this year’s event, Bob was asked why he chose to participate. He said, “I am an American. I am a veteran. I am no hero. I did what I was asked to do when I was drafted. My wife Ruth is the hero, for she was left with our month-old baby when I was shipped off to Vietnam. She had to cope with living on her own and surviving alone on a private’s pay. Ruth experienced the hardship.”

Bob doesn’t play the bugle, cornet or trumpet; oboe is his instrument. In concert band, a muted trumpet is scored to play as substitute in absence of an oboe. We think Bob’s neighbors didn’t mind one bit as they participated in a minute of silence, and enjoyed Bob playing Taps on his oboe.



Chief Dan Madden and Mission Police Officers enjoy celebrated with Bob and Ruth Abbott this past Memorial Day.



Every October, as a part of the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) Fire Prevention Week™, Consolidated Fire District No. 2 (CFD2) visits local schools to discuss fire safety with kindergarten, first and second grade students.

This year, Fire Prevention Week™ will be October 3-9 and the theme for 2021 will be "Learn the Sounds of Fire Safety."

Key messages include:

- When a smoke alarm or carbon monoxide (CO) alarm sounds, respond immediately by exiting the home as quickly as possible.
- If your alarm begins to chirp, it may mean that the batteries are running low and need to be replaced. If the alarm continues to chirp after the batteries are replaced, or the alarm is more than 10 years old, it should be replaced.
- Test all smoke and CO alarms monthly. Press the test button to make sure the alarm is working.
- If there is someone in your household who is deaf or hard of hearing, install bed shaker and strobe light alarms that will alert that person to fire.
- Know the difference between the sound of a smoke alarm and a carbon monoxide alarm – three beeps for smoke alarms, four beeps for carbon monoxide alarms.

If you have questions regarding Fire Prevention Week™ or fire safety in general, please contact CFD2 Fire Marshal Todd Kerkhoff at 913.207.0122.



It's never too early to think about supporting Mission's Family Adoption program this holiday season! Working in partnership with our local schools, the City provides special holiday food baskets and gifts for local families. If you are interested in learning more about the program, volunteering your time, adopting a family or making a donation, please contact Kathy Lockard at 913.722.8206 or klockard@missionks.org

Mission Housing Assistance Program



In an effort to provide temporary relief for residents who may have experienced financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mission City Council has created a one-time rental and mortgage assistance program for eligible Mission residents.

For eligibility guidelines and more on getting started, visit the City's website at www.missionks.org or contact Laura Smith at 913.676.8352 or lsmith@missionks.org.

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Thanks for a Record-Breaking Season!

The seventh season of the Mission Market has officially come to an end and was one for the record books! With more vendors and great attendance (and a lot of creativity from our market coordinators), the 2021 season has been our best yet! Can't wait to see you @missionksmarket next year!

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Have You Noticed?

Have the new Mission park monument signs caught your attention? These new signs give a clear sense of place and welcome residents and visitors to enjoy time in one of Mission's eight outdoor parks. For more information about the parks and amenities, please visit www.missionks.org/park-recreation.



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Happy Birthday Betty!

Mayor Ron Appletoft recently surprised Mission resident and business owner Betty Benson with a special proclamation in honor of her 100th birthday. Betty's friends and family had the opportunity to celebrate with her last month. She's a true Mission treasure!



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PUTTING THE FUN BACK IN PLANNING

KANSAS CITY'S FIRST DESTINATION MANAGEMENT COMPANY HEADQUARTERED IN MISSION

by Denise Elam

Many years ago, while traversing the Great Wall of China and leading a team of explorers through the stone carvings in Petra, Jordan, Alton Hagen was paying close attention to the ins and outs of the destination management business.

A tour manager at the time, Alton guided people through top destinations around the world. The companies he worked for had close connections to operators in charge of hotel arrangements, scheduling sightseeing tours and making luxury dinner reservations for travelers.

"I learned from these operators what they were doing, both good and bad," he said.

In 1989, as Alton made his home in Kansas City, he put his knowledge of the industry to use by creating Agenda: USA, Kansas City's first and only accredited destination management company (DMC). He moved its headquarters to Mission in 2004.

