County Collaborations
Innovative partners fitting together to better serve JoCo residents
Building strong communities

On March 26 we celebrated the State of the County with hundreds of community partners who all play a role every day in building strong communities. We had much to celebrate looking back at 2018. In last year’s citizen survey, participants gave Johnson County a 98% satisfaction rating as a place to live. Also last year, we moved from 23rd to 18th place in USA Today’s list of the best counties in the nation. With 3,007 counties in the country, we are nearly in the top half percent of best counties in which to live.

Building strong communities takes on a literal sense with work progressing on major county projects, including the Johnson County Courthouse, the expansion of the Tomahawk Creek Wastewater Treatment Facility and the county’s first Medical Examiner Facility. At the State of the County, we celebrated the opening of new community amenities, including the Monticello Library, Phase I of Big Bull Creek Park and JCPRD’s first-ever first inclusive playground, located at Stilwell Community Park. In the next few months, that list will grow to include Meadowbrook Park and the Lenexa City Center Library.

In order for a community to be strong, it must be safe. Public safety services in Johnson County received a 91% rating in the 2018 Community Survey. Collaboration between the Sheriff’s Office, District Attorney’s Office, District Courts, law enforcement, emergency responders, emergency management and emergency communications, and rural fire districts help make Johnson County a safe place to live.

Our work in the health and human services fields is a priority and contributes to the strength of our community. We take pride in being selected as one of seven counties in the nation designated as a Stepping Up Innovator County for our expertise in taking action to reduce the number of people in jail who experience mental illness. Another priority is supporting some of our more vulnerable populations with food, utility and housing assistance, helping our clients seek competitive employment and enhancing public transit that connects residents to jobs.

No one can achieve these results alone. Building strong communities can only happen with collaboration from every corner of the county. Our cover story this issue takes an in-depth look at some of the more innovative collaborations happening right now which make life better for the 604,000 residents we serve.

Have a wonderful spring!

On the cover: Our cover image pieces together some of the many examples of collaborative relationships that help make life better for Johnson County residents. Our cover story begins on page 10 and highlights innovative partnerships that encourage a safe and healthy community, promote student success, improve access to resources and services and provide employment opportunities.
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### Ways to engage with JoCo

**Online**
Visit jocogov.org to:
- Find your county commissioner.
- Get answers to questions.
- Learn about more than 400 services Johnson County provides to residents.

**Social media**
Twitter: @jocogov
Facebook: facebook.com/jocogov
Instagram: instagram.com/jocogov

**By phone**
Call Center: 913-715-5000
Kansas Relay Operator: 800-766-3777

**Board of County Commissioners’ meetings:**
Attend a weekly Board of County Commissioners meeting at 9:30 a.m. Thursday on the third floor of the Administration Building, 111 S. Cherry St., in Olathe or watch on your smartphone or mobile device, or online at live.jocogov.org

### Johnson County Elected Officials
Ed Eilert, Chairman
Becky Fast, 1st District
Jim Allen, 2nd District
Steve Klika, 3rd District
Janeé Hanzlick, 4th District
Michael Ashcraft, 5th District
Mike Brown, 6th District
Steve Howe, District Attorney
Calvin Hayden, Sheriff

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**Pictured above:** Johnson County Developmental Supports’ Emerging Artists and Papercrete Works programs hosted a Hearts Alive Holiday Sale for Valentine’s Day. It took place at the Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center, which is also the location of the Emerging Artists Program. You can find their art on display every weekday. Papercrete Works products can be found at events around the community, including a pop-up in front of Ten Thousand Villages in Overland Park on May 25. For more information, visit [facebook.com/jocojcds](http://facebook.com/jocojcds).
In short

A glimpse into what’s going on at Johnson County Government

Drills and tests play a roll in severe weather awareness week

Johnson County promoted Severe Weather Awareness Week March 4-8. During the week, Johnson County Emergency Management and Communication partnered with jurisdictions on both sides of the state line to test sirens and encouraged the public to participate in a tornado drill.

In addition to participating in the statewide drill, Johnson County also tested NotifyJoCo, our emergency notification system. A test message went to 230,114 contacts in seven minutes. Prior to the test, 450 new people opted in to get alerts about events ranging from severe weather, fires and floods, to more routine announcements, such as road closures and water utility maintenance. To sign up for alerts, text NOTIFYJOÇO (all one word) to 888777, visit notifyjoco.org or call 913-826-5555.

