



JOC



THE JOHNSON COUNTY GOVERNMENT MAGAZINE

SPRING 2015

FEATURE STORY

**DEFENDERS OF PUBLIC HEALTH:
JOHNSON COUNTY WASTEWATER**

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF LIBRARIES AND PARKS

10 COOL THINGS IN THE COUNTY ARCHIVES



THE JOHNSON COUNTY GOVERNMENT MAGAZINE

JOCO Magazine, a publication produced by Johnson County Government, is mailed to every resident in Johnson County, Kansas, three times per year.

Mission: JOCO Magazine is dedicated to publishing information that informs residents about County services and finances, as well as issues that may impact the quality of life.

Publishing advertising does not constitute agreement or endorsement by this publication or Johnson County Government.

Please send questions or comments about the magazine to jocomag@jocogov.org or call 913-715-0725.

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2015 presents both challenges and opportunities

As we move further into 2015, there are many reasons to be confident about the future of the county in which we live. The number of people choosing to live in Johnson County has been climbing at a steady rate for the past decade—consistently revealing that this is a community where people want to live, work and raise their families. Surveys show that our residents enjoy the services provided by the county, often referencing the quality libraries and parks, public safety services, as well as the excellent education opportunities, K-12 and higher education programs. We are also beneficiaries of our vibrant business and industry economy. At the end of 2014 the county unemployment rate was 3.3 percent, the lowest in Kansas and the Metro Area, and more people in Johnson County were employed than before the Great Recession began.

While our population has grown (60,000 since 2006), increasing demand for County services, we've worked diligently to be good stewards of our residents' tax dollars and public investments by finding ways to be more efficient. For example, to address the budget shortfalls brought on by the recession, Johnson County reduced 428 full time positions, a 12 percent workforce reduction without layoffs, and cut \$46 million from the annual budget to balance the books. Johnson County has held the line on property taxes for our residents, maintaining the lowest property tax rate in the state by 46 percent, lower than Wyandotte, Douglas, Sedgwick and Shawnee counties.

As our local economy continues to show improvement, we need to recognize however, the impact of financial issues that will need to be addressed by our state government as a result of much lower state revenues and the negative impact on the state budget. 2015 begins the phase

out of the mortgage registration fee, a county revenue source, whose phase out was mandated by the state legislature. The full impact of state budget decisions on local units of government remain to be seen. We will continue to look for ways to be more efficient in all operations. For instance, the recent vendor contract with the Kansas City Area Transit Authority to provide management services for Johnson County Transit will provide substantial cost savings in that operation.

Whatever decisions are made by others that have an impact on county government operations, we know that Johnson County will continue to be a Community of Choice and Opportunity as long as we work together and make the right choices for our future. I, and the other County Commissioners, are committed to doing just that.

Ed Eilert
Chairman
Board of County Commissioners



.....
Johnson County Elected Officials

- Ed Eilert, Chairman
- Ronald L. "Ron" Shaffer, District 1
- James P. Allen, District 2
- Steven C. Klika, District 3
- Jason Osterhaus, District 4
- Michael Ashcraft, District 5
- John Toplikar, District 6
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Ways to Engage with JoCo

Online

Visit jocogov.org to:

- Find your County Commissioner
- Get answers to questions
- Learn about the more than 400 services Johnson County provides to residents.

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By Phone

Call Center: 913-715-5000

TDD: 800-766-3777

In Person

Attend a weekly Board of County Commissioners meeting at 9:30 a.m. on Thursdays on the third floor of the Administration Building, 111 S Cherry St., Olathe, Kansas 66061.

By Email

Find department directory at www.jocogov.org/departments

Send questions about this publication to: jocomag@jocogov.org

ON THE COVER: Concrete steps across the waterway at Antioch Park (6501 Antioch Rd, Merriam) glisten in the sunlight of a rare, sunny winter day.

ABOVE: On December 17, 2014, Ed Eilert, chairman of the Johnson County Board of County Commissioners and Robbie Makinen, chairman of the KCATA's board of directors, signed a management consolidation agreement expected to save Johnson County \$455,000. See more information on page 5.

In short

A brief glimpse into what's going on at Johnson County Government



Exciting improvements are underway at Central Resource Library

Early next year, this renovated Johnson County Library branch will offer:

- more study rooms
- a larger MakerSpace
- a new Friends of the Library bookstore
- better access to power for your computers and devices
- upgraded air conditioning and lighting

Due to the construction, Central Resources Library has temporarily limited services to material returns, hold pickups, talking to staff about your account and access to a small browsing collection. The best way to stay up to date on this project and find out where your favorite Library program is located during this renovation project is by visiting jocogov.org/library.

Report indicates positive signs of growth in Johnson County

The Johnson County Appraiser's Office 2015 Revaluation Report reveals positive trends for Johnson County residential and commercial construction and market values of existing property. The County's residential new construction permits started moving up in 2012, took a surge in 2013, and maintained close to that level in 2014. The foreclosure rate has dropped significantly, and the county experienced a residential sales volume increase of 6.18 percent between 2013 and 2014. The appraised value of all real property in Johnson County as of February 2015 was \$59.6 billion — a 7.45 percent increase over 2014.

To read the entire report please visit jocogov.org/appraiser.

The JO now under KCATA management

As of February 1, the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (KCATA) took over management of the Johnson County Transit system. This management consolidation will result in greater efficiencies and cost savings for Johnson County, and doesn't affect The JO's routes, bus stops or fares. To learn more about The JO please visit jocogov.org/thejo.

Need tax help?

April 15 will be here before you know it! If you have a household income of \$53,000 or below, you qualify to have your state and federal income tax returns completed and e-filed for free. Johnson County K-State Research and Extension has partnered with El Centro and NextStepKC to host the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance site. For more information call 913-715-7000.

Crime Victim's Rights Week

The Johnson County District Attorney's office will hold a Crime Victims' Rights Week Art Exhibition on April 2, from 4-6 p.m., in the Johnson County Administration Building (111 South Cherry, Olathe). Come view the art exhibition and become better acquainted with safety tips and crime prevention resources. For more information contact the Victim Assistance Unit of the Johnson County District Attorneys' Office at 913-715-3004.

quotable

"It's finally happened: Johnson County officials on Thursday reached across the state line and agreed to work with a Kansas City-based group to save money and improve public transportation in the metropolitan area. In a world where the Missouri/Kansas line too often divides us, this kind of development deserves positive attention from residents as well as from other civic leaders."