"I thought there was an opportunity for a company like that (here)," he said. "Not so much for tourists, but for corporations and associations that were having their meetings and conventions in Kansas City."

Mission's close proximity to downtown

Kansas City greatly benefitted Alton's growing business.

"It's a great location for our business because from a client standpoint, we can be downtown to a client's office in 10 minutes," he said. "It was perfect."

Agenda: USA began as a group transportation company but quickly grew into a full-service DMC, specializing

"We are the local experts; we know Kansas City in and out. We have vendors and relationships in the city, so when a group comes here to put on an event for attendees or host a celebration, they call us."

-Kelley Douglass, Director of Client Services

in serving as a strategic partner while providing local expertise and creative resources to ensure successful experiences in event management, tours and activities, transportation, entertainment and program logistics. The company has two primary divisions: events and transportation.

"Primarily, we're an outsource for organizations that have their meetings and conventions in Kansas City," Alton said. "On their behalf, we will arrange for the opening reception at an offsite venue — which could be Union Station, Liberty Memorial, wherever — and bring in entertainment, décor, caterers and lighting."

Companies that are not hosting an event and instead seek reliable transportation of employees between the hotel and airport, for example, often seek Agenda: USA's set of professional chauffeurs who treat each customer like a person and not a package.

"We have chauffeurs, we don't have drivers," Alton noted. "They'll arrive for an early morning pickup at someone's home and when the passenger opens the front door, they're handed the newspaper that was lying in the driveway," he said, noting that each chauffeur caters to the customers' comfort and convenience.

In 2020, Kelley Douglass joined Alton as Director of Client Services. Her expertise lies within the event production and planning side of the business. She said the company primarily plans large events or large weddings with a starting budget

of \$5,000.

"We are the local experts; we know Kansas City in and out. We have vendors and relationships in the city, so when a group comes here to put on an event for attendees or host a celebration, they call us," she said.

The company also offers special tour packages throughout the year, such as a Royals baseball package or a holiday lights tour.

"Couples can get together and we have a shuttle that will take you straight to the gate at a Royal's game, drop you off and pick you up so you don't have to Uber out or wait in line," Kelley said.

The holiday lights packages are offered close to the winter holiday season, when the Plaza is brightly lit and decorated. Alton said that particular package is always a favorite.

"We have a basic holiday lights package which includes one of our 14-passenger mini coaches for two hours," he said, noting that itineraries are designed with the interests of the customer in mind.

"If they want more than 14 people, we have larger vehicles and if they want a longer time period, we can do that as well," he said.

Kelley said customers are allowed to bring their own beverages onto the



A jazz band performs at the Union Station Speakeasy event planned by Agenda: USA.

coaches during the holiday lights tour.

"It's such a fun evening for a group of friends that want to do a holiday activity but also want to enjoy themselves," she said. "It's just a safe, fun night."

Despite the difficulties of 2020, which saw most of the events in Kansas City cancelled, Alton and Kelley said

their business has continued to boom, especially now that many weddings are being booked and businesses are scheduling meetings again.

"Wedding transportation is a big part of our business and it has really come back full force after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted," she said. "We



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Agenda: USA has an entire transportation fleet for VIP weekends for 10 people, or festivals for 35,000.

had one weekend in April where we did transportation for 26 wedding parties."

Agenda: USA offers wedding packages that include wedding party transportation to the venue, to the hotel, to the rehearsal dinner and to spots around town during photography sessions.

"The transportation division kept us afloat during COVID-19," Kelley said. "It hasn't slowed down that much. On the weekends, we have a wedding emphasis but during the weekdays it's corporate work."

Looking ahead, Alton hopes to continue serving the Kansas City area's events industry while also focusing his time and attention toward volunteerism. His company frequently donates its services for use at charity auctions and Operation Breakthrough.