Crews construct new courthouse tunnel

An eight week project kicked off in early February to build a new branch of the courthouse tunnel. This tunnel is used for the secure transport of inmates to and from the courthouse and the Johnson County Sheriff’s Office Central Booking Facility. Due to a new courthouse being built across the street, a new tunnel branch was needed. The project wrapped up April 8 - ten days ahead of schedule.

Recognition for infant safe sleep practices

The Johnson County Department of Health and Environment’s prenatal program received bronze-level Safe Sleep Star Certification from the Kansas Infant Death and SIDS (KIDS) Network. Johnson County is one of the first health departments in the state to receive this designation.

The Safe Sleep Star program was created by the KIDS Network, a Kansas-based organization dedicated to reducing the risk of infant deaths by providing supportive services, community education, professional training and research support. To learn more about safe sleep services, call 913-477-8381.

*Image courtesy of the Safe to Sleep® campaign, for educational purposes only; Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, https://safetosleep.nichd.nih.gov; Safe to Sleep® is a registered trademark of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Two Mental Health co-responders added

Johnson County Mental Health’s Co-Responder program has grown to provide a second co-responder to Lenexa and a dedicated co-responder to service Prairie Village, Leawood and Mission Hills.

A co-responder is embedded within the police department and operates directly from that location. This program allows Mental Health to provide immediate assistance to individuals in need during emergency calls and provides an alternative to the officer taking the person to the county jail or emergency room.

Co-responders also follow up on calls that happen when they are not in service to connect those citizens with needed resources.

quotable

“Our high ranking reflects the priority this county has placed on improving the factors that affect residents’ health.”

— Lougene Marsh, director of Johnson County Department of Health and Environment, on Johnson County being ranked as the healthiest county in Kansas by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.
Why is treating neuropathy so challenging?

For those suffering from neuropathy, the condition affects every part of life — walking, sitting, and even sleeping.

If you suffer from any of the torturous symptoms of neuropathy — numbness, tingling, or sharp nerve pain — finding relief becomes a main focus in life.

“Maybe you’ve had multiple tests, only to find out no one has any idea what you have. Maybe you’ve been put on a drug with heavy side effects,” said Dr. Michael Riley, D.C., founder of Renuva Back & Pain Centers and creator of CoreCare™. “I have been helping people with neuropathy and nerve problems for many years now. This painful condition interferes with your body’s ability to transmit messages to your muscles, skin, joints, or internal organs. If ignored or mistreated, neuropathy can lead to irreversible health conditions.”

Treatment options are available. However, uncovering the cause of nerve damage is the first step in treating neuropathic pain.

“Neuropathy has many different causes. The most common causes are metabolic conditions, such as diabetes”, he said. Other causes may include chronic kidney insufficiency or toxicity from alcohol or medications; such as chemotherapy drugs. Some neuropathy cases are caused by inflammation in nerves, and others are inherited.

“Often neuropathy is caused by a degenerating spine pressing on the nerve roots”, said Riley. This can happen in any of the vertebral joints from the neck all the way down to the tail bone.

Riley said finding a solution that not only masks symptoms, but offers reliable pain management requires a comprehensive approach.

“By using gentle techniques, like those we use in our CoreCare treatment program, we aim to release the pressure on the nerve,” said Riley. “This helps the nerve to heal and the ease the symptoms. Numerous studies have proven the therapies we use can be effective in helping nerve conditions.”

“Renuva’s CoreCare treatments, which include Photobiomodulation (PBM) therapy using Class IV Therapy Laser, work to restore the body’s natural ability without painful shots, harmful drugs, or surgery”, Riley explained.

Cleared by the FDA in 2003, Class IV Therapy Laser devices have become the standard of care for many musculoskeletal injuries such as nerve damage. Before the FDA would approve Class IV Lasers for PBM therapy they required evidence that it was safe for use on humans. This led to studies on safety, but also numerous studies on the effectiveness of PBM therapy.

One study by the American College of Physicians found that pain medication and steroids were limited in improving pain outcomes. For patients with chronic pain, ACP recommends that physicians and patients initially select non-drug therapies like multidisciplinary rehabilitation, PBM therapy, and spinal manipulation — all of which are included in Renuva’s five-phase CoreCare treatment protocol.

“Another study from Lasers in Surgery and Medicine found that 70 percent of patients who received PBM therapy maintained pain relief at their one-month follow-up versus only 28 percent of patients who received a Lidocaine injection”, Riley explained.