— Published in Yael Abouhalkah's column in *The Kansas City Star* on December 11, 2014

Johnson County employees give back to the community

By NATALIE BLAIR

They don't just serve the public during the workday. Johnson County's 3,800 employees take care of the community when they are off the clock, too. Most employees live here and are passionate about making a positive difference in other's lives. Often, those two interests combine into something powerful.

Employees share their time and talent in three fundraisers each year: Feed the Need, ArtsKC, and United Way. Even the smallest contribution has a huge impact when it's multiplied across the organization.

"Residents see our passion to make Johnson County an extraordinary place through our involvement," said Hannes Zacharias, county manager. "We contribute to being a community that takes care of our people."

Feed the Need

In 1987, the District Attorney's office gathered food to assist those in need in the area. Feed the Need, as it was called, didn't collect much in those early days. Until Rick Beckwith got involved.

Beckwith, then-director of building maintenance, and his staff, would take the donations to a local food pantry. He saw they weren't able to meet client needs and decided to change that.

All County departments now compete for bragging rights and the Beckwith Award, named after the campaign's biggest supporter, who passed away in 2004. Employees donate food, toiletries, and money; departments sponsor events ranging from chili cook-offs to 5K races. An annual Event Day raises funds with food, games, and even a dunk tank.

Larry Sallaz, senior building maintenance mechanic, helped Beckwith deliver those first donations 28 years ago and is still heavily involved.

"It's a great way for me to help my community," he said. "I know what it's like to not have everything you need. The people we help might be a co-worker, a friend, or even a family member who

hasn't said anything because they are ashamed or too proud."

"Feed the Need is one of the most significant food and fundraising efforts for food pantries," said Deborah Collins, director of the Human Services Department and co-chair of the current campaign. "It contributes literally tons of food that we otherwise would not provide."

Feed the Need has collected 4,507,738 pounds of food since 1995. Employees donated 278,364 pounds for the 2013-14 campaign.

"I know what it's like to not have everything you need."

ArtsKC

ArtsKC is a local organization that supports a sustainable, vibrant arts community by encouraging participation in, providing access to, and fostering entrepreneurship in the arts.

"The arts are a critical piece of the fabric of our community and through ArtsKC we have an opportunity to strengthen and enrich this great gift," said Lougene Marsh, Department of Health and Environment director and the campaign's 2015 chairwoman.

Employees participate in many ways, showing a piece in the galleries set up in County buildings, purchasing artwork, or buying calendars featuring the previous year's submissions. The initiative began in 2012; in 2014 employees gave \$12,378.

David Judd, a custodian for the Department of Corrections, created and donated two oil paintings for the silent auction in February.

"This was my first year to participate and I really appreciate ArtsKC," he said. "The program brings us together to celebrate and share each other's visions."

Michael Chamberlin, information systems administrator in Facilities, has been involved in the campaign as an artist and with the planning committee.



Employees check out the artwork of their peers at an ArtsKC reception.

"Not being a native of the Metro area, the diverse cultural offerings here is one of the things that makes it a place I want to stay," he said. "ArtsKC helps keep those programs alive. And it's fun to see the talents of your fellow employees."

United Way of Greater Kansas City

United Way works to identify the needs of the Metro community and organize programs to address them. Employees can direct gifts to their choice of 170 non-profit agencies or support programs such as early childhood initiatives, after school education, services for at-risk young adults, and United Way 2-1-1.

Johnson County Government's first official United Way campaign was in 1983, and employees have donated more than \$1 million in the last five years.

"Every year I hear from employees about the impact United Way made on them or a family member," said Maury Thompson, assistant county manager and 2014 campaign chairman. "The United Way touches so many, in many ways, working to improve the situations of our friends and neighbors, and building a strong community that is resilient and better prepared to meet life's challenges." 🌟

WEB EXTRA To learn more about how you can help the food pantries, or view employees' artwork, visit www.jocogov.org/jocomag.

Studying the future needs for County parks and libraries

By JODY HANSON

If you ask a Johnson County resident if she is satisfied with the quality of life here, she will most likely say “yes.” In the most recent citizen survey (taken in 2013), 97 percent of participants were satisfied with Johnson County as a place to live, and 96 percent were satisfied with Johnson County as a place to raise children. Two of the highest drivers of that satisfaction are the County’s parks and library systems.

Both of these highly-used systems are conducting in-depth studies to measure how they need to meet the community’s future needs. Whether attending a public meeting, taking a survey or sharing opinions online, Johnson County residents have had many opportunities to weigh in on both plans. Both studies will be released to the public this spring.

Johnson County Library

More than 3 million people walked through the doors of a Johnson County Library branch in 2014. Seven million different objects were circulated among 270,000 cardholders. What will the County want from a library system 20 years from now? Will cardholders still visit buildings to check out books or use a computer or other electronic device? Where is the population moving, and will that determine if branches close or new ones open? The Comprehensive Library Master Plan scheduled for a May 2015 completion will help the library answer those questions and many more.

The library hired Group 4 Architecture, Research + Planning, Inc., which specializes in library planning, to prepare the plan. This firm has relied heavily on input from the community. Group 4 staff trained library employees to facilitate public input-gathering sessions at each branch involving library patrons, businesses, schools and cities. The conversation extended to www.jocolibraryconversation.org, a MindMixer portal where the public can answer questions like “What does the Library do best?” and “What would the ideal library of the future look like?”

Along with this new feedback, Group 4 will incorporate work done by library and County staff over the past three years. That work led to valuable learnings about

“What will the County want from 20 a library system 20 years from now?”

the physical condition of library assets like buildings, technology, collections, as well as the changing demographics of the County and the geography of where residents live in the County.

“The Library Master Plan will evaluate our system in terms of three values: preservation, renovation and innovation,” said Johnson County Librarian Sean Casserley. “At the end of the planning process we will have a professional, third party opinion on where we need to head in terms of buildings and services.”

Johnson County Park & Recreation District

Another highly used system dedicated to constant improvement is the Johnson County Park & Recreation District (JCPRD). The number of people who benefit from JCPRD facilities and programming is staggering — it’s 14 parks, golf courses and sports complexes attracted more than 7 million visits in 2013 and more than 2.5 million participated in programs.

You may have heard of MAP 2020, the master action plan approved by the Board of Park and Recreation Commissioners in 2001. JCPRD has been developing a *new* strategic plan for managing the County’s open space and recreational resources through the year 2030.

