

IS NORTH KANSAS CITY “HISTORIC?”

*Editorial by Richard P. Groves, Executive Director
of the North Kansas City Business Council*

We who live or work in North Kansas City

do not typically think of North Kansas City as a historic community. Kansas City and Liberty date back to the early and mid-1800s while North Kansas City didn't emerge until 1912.

North Kansas City was born almost immediately following the opening of the ASB Bridge in 1911, thanks to the North Kansas City Development Company. That corporation was a joint venture of Armour Packing Company, Swift Packing Company and the Burlington Northern Railroad. Unlike today, that private business paid for the construction of the bridge which radically changed the economic potential of the area we now know as North Kansas City. Prior to that bridge the only way for pedestrians and vehicles (and horses) to cross the Missouri River was by ferry boat.

On reflection, though, North Kansas City actually does have quite a few “historic” structures, which I arbitrarily define as being constructed more than 70 years ago (pre-1950).

As you read the examples below, I urge you to consider and marvel at the adaptive uses many of these buildings continue to provide for vital businesses of North Kansas City. Good examples are: RoKC Climbing Gym, iWerx, Screenland Armour Theatre, Olsson, Cable Event Center, Sail Away Wine, Jefferson's and Park Lofts.

Historic Structures in North Kansas City — Built Before 1950:

Two buildings at the intersection of Armour and Swift built by the North Kansas City Development Company

Northeast corner: The Peoples Building, built in 1931. Some of the uses were Firestone Tire, Three Sisters Dress Shop and Kelso's. Now: Jefferson's is the most prominent business on the lower level, but it also houses OmniLife VR and other businesses as well as numerous offices on the 2nd floor.

Southeast corner: The Community Building, built approximately 1941. First use was for Crown Drug. Other uses since then include Russell Stover Candy, Helzberg Diamonds retail store, Northtown Pizza, Carlito's Mexican food, SAS Shoes and Aunt Mary's Cookies. It now houses Express Employment Professionals, Jersey Boyz and the recently-opened Sail Away Wine at street level and various offices upstairs.

Park Lofts at 715 Armour

Completed in 1923 as a nine-story merchandise warehouse for Sears Roebuck, the building features Late Gothic Revival and Chicago school style design elements. It has seen various uses through the years, but the current use is the attractive, modern apartments known as Park Lofts.

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continued from front page

North Kansas City High School’s “Old Main” and Football Stadium

Old Main, at 23rd and Gentry, was dedicated on a cold Sunday afternoon in January 1926. By the next year, 331 students attended high school at Northtown. An addition to the north end of the building was needed to meet the demands of growing enrollment in 1930.

Old Main has been through several facelifts over the years, but none so apparent and so massive as its most recent renovation in 2019.

Construction on the NKC stadium began in 1939. The stadium saw its first football game in October 1941 between the NKC Hornets and the Liberty Blue Jays. The Hornets won 6 – 0.

During WWII, the City of North Kansas City, NKC High School and the NKC School District, raised \$300,000 to build a bomber called “The Hornet” in honor of the school’s mascot. Students sold war bonds and stamps to reach their goal. When the bomber rolled off the assembly line in 1944, it was marked “City of North Kansas City” on its fuselage.

Life Unlimited building at 320 Armour

Originally a bank. Built in early 1930s.

Screenland Armour Theatre building

The Armour Theatre building opened in 1928 as a silent movie house; one of the original movie theatres in all of Kansas City. It operated as the Armour Theatre until 1963. Next to it, in what is now the Screenland Armour Theatre expansion, was the original KC Power and Light Building. For 30 some years it housed Tanan Floral shop before Screenland annexed it.

The theatre was run by the Commonwealth theatre chain as the “Centre” through the 60s and 70s. The Fine Arts Theatres group ran it as the “Paradise” (dollar house) for a few years in the 80s. It was then run from the mid-80s until 2005 as the “Northtown Opry,” a live country music venue.

The City of North Kansas City purchased the property in 2005 with the intention of preserving the building as a movie theatre. After two years of

bids and challenges renovating the theatre and the building, the City approached Butch Rigby, owner of Screenland Theatres and Real Estate, to take on the project. In 2007 he purchased the building with a unique incentive to not only renovate the building and restore the movie theatre, but the deal was structured to preserve the theatre operation for years to come. In 2008, the theatre was reopened as the “Screenland Armour Theatre.” In 2012 BMAR Entertainment took over operations and continues to operate it to this day. Over the past decade it was expanded to have two screens, and then four screens as it operates today.

ASB Bridge

This bridge, west of the Heart of America bridge, built by the North Kansas City Development Company, opened in 1911, creating immense development opportunities for what is now North Kansas City. It features a rare form of architecture called “vertical lift truss bridge” which allowed lifting of the middle section to allow passage of high chimneys of steamboats as well as providing a lower level for trains (still operational) and the upper level for pedestrians, automobiles, buses, streetcars, trucks (and horses).