“Quite honestly, some of these people have suffered for years and because they have been through so much they don’t have high hopes. But we have treated thousands of neuropathy patients effectively and with long-lasting results — 96 percent of Renuva patients would refer us to their family and friends,” he said.

According to Riley that’s why his team offers introductory CoreCare treatments that are affordable to just about anybody. Through May 30th, Renuva will offer two treatments with a patient’s initial visit, for only $39 instead of the normal price of $275. The initial visit also includes an in-depth consultation about your neuropathy and health, a complete neuromuscular examination, digital X-rays (if needed) and a thorough analysis of your exam findings. Plus, two initial CoreCare™ treatments come as part of the package.

There are two locations that offer CoreCare in the Kansas City Area:

**Overland Park:**
Renuva Back & Pain Centers
4400 College Blvd.,
STE 150, Overland Park, KS
Call 913-828-0148

**Northland:**
Elevate Life Chiropractic & Wellness
9237 N Oak Trafficway,
Kansas City, MO 64155

Call 913-828-0148 for more information.
Volunteer in April

by GERALD HAY

April is National Volunteer Month, when Johnson County joins others to celebrate the work that volunteers do year-round. National Volunteer Week took place April 7-13.

Volunteers matter to Johnson County Government. They provide services and programs to 13 county departments and agencies that benefit residents of all ages. The county uses volunteers to deliver food in Meals on Wheels and trips in Catch-A-Ride programs. Volunteers assist residents at county food pantries in multi-service centers at Mission, Lenexa and Gardner. They staff activities at Johnson County Library, Johnson County Park and Recreation District and Johnson County Museum.

Volunteers help clients with intellectual and developmental disabilities at Johnson County Developmental Supports, with supervised visitations at Johnson County Court Services, and with services and programs serving households of all ages at the Department of Human Services.

Any definition of a successful life must include serving others.

George H.W. Bush

They are needed to take care of a community garden to benefit the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program, to protect the environment and support green initiatives by the Department of Health and Environment, and to become a vital part in the many programs and activities at the K-State Extension Service.

The list for volunteering opportunities in Johnson County Government is available at jocogov.org/volunteer.

Honoring volunteers in April began in 1974 when President Richard Nixon established National Volunteer Week with an executive order. April became National Volunteer Month as part of the late President George H. W. Bush’s 1,000 Points of Light campaign in 1991.

H.W. Bush said: “Any definition of a successful life must include serving others,” leading to the creation of the Points of Light Foundation, a nonprofit organization that encourages citizens and residents to volunteer and become a point of light in their own communities.

According to the foundation, 20 million hours of volunteer service involving more than five million volunteers are mobilized each year through the organization. The estimated dollar value of volunteer hours each year is $482 million.

Kansas ranks seventh in the nation for volunteerism, according to the Corporation for National and Community Service, with 31% of Kansans serving as volunteers. They provide more than 76.5 million hours of work worth an estimated $1.8 billion in donated time.

More locally, a 2018 report on volunteerism in Johnson County departments/agencies indicated that 14,624 volunteers provided 377,101.25 hours of service. Based on the national standard of a volunteer hour being worth $24.69, the volunteer work had a value of more than $9.3 million.

That’s a lot of points of light. But there’s always room for more in county government and elsewhere in Johnson County. City governments, local churches or schools, and religious, charitable, civic and professional organizations all have opportunities for volunteerism.

Johnson County always needs more points of light.

April is a good time to become a volunteer.

2019 is a good year to remain a volunteer.

K-State Extension Office volunteers teach children about nature at the June Bug Ball. 1,271 Extension volunteers gave 84,393 hours of service to the county in 2018.
What’s the danger in vaping?
by KRISTEN REESE

Vaping has continued to grow dramatically during the last couple of years. According to the 2018 Kansas Communities that Care Student Survey, 3.4% of middle school students and 26.6% of high school students in Johnson County reported using e-cigarettes in the last 30 days - more than double since 2016.

JUUL is just one example of a vaping device that has become popular due to the diversity of flavors, its subtle design, marketing tactics, easy access and because family and/or friends use them. The devices can vary in shape and in size; some are even shaped like a USB flash drive.

“Kids are using because it’s a hobby, an art form with approximately 8,000 flavors available,” said Jamie Katz, prevention coordinator at Johnson County Mental Health.

The long-term effects of vaping are still unknown, since research is limited. The fact is, most products like JUUL contain nicotine. Lasting damage to the adolescent brain development and to the cardiovascular system are a couple of serious side effects the highly addictive drug can have on a person.