A team of nationally-acclaimed specialists headed by SWT Design of St. Louis began working on the project last summer. The planning team, which includes De Soto-based Indigo Design, VSR Design of Prairie Village, ETC Institute of Olathe, and Ballard*King in Denver, has been

busy gathering information over the past several months. That effort included site visits to all JCPRD parks and facilities, multiple community input sessions, meetings with representatives from more than 70 public and private groups, and an extensive survey of more than 1,000 Johnson County households.

“It’s already clear through this process that access to green space and outdoor recreational opportunities are very important to our community,” said JCPRD Executive Director Jill Geller. “The public’s continued participation in the planning effort helps ensure the resulting plan is not only a reflection of the County’s current needs, but also a blueprint for providing a natural



resource and recreational legacy for generations to come.”

The planning team will present a preliminary report to the Board of Park and Recreation Commissioners this spring. The community will have opportunities to review the draft recommendations and priorities at a community input meeting and through the district’s website at www.jcprd.com. Members of the public who would like to receive email notification of the input opportunities can send a request to community.relations@jocogov.org.

WEB To join the Library’s Mind Mixer conversation or learn more about JCPRD’s planning and development efforts, visit www.jocogov.org/jocomag.



What advice do you have for new Commissioner Shaffer?



“As soon as possible, become familiar with the wide-range of responsibilities and public services – from airports to wastewater – managed by Johnson County Government.”

Chairman Ed Eilert



“Continue to be a good listener and always keep an open mind on the many issues that you will address.”

Second District Commissioner James P. Allen



“As elected officials, we must do what in our hearts we know is best for the residents of Johnson County.”

Third District Commissioner Steven C. Klika



“Be as available to your constituents as possible.”

Fourth District Commissioner Jason Osterhaus



“Remember, your wife is always right and your family will always be there at the end of the day.”

Fifth District Commissioner Michael Ashcraft



“Always reserve extra time in your busy schedule to spend with your family.”

Sixth District Commissioner John Toplikar

WEB EXTRA

Do you know which Commissioner represents your district? Find your Commissioner and his contact information online at jocogo.org/jocomag.

At work

with the Board of County Commissioners

By JODY HANSON



After 15½ years as Mayor of Prairie Village, Commissioner Ron Shaffer decided not to run again. Around

the same time he learned that his friend, former First District Commissioner Ed Peterson, was not seeking re-election to that position.

“Timing is everything,” Commissioner Ron Shaffer said. “I would not run against someone I support or a friend who is doing a good job in office.”

A Wyandotte County native, Commissioner Shaffer made several Johnson County friends while attending Kansas State University and decided Johnson County was where he wanted to live. His interest in civic involvement started with Kiwanis International, where he held many elected leadership roles, locally and nationally. That expanded to serving on chambers of commerce and other community involvement.

Commissioner Shaffer is an architect and has owned his firm, RLS Architects, since 1979. He has designed retail projects, restaurants, residential projects, factories, warehouses and office buildings in more than 30 states. In 2014, the American Institute of Architects-Kansas City Chapter named Shaffer “Architect of the Year.” Commissioner Shaffer and his wife Jeannine live in Prairie Village, where they raised their three children. ☀️

Budget Breakdown

By ANDY GRAHAM

Each year, approving the County's budget is one of the most important decisions made by the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). The budget articulates the County's priorities and strategic goals, identifies the services and programs that will be provided, and sets forth the County's spending plan for the entire year and the property tax required to support the budget.

Johnson County's current mill levy consists of the 17.764 mills of the County's taxing district, Library's taxing district of 3.157 mills, and Park and Recreation's taxing district of 2.349 mills, for a total of 23.27 mills. One mill is equal to \$1 of property taxes per \$1,000 of taxable value.

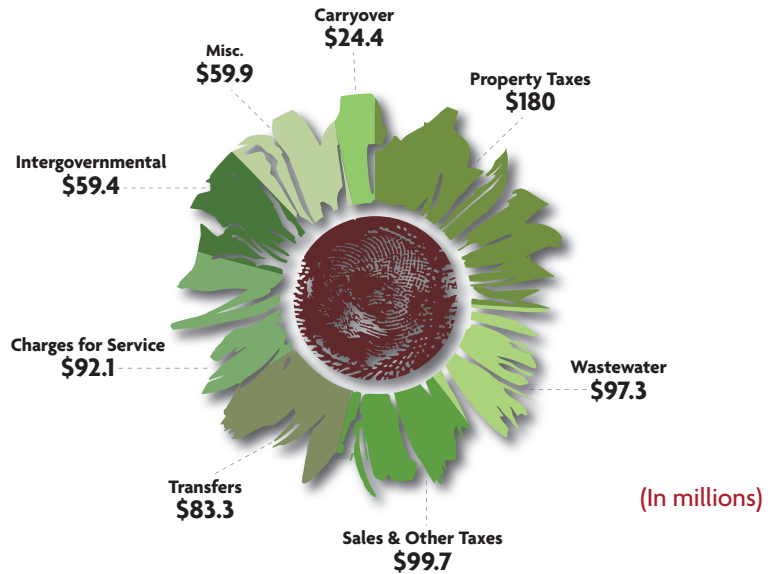
The proposed FY 2016 Budget will be presented to the BOCC on June 4. The Board will review the proposed budget, receive final funding requests from departments and agencies, and make any necessary changes before finalizing the budget in July. The county's next fiscal year begins Jan. 1, 2016.

By the numbers

- **566,933** people live in Johnson County
- **\$59.6 billion** appraised value of all real property in JoCo
- **17.764** County taxing district mill levy, the lowest in Kansas
- **25.9 %** of the County's revenue is from property taxes
- **\$666** average annual resident property tax bill
- **\$55.50** average monthly resident property tax bill

WHAT IT COSTS TO RUN THE COUNTY IN 2015

Total Revenue: \$696.1 million



Property Taxes: also known as Ad Valorem taxes from the mill levy

Wastewater: self-funded enterprise

Sales & Other Taxes: public safety, motor vehicles, etc.

Transfers: interdepartmental, etc.