"I want to continue to provide good

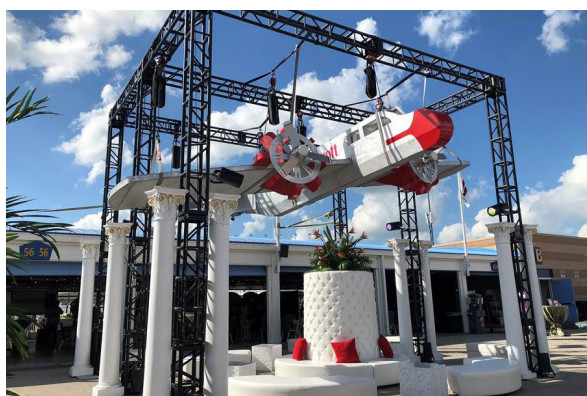
service and raise our standards," he said. "I want to transition away from the company and start giving back to other organizations I volunteer with, like Heart to Heart International. Mercy Ships (an organization providing lifesaving surgeries aboard floating hospital ships) is on my radar."

As Alton looks to focus on humanitarian work, Kelley plans to take on a bigger role with the company and increase its growth.

"I bring a lot of experience to this market and maybe some new ideas," she said. "Things are really starting to come back (after the pandemic), so I'm able to do a

lot of fun events... Event planning is a lot — it's long hours, but it's worth it," Kelley said. "It's my happy place."

For more information, visit agendausa.com.



Corporate event design by Agenda: USA for a Casablanca event at American Royal.



Event lounge design by Agenda: USA for a barbecue event in Kansas City's West Bottoms.



Pictured from left to right: Samantha Morinville, Matthanah Morinville, Oreofe Oni, OreOluwa Oni, Claire Winston, Christine Morinville, Jack Coddington and Hananeel Morinville.

'A safe space to be yourself'



Tyler's House in Mission equips students for the future



Story and photos by Denise Elam

When Cori Hastings retired from a long career as an accompanist for the Shawnee Mission School District, she knew her life's work was just getting started. For several years, she had been daydreaming about opening a warm and inviting space for high school students to experience a sense of belonging and encourage creativity.

"Everybody assumes high schoolers can take care of themselves," Juli said. "While that may be true, there's still a need for connection and help. I don't think we ever outgrow the need for help."

-Juli O'Mealey Simmons, Tyler's House Board member

"Tyler's House has been a dream in the making for me for at least 15 years," Cori said, explaining that her goal was to honor a friend's son, named Tyler, who passed away when he was 10.



Cori Hastings and Juli O'Mealey Simmons of Tyler's House KC.

"It was just a way to honor his life," she said.

Cori's friend, choral director and music educator Juli O'Mealey Simmons, shared in her dream. During their 20-minute lunch breaks together, in the break room at Shawnee Mission North (SMN), Cori

and Juli would discuss the needs of their students. They realized the 9-12th graders were a demographic often missed by outreach programs.

"Everybody assumes high schoolers can take care of themselves," Juli said. "While that may be true, there's still a need for connection and help. I don't think we ever outgrow the need for help."

Little by little, the idea of what Tyler's House KC would provide to the community became clearer and clearer.

"The kids have their struggles and we knew there were ways we could facilitate some answers," Cori said.

Cori and Juli envisioned creating a safe after school space for all students aged 14 and up — a spot they could come to after school to learn, relax, converse, have fun and ultimately, be themselves. Through creative arts programming and resources, their goal was to form trusting relationships to empower youth to navigate their worlds.

Upon their consecutive retirements

from the Shawnee Mission School District in 2019, Cori and Juli began working together to devise a plan of action. Cori kept busy — when she wasn't working on Tyler's House, she continued in her other role as a private music instructor. In November of that same year, they pulled together a group of like-minded individuals and created the Tyler's House KC Board of Directors.

Then COVID-19 hit in 2020, bringing their plans to find a space for Tyler's House to an abrupt halt. Trying to meet the needs of students as best as they could without a physical location, the team at Tyler's House created care packages for SMN students that winter.

"We tried to make it known that we were here if anybody needed anything," Juli said.