“Many teens think of vaping as something to do with friends, not as a nicotine product with health risks. They believe that vaping is less harmful and less addictive than cigarettes,” said Katz.

How can I help prevent vaping?

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, there are several things you can do to reduce and even prevent vaping by young people.

1. Learn about the types of e-cigarettes and the risks of all forms of e-cigarette use.
2. Talk to the young person about the risks of e-cigarette use. Express firm expectations that they remain tobacco-free.
3. Set a positive example by being tobacco-free.

For more information and resources about preventing vaping, visit endthetrend.me or truthinitiative.org.
**Milestone anniversaries for two JCPRD programs**

by GERALD HAY

Two beloved programs presented by Johnson County Park and Recreation District (JCPRD) celebrate milestones in 2019.

Come early June, Theatre in the Park will raise the curtain on its 50th season of live entertainment.

By the end of June, the Kansas City Corporate Challenge will complete its 40th year of competition.

Both programs started small and have generated increased popularity for decades.

The idea of presenting live theater in a Johnson County park was launched in 1969, leading to the first production, “Mame,” the following year on a small wooden stage in Antioch Park, 6501 Antioch Rd., Merriam. Since that first curtain call, Theatre in the Park (TIP) has presented 212 productions.

From 1970 to 1971, productions took place at Antioch Park when plans were developed to relocate the outdoor theater to Shawnee Mission Park and to expand the stage facility to include restrooms, concessions and parking.

A temporary wooden stage was constructed in Shawnee Mission Park in time for performances in 1972 with a plan to eventually construct a permanent facility. With the fundraising support of the Shawnee Mission Sertoma Club, construction of a permanent stage at the present location of TIP began on 10 acres in 1979 and was dedicated on June 20, 1980.

An indoor season was launched two years ago with the opening of the Blackbox Theatre as part of the Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center, 8788 Metcalf Ave., Overland Park. The 2019 indoor season runs April 19-May 5 with “Forever Plaid.”

TIP’s outdoor season opens June 7-15 with “Annie” at the Theatre in the Park complex at Shawnee Mission Park with its own entrance at 7700 Renner Road, Shawnee.

More information about TIP and its upcoming indoor and outdoor seasons is available at theatreinthepark.org.

In the same year that TIP’s permanent outdoor stage was dedicated, JCPRD launched its first Kansas City Corporate Challenge (KCCC) with 18 participating companies for one weekend of competition.

KCCC started as the vision of a few local sports enthusiasts.

“In 1980, the U.S. boycotted the Moscow Olympics, and these sports enthusiasts approached JCPRD about having our own Olympics, right here in Kansas City,” Jill Geller, JCPRD director, explained.

“Instead of countries competing against one another, companies would compete. JCPRD was eager to be a part of such a terrific event, and we’ve administered the games since their inception. Who would have dreamed that the KCCC would become bigger than the actual Olympic games?”

That comparison is not mere hyperbole. While the 2016 Rio Olympics drew 11,237 athletes from 207 countries to compete in 28 different sports, the 2018 KCCC drew approximately 33,000 athletes from 222 companies competing in 30 sports.

The 2019 Kansas City Corporate Challenge, which began April 5, ends June 22, featuring more than 33,500 athletes, 265 companies and 29 sports.

*Instead of countries competing against each other, companies would compete. Who would have dreamed that the KCCC would become bigger than the actual Olympic games?*

JCPRD Director Jill Geller

The KCCC is now the largest corporate games in the world, according to JCPRD. Officials estimate more than 500,000 individuals and approximately 700 different companies have taken part since the program started in 1980.

More information about the KCCC and its schedule of events is available at kccorporatechallenge.com.
Building a strong Johnson County community through innovation and collaboration

Partnerships with cities, schools, private businesses and others improve the lives of residents

by THERESA FREED

Johnson County exemplifies innovation and collaboration - working hand-in-hand with partners to build a strong community while embracing new concepts, information and methods to provide residents with vital programs and services.

Collaboration is nothing new in Johnson County. Since 1983, the county has partnered with cities on constructing and maintaining major roads through the County Assistance Road System (CARS). A few years later, in 1990, Johnson County created the Stormwater Management Program, to help cities control their stormwater. There are countless examples of collaboration over the county’s history, and too many to include in just one story.

Here’s a sampling of ways in which working with community partners the county has improved services to those who call Johnson County home.