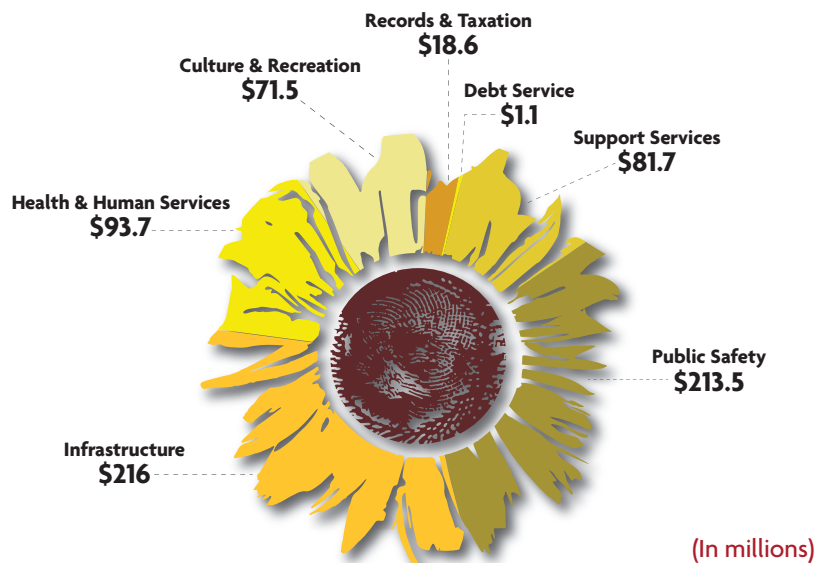
Charges for service: fees from mental health, park and rec, etc.

Intergovernmental: from municipalities, state and federal governments

Misc.: courts

Carryover: investment interest, airport fees, etc.

Total Spending: \$696.1 million



Public Safety: district courts; MED-ACT; corrections; Sheriff; emergency management; etc.

Infrastructure: airport; public works; contractor licensing; transportation; wastewater; etc.

Health & Human Services: aging services; JCDS; health and environment; mental health; etc.

Support Services: BOCC; budget and financial planning; human resources; etc.

Culture & Recreation: parks; library; museum; etc.

Records & Taxation: appraiser; motor vehicles; etc.

Debt Services: bond principal and interest

Defenders of public health: Johnson

By NATALIE BLAIR

When asked who is responsible for keeping our community healthy, most people would say the Department of Health and Environment, MED-ACT, maybe even the Park and Recreation District. But Johnson County Wastewater (JCW) is the unsung hero when it comes to stopping the spread of pathogens and protecting the environment.

While wastewater services is the largest part of the County's budget, the department is mostly self-funded, covering costs through billing and permit fees. The department also keeps an eye toward ways to cut back on expenses, such as joint projects with cities that help minimize costs and increase efficiency.

In 2014, the department brought in \$119.7 million in revenue and incurred expenses of \$113.2 million with the balance going into reserves.

"We strive to be responsible stewards of our resources, both financial and environmental," said John O'Neil, Johnson County Wastewater general manager. "We focus on maintaining our system with an eye to the future because it would be a disservice to residents to do anything but."

It is rare for a wastewater treatment service to be part of a county government structure. Although JCW is the largest provider in the County, some areas have a more traditional model with sanitary sewer service provided by the city. Olathe, DeSoto, Gardner, Edgerton, and Spring Hill provide wastewater services within all or part of their city limits.

"Historically, JCW has the lowest rates in the Metro area because our maintenance keeps the cost down," O'Neil said. "We are fortunate that our County Commissioners recognize the importance of a well-maintained system and support our efforts to find the best long-term value for residents, which isn't always the lowest short-term cost."



Clockwise from top left: Secondary treatment creates a utopia for microorganisms that clean the water; water cascades down "steps" to increase its oxygen content; the clean water, called effluent, is returned to streams and waterways; domes collect biogas — a natural byproduct of treatment — used to help power the Douglas L. Smith Middle Basin Treatment Plant.

What is Wastewater?

Most people equate wastewater with bodily waste, but it's actually all of the water leaving your house and everything in it: shampoo, laundry detergent, soap, and everything toddlers flush down the toilet.

JCW treats the wastewater for all of those "extras" before returning clean water to rivers and streams, but their work doesn't stop there. They prevent backups by cleaning and maintaining a mostly-underground web comprised of 2,200 miles of pipes (enough to stretch from Johnson County to New York City and back), ensure the accuracy of charges, and plan for the County's future needs, all while serving as the first line of defense against threats to our health and environment.

"It's hard work but if we're doing our job right, most people don't give us a second thought," O'Neil said. "We are an integral part of maintaining the county's high quality of life and we take a lot of pride in our work."

Clean Water = A Healthy Community

Protecting public health and safety is Johnson County Wastewater's prime responsibility. If not properly treated, water can carry many dangers:

- disease-causing bacteria such as E. coli
- viruses such as cholera
- medications
- metals such as mercury, lead, cadmium, chromium, and arsenic
- household chemicals such as bleach and toilet bowl cleaner

JCW also monitors water from industrial clients to ensure they are doing their part to remove other chemicals before sending into the wastewater stream.

In addition to disease and chemicals, wastewater can carry fats, oils, and grease (FOG) that if ignored can cause sewer blockages and subsequent sewage spills, posing a threat to public health and safety which can be prevented with proper grease management.

FOG includes cooking oil, lard, grease, butter, shortening, margarine, and other

County Wastewater to the rescue

substances used in food processing. Kitchen waste, along with water that has been used to wash kitchen equipment and floors, contain FOG. When FOG is poured down the drain, it cools and solidifies in sewer pipe walls, clogging the wastewater flow and costing ratepayers money.

JCW has had programs in place for many years to reduce the amount of FOG that enters its system from businesses in the food preparation industry. In 2010, JCW installed a FOG receiving station at the Douglas L. Smith Middle Basin Plant at 69 Highway and College Blvd. This shortened hauling distances for trucks bringing FOG from businesses in Johnson County cities, reducing both costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

“Our higher water quality means tighter controls and regulations.”

Solids removed during treatment are mixed with the FOG, producing biogas — similar to natural gas used to heat your home. The biogas is used as a fuel to generate electricity at the plant, reducing the amount of electricity bought off the power grid. This reduces costs for ratepayers as well as greenhouse gas emissions. The process produced 6,036,000 kWh of green power in 2014 — enough to power 548 homes for a year — and cut the power the plant uses from the electrical grid in half.

After processing, biosolids can be used to fertilize crop land to provide essential nutrients, improve soil structure, enhance moisture retention, and reduce erosion.

Expanding Capabilities

One project that could bring long-term value to JCW customers is the expansion of the Tomahawk Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant at Lee Blvd. and Mission Rd., to meet future regulatory requirements and provide cost-effective treatment.

The plant currently treats 7 million gallons

of wastewater per day, approximately 40 percent of the average of 17 million gallons per day arriving at the plant from parts of Overland Park, Leawood, Prairie Village, and Olathe. The remainder of the wastewater is sent to Kansas City, Mo., for treatment at their Blue River Wastewater Plant. However, Kansas City is facing substantial rate increases due to a federal mandate that will require a \$4.5 billion investment in their system over 25 years. This has caused JCW to assess how to manage this waste in Johnson County.