Helzberg Diamonds HQ building

at 1825 Swift – originally a J.C. Penney store

1501 Howell

This building, built in the 1930s, is now the home of RoKC Climbing Gym. It was originally used for manufacturing during WWII and was known as the American Steel Co. building.

1501 Burlington/1520 Clay

This building was built in 1941 to serve as a distribution center for Kroger grocery stores. For many years it served Stor-Safe Warehouses as an indoor storage facility with dozens of storage units. Now, much of it has been vastly enhanced to serve as the iWerx Entrepreneurial Development Center, co-working space and The Pavilion event center.

Cable Building at 1301 and 1321 Burlington

Jack P. Whitaker founded his automobile battery cable business in 1920 on Grand Avenue in Kansas

City. He moved to 1301 Burlington St. in 1930. He built the wire plant with the lacquer tower at 1321 Burlington St. in 1948. The lacquer tower is the broad “chimney” you can see from any direction and is a prominent feature within The Cable Event Center. Olsson (engineering) and many smaller businesses are also in the building, including the catering kitchen for Above & Beyond Catering, sipVine, INDIGEX and All Dimensions Search Group.

Ingredient

- Previously known as National Starch and Corn Products; first occupied 1001 Bedford in the early 1920s; changed name to Ingredient in 2012

“Paint District” buildings near E 14th Ave. and Knox

- Cook Paint & Varnish Company buildings first occupied in 1923 – now owned and operated by Polynt Composites
- Davis Paint building – first occupied by Davis Paint in 1928; Davis Paint continues to operate at that location – the oldest sustained business with the same name in North Kansas City

Most of the streets of North Kansas City

North Kansas City’s streets were laid out by the North Kansas City Development Company as the

first planned commercial and residential community in the Kansas City area. The plan was in place even before North Kansas City became an incorporated town.

You may have noticed the deliberate, systematic naming of the streets. The north/south streets are generally in alphabetical order (with a few exceptions) from west to east and most of them are names of counties in Missouri. Some exceptions are Swift and Burlington whose names were derived from two of the three businesses that created the North Kansas City Development Company.

The east/west “streets” are actually called “Avenues,” counting northward from 9th Ave to 32nd Ave to distinguish them from similarly-named streets in Kansas City, Missouri, which count southward from the River Market area. An exception is Armour, named for the third company that formed North Kansas City Development Company. Other exceptions are Clark Ferguson Drive, Bedford and Levee Rd.

Others?

Which historic structures did I overlook? Some of our readers may know of other North Kansas City buildings which should be considered historic (pre-1950 construction). I would be interested in any comments you might have about that. Please send to richard@nkcbusinesscouncil.com.

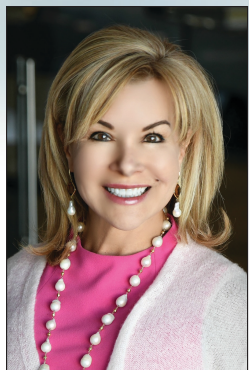
Sail Away Wine Ribbon-Cutting

We are pleased to welcome an exciting new wine bar experience to North Kansas City called Sail Away Wine, at 309 Armour Road. The former bakery space has been spectacularly transformed into a comfortable hangout where guests can embark on a self-guided tour of the world of wine, with 75 different rotating wines available for smaller tastings or full pours. There are carefully curated selections of beer and spirits as well.

Mayor Bryant Delong, several members of the City Council, and members of the North Kansas City Business Council Executive Committee were on hand to cut the ribbon June 9th and welcome Sail Away to the community. They are now open seven days a week and invite you to set sail! For store hours and more information, visit www.SailAwayWine.com

Entrepreneurial Profile

JEANETTE PRENGER, CEO OF ECCO SELECT



*ECCO Select's
Jeanette Prenger*

In recent issues of this newsletter we have focused on two veteran entrepreneurs—Joe Roetheli and John Miller, Sr.—and two younger entrepreneurs—Adam Roberts and Andrew Potter.

This issue focuses on Jeanette Prenger, the woman and minority leader of ECCO Select. ECCO Select is an Information Technology professional services company at 1601 Iron. Jeanette brought

her business to North Kansas City during the summer of 2019. ECCO Select's clients are Fortune 1000 companies and government agencies. In addition to their corporate headquarters in North Kansas City they have offices in St Louis and the Washington, DC area.

Her personal background is unique and one that prepared her to take on the challenges of starting and growing a business. She was born in Portugal and by the time she was five she had lived in Portugal, Spain, Detroit, South Dakota and Pennsylvania. Growing up in New Jersey and then Kansas City, her father was an engineer in the Air Force before he transitioned into Technology to grow his career. She is the oldest of six children and between helping with younger siblings and learning to be the 'new kid', she figured out how to keep the peace and make friends. Having to learn to adapt at an early age, especially with new languages, made her a natural learner. In fact, her father talked her into her degree by equating software language as another language – to the computer.

She claims that you build resiliency and understand what it means to be disappointed when you're uprooted and must figure out new schools and fitting in. These are valuable skills for anyone, but especially as an entrepreneur, where she didn't really know what she was getting into.