Encouraging a safe and healthy community

Every resident deserves to feel safe and well. Many Johnson County departments offer direct services to residents to help those in the community achieve wellness, including mental wellness. Johnson County Mental Health Center (JCMHC) Director Tim DeWeese knows that when it comes to addressing behavioral health, collaboration is key, and can be especially impactful within the criminal justice system.

“Collaboration with law enforcement has been successful at getting mental health services to those in need, while minimizing their risk of incarceration that can further problems and delay appropriate response,” said DeWeese.

Although the partnership is not new between law enforcement, the mental health system, courts, affected residents and their families, the Kansas Law Enforcement Crisis Intervention Team continues to employ new training and tactics to reduce recidivism and arrests by diverting individuals with mental illness to appropriate mental health service providers.

“We’ve collaborated between city, county and state partners on this project and it makes us a better community by addressing mental health concerns as a shared problem. No one entity owns the problem, and no one entity has the solution to the problem. We all have to work together on this,” said Robert Sullivan, Johnson County Department of Corrections director. “Johnson County is well-positioned to do this kind of work.”

Collaboration between partners has also led to Johnson County being selected as a Stepping Up Innovator County for its expertise in taking action to reduce the number of people in jail who experience mental illness. Johnson County is the only agency in the state to receive this honor, and just one of seven in the nation. Innovator counties were evaluated on four key measures: jail bookings, length of stay in jail, connections to treatment and recidivism.

Co-responders to the rescue. In 2011, Johnson County Mental Health’s co-responder program launched with the Olathe Police Department, and has since grown to cover nearly every city in the county. A mental health co-responder is embedded with law enforcement and, among other duties, offers support on the scene when someone is in need.

Mental Health First Aid. Johnson County has been named a Mental Health First Aid Champion and has provided Mental Health First Aid training to 2,200 individuals throughout the community. Mental Health First Aid is a groundbreaking public education program that helps the public identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders.

Data Science for Social Good. Johnson County Government collaborates with the University of Chicago on Data Science for

No one entity owns the problem, and no one entity has the solution. We all have to work together on this.

Department of Corrections Director Robert Sullivan

This map shows a color-coded coverage area for each of six co-responders. These clinicians are embedded with police departments to serve municipalities all over the county.
Social Good, a fellowship program focused on reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for people with complex health needs. In 2018, Johnson County expanded the program’s access to police department and public health data, improving the data analytics. In turn, the Mental Health Center can effectively allocate resources for proactive and preventative methods, including outreach and case management, toward reducing the number of individuals with mental health concerns in the criminal justice system.

United Healthcare transportation pilot. Another way in which county and community partners are working together to improve outcomes for those with mental health concerns is through a successful pilot project that shows great promise for future collaboration. Two years ago, JCMHC entered into a unique pilot program agreement with Kansas Medicaid provider United Healthcare, which allows some JCMHC clients to provide other clients with behavioral health needs rides to their medical services appointments. In 2018, the peer-support effort involved 34,427 rides. During the first phase of the pilot, Oct. 1, 2017-Sept. 1, 2018, the percentage of client-missed appointments dropped from 40% to less than 2%.

David Stump is a driver participant who values the program. He is able to mentor others while also earning income and building his resume.

“Helping to give people rides where they need to go, providing these valuable services not only helped me to feel part of a team, but helped get me back into being productive in a time when that’s exactly what I needed,” Stump said. “It’s been a great help.”

Approximately 33% of clients participating in the pilot found full-time employment and 88% of clients transitioned off Medicaid benefits.

Disaster response coordination. Being ready to respond swiftly and effectively when disaster strikes requires significant pre-planning, coordination and collaboration. NotifyJoCo, the county’s mass emergency notification system, was created through a unique partnership between Johnson County, WaterOne, 12 municipalities, and two fire districts within the county. In cooperation with these agencies, Johnson County Emergency Management administers the system to ensure public safety officials have the ability to quickly alert the community about emergencies.

In preparation for the spring storm season, on March 4, the annual countywide test of NotifyJoCo was conducted, disseminating notifications to more than 230,000 contacts within seven minutes.

“NotifyJoCo is a great example of local innovation and partnership,” Dan Robeson, deputy director of Emergency Management said. “When there is an event that could impact the safety of residents, we want to inform everyone as quickly as possible. NotifyJoCo allows us to provide critical information to people when they need it most.”

MED-ACT peer support in times of trauma. In 2018, MED-ACT ambulances were dispatched more than 51,112 times in response to medical emergencies. Repeated exposure to tragedies can create secondary trauma for first responders. To help these public servants cope with this occupational hazard, MED-ACT has fully implemented a peer support group.