At the beginning of 2021, the board got together to discuss moving into a permanent location and fundraising while also exploring potential partnerships with the Johnson County Mental Health Center located in Mission. By mid-March, Tyler's House found a spot on Johnson Drive in downtown Mission to call home.

"Because of the Johnson County Mental Health Center, we're here," Cori said, noting that the center is providing rent for the nonprofit for the next year. Tyler's House plans to cooperate with the center in the future, providing a safe space for students to interact with mental health professionals on an as-needed basis.

The team spent the next three months renovating the space with the help of volunteers, including a group of students from the Tyler's House Student Advisory Team. The team consists of students in the Shawnee Mission School District who advise the board of directors at Tyler's House on issues and needs of the student population.

"It became a community project because we had so many volunteers donating their time and talent," Cori said, explaining that a student at Shawnee Mission North even painted a mural on the wall inside the space.

On June 1, Tyler's House celebrated its soft opening and is planning a larger, grand opening sometime down the road. The space currently houses a black box theater, a piano, a pantry space and a quiet room for studying and group discussions. The space also offers video games, board and card games, art supplies and places to read, converse and participate in weekly activities, like cookie decorating and rock painting.

In the future, Cori and Juli plan to host poetry readings, karaoke nights, informational programming and events to bring the community together and



Students at Tyler's House can participate in a variety of bonding and creative learning experiences.

Pictured from left: Hananeel Morinville, Samantha Morinville, Christine Morinville

spread awareness about different age groups and cultures. Mentors with various backgrounds and skillsets will often be on-site to aid students.

"We've been talking to The Welstone at Mission Crossing about partnering for a fundraising event but we are also in discussion regarding programming," Juli said. "We've noticed kids in high school like to knit or crochet, and it would be a perfect intergenerational activity."

Claire Winston, a soon-to-be senior at SMN, has enjoyed her time as a member of the Tyler's House Student Advisory Team. She looks forward to future programming and seeing the space transform students' lives.

"We'll probably take advantage of the resources at Tyler's House as much as somebody who isn't on the student advisory board," she said. "In my early high school experience, it would have been nice to have a space with people I could just talk to."

OreOluwa Oni, another soon-to-be senior at SMN, said she can't wait to see students benefit from their time at Tyler's House.

"It's definitely something that will

happen," she emphasized. "I can't wait to have events here that are packed. I would like to see a lot of different people make use of this space."

From the beginning, Tyler's House has had one clear goal: to help young people know they are worthy of living bright, healthy futures.

"Our goal is to provide students with tools, both mental health and coping tools, that they can take with them through life," Juli said. "When we equip students, it makes a healthier community ... if we can equip these young people, then we're actually equipping the future."

For more information on how to get involved, visit tylershousekc.org.



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Volunteer firefighters proudly display their new fire truck, fully funded through community support. The department's first fire truck was purchased in 1939 and is currently being restored. All photos courtesy of Mission Then And Now.

RESPONDING TO THE CALL

Remembering Mission's Community-Supported Volunteer Fire Department

by Kate Deacon

It's November of 1954, and the band swings into high gear as dresses swirl around the dance floor at the annual Fireman's Ball, the social gathering of the year in Mission that provided much more than a good time.

Established in 1939, the Mission Hills Acres Volunteer Fire Department was fully funded by members of the community through donations to dances, bake sales, picnics and countless fundraising efforts. Community members had a vested interest in fundraising for top-of-the-line equipment: not only were the properties protected their own, but the firefighters themselves were the fathers, sons, brothers, and friends of those they served.

Volunteers who joined the ranks of the department would be called upon day and night to leave their offices, their kitchen tables, their warm beds, and rush to the firehouse at the ring of the bell.

The old fire station bell was eventually replaced by a loud siren dubbed "Big Bertha" that alerted firefighters to an emergency. No matter their day job, a volunteer firefighter dropped what they were doing and headed to the station. Clerks would leave their counters, the boss might dart off from an important meeting, and everyone understood that their priority was to serve at those times. It could be quite a chaotic scene at the corner of Beverly and Johnson Drive as folks rushed to the fire station from all

corners of Mission to respond to those calls.