JCW completed a study in 2013 that recommended looking into options for the Tomahawk Creek plant. Now in the planning phase, to be completed in early 2016, they are identifying the best option.

“We are looking at what it will cost to treat all of the water here rather than send it to Kansas City,” said Susan Pekarek, chief engineer. “We will need to make improvements at Tomahawk to meet future water quality regulations and keep the plant operating, regardless of whether or not we expand our capacity. Current indications are that it will be more cost-effective to expand the plant rather than just make those improvements. Our customers would still have a rate increase, but it will be a smaller increase than if we continue to send it to Kansas City.”

Natural Resources

In addition to planning for the future, JCW’s 208 employees provide a wide array of services: answering customer questions, reviewing bills for accuracy, keeping technology running, maintaining lines and pump stations, and testing samples, just to name a few.

“Our higher water quality means tighter controls and regulations, but we consistently receive national recognition from the National Association of Clean Water Agencies for our outstanding compliance with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit limits,” O’Neil said. “We couldn’t do that without our dedicated employees.”

By The Numbers

- **208** employees
- **6** treatment plants
- **1** small lagoon facility
- **31** pump stations (some that look like houses)
- **56,000** manholes
- **2,200 miles** of sewer line pipe, covering **172** square miles and **16** cities. The miles of sewer lines would span the distance between Johnson County’s Administration building in Olathe to New York City and back.
- **16.3 billion** gallons of wastewater processed in 2014, equivalent to filling the Sprint Center more than 78 times.
- **63.87 million** gallons of water can be treated daily
- **100 percent** compliance on solids disposal
- **398.42 miles** of sewer line cleaned in 2014
- **6** odor complaints in 2014; well under the goal of less than 53 per year
- **More than 500,000** residents served
- **137,961** active accounts including:
 - 114,893** single-family residential accounts;
 - 17,049** multi-family accounts;
 - 5,907** commercial accounts;
 - 112** industrial accounts

... Continued on page 12

Your Toilet Is Not A Trashcan

Whatever ends up in the sewer can potentially impact the water environment. Keep these 10 things out of the wastewater system:

1. Prescription and over-the-counter pharmaceuticals
2. Hair
3. Rags and towels
4. Baby wipes and diapers
5. Disposable toilet brushes
6. Syringes
7. Personal care products
8. Grease
9. Aquarium gravel or kitty litter
10. Cotton swabs

You Plug It, You Pay For It

Not only do the above items, and a host of others, create sewer backups and overflows, they also cause backups in the public sewer pipes and at the local wastewater treatment plant. The related costs are then passed on to ratepayers. Disposable doesn't mean flushable, and even if something is advertised as flushable, it's still safer and better for the environment to place it in the trash can. It's also a waste of water to flush or send down the drain those things that don't belong there.



Pedro Calderon has been a JCW employee for 32 years. He started in maintenance and with encouragement from department administrators, took classes and gained experience to become a senior laboratory technician.

... Continued from page 11

One of those employees is Pedro Calderon, senior laboratory technician.

He had taken classes for two years at Universidad Nacional de Ingenieria in his native Peru before he met his wife, a Johnson County native. They were in the U.S. for a visit so that Calderon could meet his in-laws when his wife was diagnosed with typhoid fever.

“We spent all our money on hospital bills, so I thought I’d get a job to help us get enough to get back home. I started out as a maintenance guy, mopping floors and cleaning up. I thought I’d be here maybe six months.”

That was in 1982. “I saw how happy my kids were here and I thought, why not stay?”

With some encouragement from then-lab director Ralph Hazel, Calderon took wastewater operation classes at Fort Scott Community College and other classes at Johnson County Community College

and University of Missouri-Kansas City. He moved from maintenance to surveying the insides of pipes with closed-circuit television, and then became an environmental lab technician. He now oversees all fieldwork and sample collection.

Samples are collected throughout the entire treatment process, including checking that businesses and industrial companies are taking out the chemicals, metals, and anything else required by their wastewater permit before their flow enters the County’s system. Employees also check the Tomahawk Creek Plant wastewater that flows to Kansas City so they know what to treat it for and how to calculate service charges.

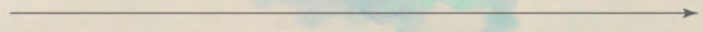
“We’re all working together to make people’s lives easier,” Calderon said. “It’s my responsibility to help keep our water clean. I don’t want my kids and grandkids to step in dirty streams. I feel ownership for making the community a better place.” 🌞

Anatomy of a Flush

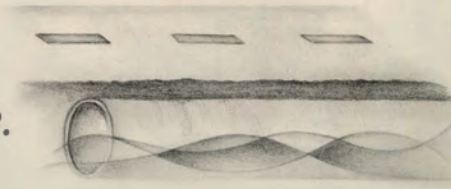


1.

Wastewater is all of the water leaving your house and everything in it: shampoo, detergents, and things toddlers flush down the toilet. It is 99.9 percent water and .1 percent solid material — organic and inorganic.

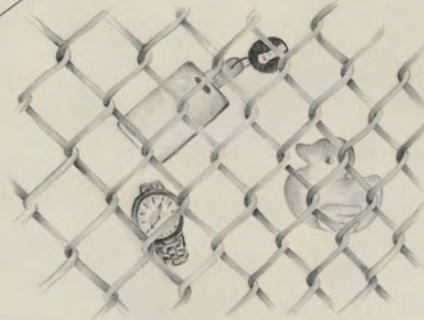


2.



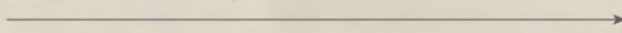
The wastewater runs through a web of underground pipes to treatment plants.

3. Large debris is filtered out of the water.



4.

The water is sent through clarifiers and then microorganisms feed on the dissolved waste.



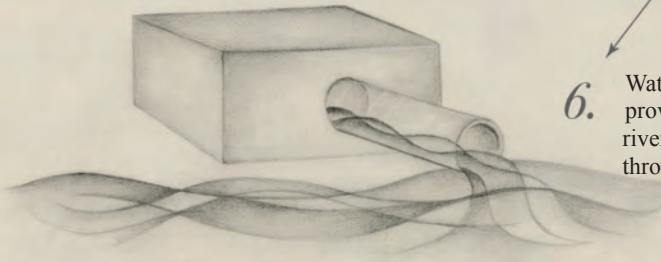
5.

The water is treated with UV light or chemicals, neutralizing any leftover organisms, such as E. coli, that might cause disease.