The group is comprised of 17 members from all ranks and shifts who are available to provide support and offer private counsel to their co-workers as well as other agencies in the region.

Pulse Point. In late 2017, Johnson County joined forces with local fire departments and emergency medical services to introduce Pulse Point. The free mobile app alerts citizens trained in full or hands-only cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) when someone in a nearby public place suffers sudden cardiac arrest. Public safety communications centers send alerts through the app at the same time they dispatch first responders to the scene. The collaboration between agencies and the community outreach efforts have improved the likelihood of survival from a cardiac arrest event.

Promoting student success

United efforts to address youth suicide. Several Johnson County departments are teaming up with area schools to address the ongoing tragedy of youth suicide. Johnson County District Attorney staff joined a panel presentation to the general public at Olathe East, South and North high schools recently to discuss current trends related to mental health and or substance abuse issues in the schools. Johnson County Mental Health and the District Attorney’s Office joined other county agencies, Johnson County school districts, health care institutions and concerned

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citizens in starting the Zero Reasons Why campaign to address teenage suicides.

Impact Olathe and Project H.O.M.E. Johnson County residents are best served when organizations throughout the community work together to create solutions. Project H.O.M.E. (Housing Opportunities Move Everyone) in the Shawnee Mission School District and Impact Olathe for the Olathe Public Schools are collaborative community programs that serve students and families who are considered homeless, which includes not just students who live on the streets or in their cars, but also students who live with other families, in a shelter or in a hotel. The Shawnee Mission School District has partnered with Johnson County Mental Health and others to provide centralized access to community services twice a month with Project H.O.M.E. Similarly, Olathe Public Schools brings community partners, such as Johnson County Human Services, together on a biweekly basis.

“For many families, scheduling appointments with various community resource agencies all over the county is not possible because of the lack of transportation, the inability to take time off work and other barriers for these families,” said Olathe Public Schools Community Liaison Heather Schoonover.

Olathe Public Schools in the juvenile justice and mental health facilities. As Johnson County youth are temporarily housed in facilities—whether they are awaiting adjudication in the Detention Center or receiving drug and alcohol treatment through the Adolescent Center for Treatment, an emphasis is placed on every youth to help maintain their educational path. The successful partnership with Olathe Public Schools has allowed educators the opportunity to work directly with residents in both programs to ensure that no time is lost in their schooling. Anne-Marie Bixler-Funk serves as a lead teacher at the Adolescent Center for Treatment.

“We work really hard to support each other and student needs, as well as to understand roles and responsibilities in terms of what we need to do as educators to meet the academic needs of the students we serve. It’s a really good partnership,” Bixler-Funk said. “I’ve had a couple of instances where kids call me and let me know that they did finish school.”

Improving access to resources and services

Library partnership with private business. Black & Veatch continues a successful partnership by renewing a three-year commitment to the Black & Veatch MakerSpace at Central Resource Library. The renewed gift permits the pursuit of interesting new projects, including expansion of STEM programming, outreach with county educators, and expansion of the popular circulating Maker Kits.

Volunteer Management System pilot. More than a dozen county departments, agencies and offices rely heavily on volunteers. Three of the county’s departments piloted a new Volunteer Management System for those who are interested in volunteer opportunities in Developmental Supports, Human Services and the Johnson County Library. In 2018, these three departments alone made use of 2,861 community volunteers working more than 81,300 hours.

Employment opportunities

Through strong supports and services, Johnson County has been able to remain a great place for people of all abilities to find and keep a job. In fact, in 2018, we experienced an increase of 5,000 employed residents. Community collaboration further makes it possible for residents with disabilities and those with a criminal history to enter the workforce.

End-Dependence Kansas. End-Dependence Kansas works with more than 40 employers in Johnson County to help jobseekers with disabilities find competitive, community employment.

Project SEARCH. This unique program assists adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities by matching their skills to employment opportunities in the community. This national program that began in 1996 launched in Johnson County in 2014, with a 100% success rate.
Crave a lush thick lawn?
It all starts with a soil test!

Start your lawn and garden off right this spring — get your FREE* soil test!

- Applying just the right kind and right amount of fertilizer saves you money AND protects our water quality
- Johnson County Residents, get one FREE soil test and a personal recommendation for your lawn or garden from a local university expert

Learn how to take a proper soil sample at:

johnson.k-state.edu
or call 913.715.7000

* Basic fertility test; a $12 offer. Funding provided by the Johnson County Stormwater Management Program. Limit one free soil test per Johnson County address.
Here is just a sample of some of the Johnson County events you can enjoy this spring and summer. You can find more at jocogov.org.