The Mission Fire Department was 100% volunteer operated until the 1970s, when the growing needs of the community demanded a fully-paid and staffed station, now Consolidated Fire 2.

The volunteers remained a vital part of the fire department even after the City funded paid positions, as volunteers continued to serve until well after consolidation in 1988. Mission's Murrel F. Bruce Fire Station is named for the beloved Chief Bruce, originally a volunteer who boarded his first truck in 1939 and devoted his life's work to the fire department.

The nonprofit organization Mission



Firefighters draw a crowd and promote the Nov. 19, 1954 benefit dance, their main fundraising event.

Fire Department Incorporated is still owned and operated by the volunteer firefighters, and they continue to keep the Mission spirit alive with annual gatherings and charitable community projects. Most recently, many in the organization are involved in efforts to restore the original 1939 Dodge Fire Truck first used by the Mission Hills Acres Volunteer Fire Department — the ornament on the hood still bears its name. Look for it at a parade near you!

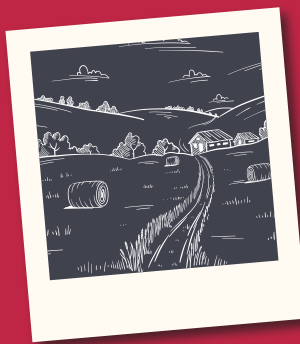


Mission residents enjoy a parade of fire engines on Johnson Drive and Reeds Road, 1953.

2021 marks Mission's 70th Anniversary and we're celebrating with Mission memories all year long.

Have your own to share?
Please fill us in on your own historic highlights!

Email pictures, stories and memories to:
erandel@missionks.org.



Community funded and supported: The town rallies and celebrates purchases

- The 1939 La France Pumper Truck was the first truck purchased through community efforts.
- In 1954, the department raised funds to purchase the Beverly Station, which is still used for social gatherings and volunteer efforts spearheaded by former volunteer firefighters.
- Parades on Johnson Drive and the annual Fireman's Ball were beloved community celebrations honoring the firefighters and celebrating the community's successful support.

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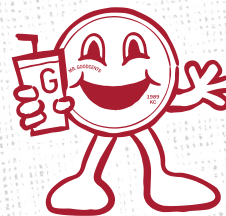
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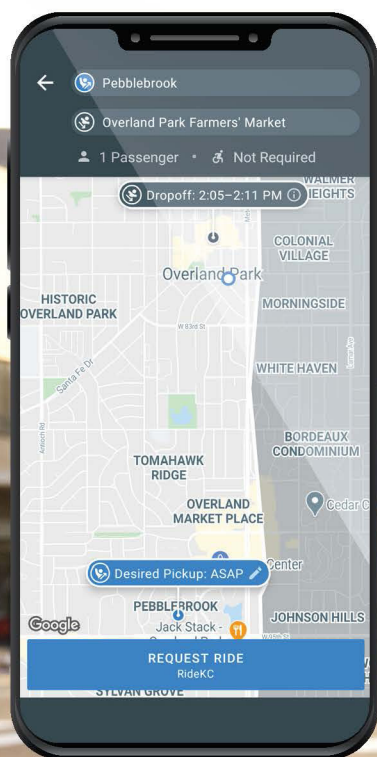
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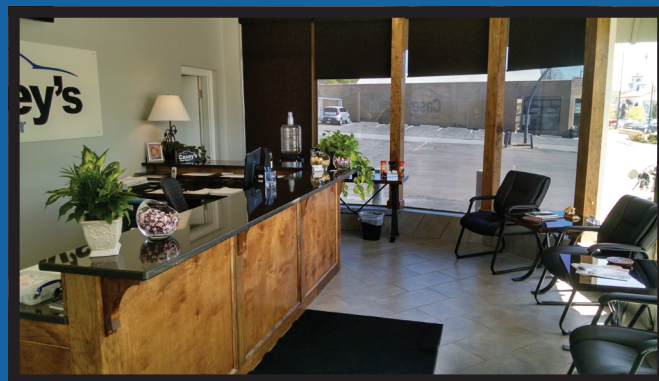
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