Jeanette started her business in 1995 when worldwide computer systems were being adapted or replaced to deal with the expected challenges of the new millennium beginning in the year 2000. Some readers of this article may remember the widespread concern (almost approaching panic) about

what would happen to computer systems that relied on the century date starting "19" when the "current year" became the year 2000. Up to that point many programs that were date sensitive assumed the century would start with "19." In the five or six years leading up to 2000 there was a lot of demand for people that understood emerging technologies and how to modernize legacy systems. Opportunities were ripe for Jeanette because she was not only technical, but she had the skills to hire and manage the type of talent needed by businesses. Before job boards, skills testing and software to match resumes, she had the ability to match people to clients.

Jeanette was the new company's first billable consultant and within a year had 12 contractors. They now average around 500 associates nationwide.

Jeanette has been successful because of her technical background. This was a critical factor in her



ECCO Select is an Information Technology professional services company with headquarters in North Kansas City at 1601 Iron.

early success since other competitors were typically salespeople trying to mimic the tech lingo to broker talent. She proudly claims that their sustainable success can be attributed to maintaining high standards of integrity, honesty and transparency with clients and candidates. She also looks at others she admires to help her be a better leader.

Originally, ECCO Select only worked with commercial clients but eventually started working with public sector agencies and municipalities.

Jeanette said that 9/11 was the most daunting situation for their company. Some of the lessons learned during that crisis helped handle the challenging pandemic year beginning last March. *continued on page five*

Jeanette claims that the most fulfilling part of her career has been watching high performing leaders develop, witnessing strategies morph into aggressive growth, and providing opportunities for associates.

ECCO Select chose North Kansas City because they wanted a location that was easily accessible for their associates and to meet with candidates and clients. 1601 Iron in North Kansas City fits that criteria, and, it had something that was more difficult to find in other areas of town—parking.

Not standing still, Jeanette is an investor in other technology centric companies that use IoT (Internet of Things). One is for energy savings and sustain-

ability, the other is in healthcare equipment. Her family has been an integral part of success within ECCO Select as well as other ventures. She was proud that both of her sons came to her for advice on how to prepare themselves to work at ECCO Select after they finished college. Grooming the next generation has been a balancing act that is now paving the way for her grandchildren. You'll even see the oldest grandson mowing the grass on weekends. Having a strong work ethic is part of the Prenger DNA.

Jeanette's advice to others about being an entrepreneur: Don't get discouraged; don't be afraid to ask for help and follow your passion.

NORTH KANSAS CITY BUSINESS COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS

The three pro-active goals of the North Kansas City Business Council are:
INFORM. CONNECT. SUPPORT.

Here are some of the ways the Business Council Informs

Primary website: www.nkcbusinesscouncil.com

- Contains a continuously updated online Business Directory
- Member-controlled details about their businesses with up to 3 categories
- Simple listing of all other businesses in one category only
- Calendar of events (including registration when required)
- Details about the North Kansas City Business Council
- Details about membership and link to join
- Archived newsletters
- Directory of community resources
- Links to details about destination attractions

**Website promoting destination businesses:
www.ExploreNKC.com**

- Details about places to dine, drink, shop, play and stay
- A map showing the location of each of these businesses

Business Directory and Newsletters

- Printed Business Directory—produced annually with copies mailed to all North Kansas City businesses
- Quarterly printed newsletter – copies sent to all North Kansas City businesses
- Monthly e-newsletters with current news about North Kansas City businesses and North Kansas City Business Council events
- E-newsletters following each City Council meeting, sent to Members Only, a succinct summarization of decisions and discussions of agenda items of interest to businesses

Monthly luncheons

with interesting programs and networking opportunities—registration required; non-members welcome; \$30 vs member rate of \$22

First Friday Coffees

where attendees share information about their businesses and have the opportunity to network—no cost; non-members welcome; registration not required

NORTH KANSAS CITY BUSINESS COUNCIL

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Ingredion.



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NEW MEMBERS

Blue Oak Technology Solutions
1529 Swift

Game of Scones
1599 Iron (Iron District)

Pinnacle Planning
406 Armour, upstairs

Precision Elements
820 Atlantic

PrimeTech International
329 Swift

The Whole Person

TNC Community

Ultimate Services
1441 Burlington

NEW OR COMING-SOON BUSINESSES IN NORTH KANSAS CITY

Callsign Brewing – 1340 Burlington - vastly expanded new location,
late summer opening – until then, continuing at 1447 Gentry

Chef Tito's Mexican Restaurant & Cantina – 1621 Swift – new name
and focus for former American Fusion Café

El Canelo Mexican Restaurant – 1800 Swift - new

Flex Fitness – 1534 Burlington - new

LC's Hamburgers – 1825 Buchanan – new; still has location
in Northmoor/Riverside

NKC Animal Clinic & Daycare – 1415 Burlington - new

Outlaw Cigar – 309 E 10th Ave (September opening) – new;
still has other locations

Rise and Grind Bakery – 504 Armour - new

Sail Away Wine – 309 Armour - new

WERQ Dance-Fitness-Workout – 1534 Burlington - new