6.

Water is sent to rivers and streams. Your water provider pulls the water out of those streams or rivers, cleans it again, and sends it into your house through another set of pipes.



Where it goes after the flush

1. Collection and Transfer

All of a home's or business's wastewater travels through service lines and sewers and eventually to a wastewater treatment plant.

2. Preliminary Treatment

The used water runs through a bar screen to remove large items such as paper cups and sticks. It then moves through a grit removal chamber to remove debris such as gravel, seeds, and coffee grounds.

3. Primary Treatment

The water is sent through clarifiers to remove the smaller solid particles that still remain. The remaining wastewater

now contains mostly dissolved wastes called primary sludge.

4. Secondary Treatment

In nature, bacteria and other microscopic organisms grow by using that dissolved waste for food. At treatment plants the process goes a little faster by creating a utopia for microorganisms, which feed on the waste, grow, and multiply, cleaning the water.

The water is sent through another round of clarifiers and the resulting settled organisms are combined with the primary sludge to be treated separately.

At this point, more than 85 percent of pollutants have been removed from the wastewater.

5. Disinfection

Treated water is disinfected, using either ultraviolet light or chlorine and a neutralizer, to kill any microorganisms, such as E. coli, that might cause disease.

6. Effluent

The cleaned water, called effluent, is then returned to a stream or river. Your water provider pulls the water out of those streams or rivers, cleans it again, and sends it into your house through another set of pipes.

WEB EXTRA

Visit jocogov.org/jocomag to learn more about Johnson County Wastewater (JCW) with additional information, including a list of frequently asked questions and answers, and different ways to get in touch with JCW customer service.

Law enforcement community connects with the public

By JODY HANSON



Officers with the Lenexa Police Department share some coffee and conversation with Johnson County residents at regular “Coffee with a Cop” events.

Mention a cop, a cup of coffee and some pastries and you’ll most likely conjure up the stereotype of an on-duty police officer hanging out at the doughnut shop. However, the Lenexa Police Department has turned a hot cup of Joe into a tool that breaks down barriers with the public, opening the door to stronger relationships and increased public safety.

Coffee with a cop

Since 2012, the Lenexa Police Department has participated in a national program called “Coffee with a Cop.” This effort started with uniformed police officers making scheduled visits to assisted living facilities when the number of crimes against the elderly began to rise.

“We’d provide the coffee and be available to answer any questions residents had,” said Lenexa Police Sergeant Gary Graniewski. “They could talk to us about scams targeting the elderly, or we’d talk about the Royals, without any agenda,” he said. “We want the public to be less intimidated by our uniform and see officers as people who are approachable and can help them.”

In January, the Lenexa Police Department tried something new. About 10 officers held a “Coffee with a Cop” event in a back room at a Lenexa Perkins Restaurant. During the hour and a half

event, more than two dozen people came in for a free cup of coffee and a one-on-one conversation with an officer.

One of those attendees was Kay Plaster of Lenexa. She heard about “Coffee with a Cop” in an email she received from the City of Lenexa, and showed up to vent her frustration about drivers who speed through her neighborhood. She spent about 30 minutes visiting with Sergeant Jay Richards on that topic, along with several other issues on her mind.

“I learned about the blue lights installed on some of our traffic lights...I never knew what those were for,” Plaster said. “I think this event is valuable. It’s good to have a cup of coffee with a police officer because it puts you on a nice, friendly level.”

Getting “social” with your neighborhood police

Other communities are using social media to increase public safety. Olathe was the first city in the Kansas City metro to connect with neighborhoods through Nextdoor, a private social media network geared for neighborhoods. Once a neighborhood signs on, its residents go through a simple screening process to verify that they live in the neighborhood, before they sign up and start interacting.

“We use Nextdoor to communicate directly with more than 5,000 Olathe

residents,” said Sergeant Bryan Hill, public information officer for the Olathe Police Department. “We can provide them with neighborhood-specific crime statistics or alerts. Also, if we are looking for someone in their neighborhood, our Nextdoor residents can help us by providing an extra sets of eyes.”

Nearly half of the households in the Nelson Square neighborhood in Olathe are signed up for Nextdoor. Its members use it to find lost pets, promote its National Night Out events and read safety tips and information about nearby crimes.

“I love the idea of Nextdoor and am trying to use it in every way that could benefit the community,” said Amy O’Bryan, Nelson Square neighborhood watch captain. “Nextdoor is an innovative way to watch out for one another.”

Help T.R.A.C.E. stolen equipment

One way the Johnson County Sheriff’s Office connects with the public is through its T.R.A.C.E (Theft Reports of Agricultural and Construction Equipment) program. It’s quick email communication between law enforcement and the public specifically related to large equipment or livestock theft.

Launched in 2010, currently 1,460 T.R.A.C.E members in 122 counties in Missouri and Kansas signed up online and now use email or social media to provide tips to law enforcement when they see suspicious activity on farms, construction sites or other places that store large equipment like tractors or skid steer loaders. In return, detectives use these same tools to alert members when a theft has been reported in their area. 📧

WEB EXTRA Tell us about a Johnson County community to profile in a future issue of JOCO Magazine by emailing us at jocomag@jocogov.org.

THREE Questions for Johnson County Government employees

By ANDY GRAHAM



Teal Navarro
Human Resources Partner

Teal Navarro is a human resources partner in Johnson County's Human Resources Department. She has worked for the County for six years, assisting departments and agencies with recruiting for positions, assisting with classification and compensation projects, and providing guidance and advice on employee relations issues.

On average, how many job applications are submitted for each position opening?

We are fortunate to often have a large pool of candidates for our positions. The number of applications can range from around five to more than 300, depending on the position and whether the position was posted only internally or if it was open to the public.

What do you like best about your job?

I really enjoy recruitment. It's a good feeling when you find the perfect person for a position.

What do you tell people who ask if Johnson County is a great place to work?

The people here are great. Employees care so much about what they do and make sure that the public gets the best service possible. Also, the variety of services Johnson County provides is amazing. It's nice to know you're helping make the community a better place, whether by directly providing services to the public, or indirectly by providing support to employees.



Anoush Fardipour
Chief Building Inspector

As chief building inspector, Anoush Fardipour reviews building permit applications for all structural, non-structural, electrical, fire protection, mechanical and plumbing construction documents and specifications for compliance to Johnson County Building Codes for new and existing buildings. Fardipour has worked for the Planning and Codes Department since 1996.

What do you like best about your job?

Direct contact with the public and individuals; helping them accommodate code requirements and issues they have with their building permit and questions during construction process.