**May 2019**

**Thursday, May 2**
First performance of Theatre in the Park’s “Forever Plaid” INDOOR at the Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center. Visit theatreinthepark.org for showtimes and tickets.

**Thursday, May 9**
Meet Oscar-winning screenwriter and KU Professor Kevin Willmott and see his documentary on William Allen White! 7-9 p.m. at the Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center.

**Friday, May 10**
A FREE half day conference that equips individuals in the process of recovery and their family members with the skills and tools they need to have continued success. 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Cleveland University - 10850 Lowell Ave., Overland Park. To register, call 913-715-7880.

**Saturday, May 18**
Bring your kids in for Nacho Regular Tacos! 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at 11811 S. Sunset Dr., Suite 1500, Olathe. Call 913-715-7000.

**Monday, May 27**
County offices closed for Memorial Day.

**June 2019**

**Saturday, June 1**
Temporary exhibit “Expanding Oz” opens at the Johnson County Museum

**Monday, June 3**
Last day to file for the Aug. 6 Primary Election. Learn more at jocoelection.org

**Friday, June 7**
Theatre in the Park’s outdoor season kicks off with Annie! Visit theatreinthepark.org for showtimes and tickets.

**Thursday, June 13**
Learn to help someone in crisis with Mental Health First Aid. 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 6000 Lamar, Mission. $10 cost includes lunch. Call 913-715-7880 to register.

**Tuesday, June 18**
Bring your rolling pin to bake a mouth-watering summer pie. 6-8 p.m. at 11811 S. Sunset Dr., Suite 1500, Olathe.
JoCo Breastfeeding Coalition
3rd Tuesday of every month

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 83.8% of Kansas moms initiate breastfeeding, but this number drops to 50.5% by the time the child is 6 months and 32.4% at 12 months. There’s no question that breastfeeding benefits moms and babies, yet a lack of support from healthcare providers, workplaces, and other systems often prevent moms from reaching their breastfeeding goals.

Johnson County community members recently met and formed a coalition to discuss the landscape of breastfeeding support in Johnson County. The conversation explored barriers to breastfeeding and generated project ideas for areas of improvement.

The coalition hopes to bring together even more members of the community who have personal breastfeeding experience or who play a role in breastfeeding outcomes. The group meets the 3rd Tuesday of the month from 2 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. at the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment, 6000 Lamar Avenue, Mission, KS. Contact Danica at Danica.Pelzel@jocogov.org or call 913-826-1229 for more information.

by BARBARA MITCHELL

National Bike to School Day
Wednesday, May 8

Get out the tire pump: National Bike to School Day is May 8th! This event encourages kids and families to be physically active on the way to school and raises awareness about road safety. In Johnson County, bike to school days have often been a catalyst for neighborhoods and cities to improve the built environment for walkers and bikers.

To date, the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment and community partners have worked with more than 15 area elementary schools. Activities can involve major change, but more often are as simple as mapping safe routes to school or organizing kids and parents to walk/bike on specific days. Local schools who wish to participate can register for free at walkbiketoschool.org. For a Safe Routes to School Checklist, visit livewell.jocogov.org/safe-routes.

Five more reasons to join the fun on May 8:

1. Many children do not get the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity daily – being active on the way to and from school can help close that gap.
2. Walking or biking to school helps students arrive focused and ready to learn. Kids who are physically active perform better academically.
3. Kids and parents can build community, socialize and have fun while building their pedestrian and bike safety skills.
4. Neighborhoods can use this day to identify opportunities to improve the pedestrian and cyclist environment.
5. Active transportation supports sustainability by reducing air pollution, traffic congestion and safety concerns around schools.

by MEGAN FOREMAN

July 2019

Thursday, July 4
County offices closed for Independence Day

Tuesday, July 9
Learn about Medicare and Medicare supplements.
Free Medicare seminar, 5:30-7 p.m. at 11811 S Sunset Drive, Suite 1500, Olathe. Call 913-715-7000 to register.

Tuesday, July 16
Last day to register to vote in the Aug. 6 Primary Election. Learn more at jocoelection.org.

Thursday, July 18
Perfect your vegetarian/vegan cooking skills.
6-8 p.m. at 11811 S. Sunset Drive, Suite 1500, Olathe. Call 913-715-7000 to register.