What is the most challenging part of your job?

Satisfying the building permit applicant for compliance to the current building code requirements. Most of the time they are not happy to do that since it might mean additional costs.

How many inspections do you perform in a given year?

Reports indicate that we performed a total of 1,940 inspections during 2014.



Megan Younger
Mental Health Co-Responder

Megan Younger, a County employee for nine years, is an emergency services clinician from Johnson County Mental Health embedded with the Overland Park Police Department. Her position is currently paid for by a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance.

Can you describe the partnership between Johnson County and Overland Park?

My role is to educate officers about mental health and substance abuse issues in the community. The goal of the co-responder is to decrease the amount of time officers and citizens spend in local emergency rooms, and to avoid sending mentally ill persons to jail if they need treatment.

How do you make life better for Johnson County residents?

I try to reduce the stigma of mental illness and offer education and support for anyone requesting it.

What's the biggest misperception about mental health and your job?

People who are long time mental health consumers may be afraid that they will be taken out of their residence when they have contact with police and myself. In reality, the goal is to try and maintain them in their home and community (least restrictive environment) with as many supports that are available.

BEYOND TREE HUGGING

County sustainability efforts save money, resources

By ANDY GRAHAM

When most people hear the word “sustainability,” they think of the environment and different ways to “go green” — recycling, composting, driving fuel-efficient vehicles, etc. But being sustainable is about more than being eco-friendly.

“From building facilities designed to last for over a hundred years, to reducing our energy costs, sustainability is an investment in the future of Johnson County,” said Sustainability Program Manager Jasmin Moore.

Johnson County Government defines sustainability as “the responsible management of resources to meet the environmental, economic, and human needs of today and for generations to come.” In a 2011 citizen survey, 87 percent of residents said it was important for Johnson County Government to support sustainability programs.

“Sustainability is about being conservative and frugal with our resources to ensure that they will still be around for future generations of Johnson Countians,” said Johnson County Government Bureau Chief Joe Waters.

The County has initiated and participates in several programs that have set the community and County operations on a track towards increased economic benefits and community health.

A recent study on the County’s greenhouse gas inventory emissions by The Brendle Group noted that, “Johnson County is committed to maximizing the economic, environmental, and societal benefits of its operations within the community, and has undertaken a comprehensive sustainability program that addresses topics ranging from air quality and energy efficiency to recycling and water resources.”

Here’s a snapshot of some key Johnson County Government sustainability projects intended to use resources more responsibly for future generations.

LEED-certified buildings

In 2006, Johnson County began building facilities according to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) principles as certified by the U.S. Green Building Council. LEED standards help building owners and operators be environmentally responsible and use resources efficiently. Building high performing facilities saves money on utilities and maintenance down the road, and Johnson County has benefitted to a tune of more than \$8 million dollars of avoided costs since 2006.

“Our focus on high performance building standards in our renovations and new construction has yielded significant energy and operating cost savings,” said Waters.



The County’s LEED-certified buildings include:

- Sunset Drive Building, 11811 South Sunset Drive, Olathe: LEED Gold 2006
- County Communications Center, 11880 South Sunset Drive, Olathe: LEED Gold 2009
- New Century Fieldhouse, 551 New Century Parkway, New Century: LEED Gold 2011
- Youth and Family Services Center, 920 W. Spruce, Olathe: LEED Platinum 2012
- Public Works, 1800 W 56 Highway, Olathe: LEED Gold 2012
- Criminalistics Laboratory, 11890 S Sunset Drive Olathe: LEED Platinum 2013 (*bottom photo*)
- Johnson County Sheriff’s Office Central Booking Facility, 101 North Kansas Avenue, Olathe: LEED certification 2013
- 588 Justice Annex, 588 Santa Fe, Olathe: LEED Silver certification 2014 (*top photo*)

Reusable linens on ambulances

Johnson County MED-ACT has built in sustainable approaches to its operations. One way is by reducing the amount they spend on linens, and the amount of waste produced.

Before 2010, all Johnson County MED-ACT ambulances used disposable linens (sheets, blanket, pillow cases). The problem was that disposable blankets didn't perform well and were expensive. Due to shrinking budgets and a desire to reduce waste, MED-ACT switched to cloth linens, which saves money, improves the patient's comfort, and reduces waste.

"MED-ACT transports more than 20,000 people each year. Washable linen almost eliminated use of disposable paper and plastic sheets, which ended up as waste," said Mark Terry, deputy chief of Emergency Medical Services (EMS). "Sustainability helps to assure that our operational effectiveness doesn't carry unintended impacts and long-term costs."

The linen exchange has been in effect for about four years and has resulted in a more comfortable experience for patients, about \$200,000 in savings, and kept tens of thousands of disposable linens out of the waste stream. This solution was only possible because EMS staff looked beyond the needs of a single patient, ambulance, department, or hospital and looked at the larger system.

MED-ACT fleet

Johnson County MED-ACT also takes a sustainable approach to its vehicle fleet, choosing to reduce emissions and fuel consumption by using clean diesel, and powering equipment with batteries designed to run for up to five hours while the engine is off to reduce idling and pollution. In fact, vehicles will only idle for two reasons:

- in extreme temperatures (less than 45 degrees, greater than 85 degrees) to maintain medications at a safe temperature
- while responding to an emergency

New ambulances (on order) will also be equipped with solar panels to further reduce energy consumption while on a call.

Electric vehicle charging stations

In addition to its expanded fleet of alternative fuel and compressed natural gas vehicles, Johnson County Government has demonstrated a commitment to improving air quality in the region by offering drivers of electric vehicles (EV) a total of 16 charging stations at nine locations — there are currently only about 40 total charging stations available in the entire region. However, many more EV charging stations are coming soon via KCP&L's recent commitment to install 1,000 across the metropolitan area by summer 2015.

Johnson County Middle Basin cogeneration project

In 2013, The National Environmental Health Association awarded the prestigious Sustainability Award to Johnson County Wastewater for its co-generation project at the Douglas L. Smith Middle Basin Treatment Facility.

The project was designed to:

1. increase the solids handling at the Douglas L. Smith treatment plant;
2. use methane from digestion of biosolids and fats, oil and grease from restaurants to generate electricity;
3. reduce the county's carbon footprint; and
4. reduce utility costs for the wastewater department.

Johnson County Wastewater is one of the largest consumers of electricity in Johnson County. The cogeneration project generates enough electricity to power half of the power needs of the entire Douglas L. Smith Treatment plant, which is one of the largest power users in the JCW system. The project makes use of restaurant by-products that were previously treated as waste, and methane. Based on adjustments for rate changes and changes in use patterns, JCW is seeing a savings of approximately \$250,000 per year through on-site power generation.



Composting

Composting is an important part of Johnson County's waste reduction efforts. Food waste makes up about 17 percent of all the waste going to the landfill. Johnson County composts at five facilities: Central Booking, New Century, Administration Building, Sunset Office Building, and Health Services Building.

At the three locations with cafeterias, the County participates in a commercial food composting program where food and other compostable materials (food containers, flatware, cups) are picked up as needed and taken to a recycling center for composting.

In 2014, about 172,000 pounds (86 tons) of food waste were collected from Johnson County facilities and turned into high quality compost, used on landscaping across the region. 🌻

**WEB
EXTRA**

Catch some great sustainability tips for home and the workplace by visiting www.jocogov.org/jocomag

Self sufficiency program helps put Johnson County residents' lives on the right track

By GERALD HAY

Darlene Dunn no longer lives in poverty.

As a graduate of the Johnson County Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Program, she has a good job, pays her bills, and resides in an Overland Park apartment, requiring no federal assistance for rent. Getting to this point wasn't easy. The FSS program helped to point her towards a better life and financial independence.

Dunn is a survivor in many ways. In 1999, she fled an abusive relationship in her hometown of Baton Rouge, La., to start new in Kansas City with her three young sons and only the belongings that would fit in her car.

"I was homeless when I moved here," she said.

For three months, Dunn and her family stayed at New House, a domestic violence shelter in Kansas City, Mo. Her first jobs barely paid more than the minimum wage. She moved from the shelter to Section 8 housing. A year later, she relocated to Johnson County, living in a federally-assisted townhouse.

In 2002, she moved back to Baton Rouge, but not for long, returning to Johnson County the following year. After receiving public assistance for four years and working low-paying jobs, Dunn was accepted into Johnson County's FSS Program where she turned her life around. The program is coordinated by the Housing Authority — part of the Johnson County Department of Human Services.

The Family Self-Sufficiency Program, created by Congress in 1990 as part of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, helps participants like Dunn move up and out of poverty.

"The program allowed me to work toward self-sufficiency and to escape poverty," she said. "It made me believe in myself."



Darlene Dunn has come a long way to now living comfortably in her Overland Park apartment.

Johnson County's FSS, which has been in place for more than 14 years, is not so much a program as it is a mechanism designed to help families move up the economic ladder toward financial independence.

The goal of the five-year FSS program — open to families in Johnson County receiving Federal Section 8 housing voucher assistance through the Housing Authority — is to build on the stability that housing subsidies provide and break the cycle of generational poverty.

Participants must work with a FSS coordinator to develop and carry out a personal action plan, the initial purpose of which is to develop a path that allows them to leave public assistance behind. The plan specifies personal goals, including employment, over a five-year contract period, and helps link participants to other support services.

The voluntary program is for those who are unemployed or already employed but want to increase their income and who are willing to commit to changing their lives. As FSS participants succeed in raising

their family income, the portion of their monthly income contributed toward their Section 8 rent payment also increases. HUD allows a percentage of this rent increase to be deposited into an interest-bearing escrow account for the family.

If the family meets its goals within five years and "graduates" from welfare assistance for a period of 12 consecutive months, they receive the funds accumulated in the account. Some ways in which graduates have used their escrow have been for the down payment on a home, continuing to pursue higher education or starting a business.

Graduation is challenging. Since the Johnson County FSS program began, it has had 173 participants with 35 successfully completing their personal action plan. Two of them are now homeowners.

Dunn completed her plan in only three years, ending her reliance on Section 8 housing in 2005 when she graduated with full-time employment.

Last year, Dunn received a Special Achievement Award at both the Kansas Chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) and Southwest Regional NAHRO conferences in recognition of her outstanding achievements.

Dunn also completed associate's (2005) and bachelor's (2011) degrees in accounting and is working on her MBA, hoping to graduate in October. She knows FSS helped to point her in the right direction for self-improvement.

"Without the support and training from FSS, I would probably still be living in Section 8 and on welfare," Dunn said. "It changed my life." 🌞

WEB Learn more about
EXTRA FSS and other Human
Services programs at
www.jocogov.org/jocomag

10 THINGS In the JoCo Archives

By JODY HANSON

COOL



Johnson County Archives and Records Management serves as the caretaker of official County records. The Archives' three full time employees protect treasured artifacts like these:



1.

Minutes from the first Johnson County BOCC meeting on Sept. 7, 1857 (more than three years before Kansas became a state).

2.

A log book of residents of the Johnson County Poor Farm in 1886. The Poor Farm provided a home and food for the indigent from the Civil War through World War II.

3.

A naturalization record from 1881. Beginning in 1790, naturalization was possible for any free, white adult with four years of residency.

4.

Starting in 1930, **Declaration of Intent Forms** were filed upon arrival to America to begin establishment of residency without delay. The Archives has one from 1931.

5.

An Affidavit for Marriage from 1857. Marriage licenses are one of the most requested documents in the Archives.

6.

A will record dating back to 1859. No death certificates or birth certificates, though. They are housed with the State's Bureau of Vital Statistics.

7.

An Indian land record from 1863. Indian land records contain a certification from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs with the U.S. Department of the Interior.

8.

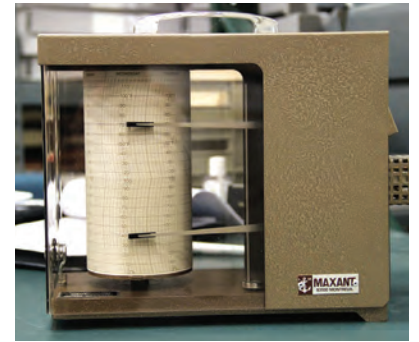
A criminal record from 1859. The Clerk of the District Court donated criminal records from 1857 to 1969 to the Archives.

9.

A school truancy record from 1904. Most truancy records were for children who needed to work, take care of a parent or were exposed to a communicable disease like scarlet fever.

10.

A tax record from 1862 for a block in Monticello Township. Taxes on this land were \$.30, compared to \$3,707.13 today.



The Archives has three hygrothermographs used to monitor the temperature and humidity throughout the building.

ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT BY THE NUMBERS

24 years in existence (created in 1991, joined the Records and Tax Administration Department in 2010)

85 million estimated page count of stored documents

13,500 square feet of warehouse space

70 degrees Fahrenheit and **50 percent** humidity are the optimum storage conditions



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