Monday, July 29
Advance voting in person for the Primary Election begins. Learn more at jocoelection.org.
We all play a role in our local food system
Johnson County Food Policy Council shares how you can become an advocate for healthy food

by RENEE BRYANT

When we think about maintaining our good health, eating the right foods is one of the most important things we can do. However, accessing healthy food is still a challenge for many residents in Johnson County. The Board of County Commissioners appointed the Johnson County Food Policy Council (JCFPC) in 2016 to address these concerns. Members of the council represent all segments of the food system and support the county’s efforts to shape and influence public policy. The council also works with public and private sectors to improve access to healthy food and strengthen the local food economy.

“To improve healthy food access we must address the whole food system,” said Lougene Marsh, director of Johnson County Department of Health and Environment. “Our food system is complex - it’s how food is produced, processed, distributed, consumed and wasted.”

In 2018 the council identified four issues for further study that affect Johnson County’s food system: Hunger Free Healthcare, Food Insecurity, Food Waste Solutions and Local Food Production. Here are a few ideas for how the public can help:

**Grow your own food**

There are many benefits of gardening at home. It is a great way to be physically active and spend time with your family. Getting our kids to eat vegetables can be hard, but if they grow it themselves they are more likely to eat it.

“Our whole family benefits when we grow our own food,” said Sherri Thomas, Overland Park. “Freshly picked from the garden is as healthy and nutritious as you can get. I also have more control over what’s on my food. It doesn’t travel from far away, sit in trucks or on the grocery shelves, losing its nutritional value and flavor.”

**Seek expert gardening advice**

Johnson County K-State Research and Extension has all the resources needed to garden, with recommended fruit and vegetable varieties proven to produce in our climate. You can access crop specific fact sheets, educational classes and experts are ready to answer your fruit and vegetable questions. Just contact the gardening hotline at garden.help@jocogov.org or 913-715-7050 or at johnson.k-state.edu.

**Volunteer at one of your local community gardens**

There are many ways to help those who do not have access to healthy foods in addition to donating to local food pantries or volunteering in a soup kitchen. Each year around 150-200 volunteers help out in the Women, Infant and Children’s (WIC) Community Garden.

“The garden educates, empowers and feeds the clients in the WIC program,” said Laura Grimmett, Johnson County WIC program manager. “Thanks to our volunteers, we have harvested a total in excess of 4,000 pounds of produce for women and children in our community.”

Gardeners of all experience levels are welcome to volunteer. Find out how at jocogov.org/community-garden.

**Buy local**

Buying locally-grown food has economic benefits and keeps a greater portion—25% more—of every food dollar in the local economy. This helps farmers grow their business, enables them to expand their employment of local farm laborers, and helps prevent the loss of agricultural land in Johnson and surrounding counties.

There are eight farmer’s markets in Johnson County where you’ll find fresh-cut flowers, local honey, free-range eggs, baked goods and locally-grown produce. Visit one of your local markets in Gardner, Lenexa, Mission, Olathe (2), Overland Park, Merriam and Shawnee to help support your local farmer.

**Reduce food waste at home**

Up to 40% of food produced in the United States is never eaten. U.S. household food waste totals 76 billion pounds, or 238 pounds of food per person annually. This costs $450 per person, or $1,800 per year for a household of four.

Why do we waste?

- Lack of awareness and information
- Confusion over date labels
- Poor storage
- Poor planning
- Impulse and bulk purchases
- Overproduction
Food waste is about more than just food. It’s about how our food system uses a considerable amount of our resources and accounts for $218 billion lost. Food waste consumes 21% of all fresh water, 19% of all fertilizer, 18% of cropland and 21% of our landfill volume. Johnson County weighed in above average at 23% in 2016. Reducing food waste will relieve agricultural pressures on the environment and increase business efficiencies for food producers and sellers.

How we shop and eat makes a difference. Households are responsible for the largest portion of all food waste. Because it has undergone more transport, storage and often cooking, throwing food away at the consumer level has a larger resource footprint than at any other point of the food chain.

**Help save the food**

JCFPC is teaming up with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Ad Council to launch a national public service campaign, Save The Food, that aims to combat wasted food through its largest source - consumers - by raising awareness and changing behavior.

The website, [savethefood.com](http://savethefood.com), has tips and techniques on planning, shopping, preparing, cooking and even how to estimate how much food to make for that next family party.

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**Get involved in Johnson County**

For more information on the JCFPC or how to get involved contact Renee Bryant, food policy and advocacy coordinator, Johnson County Department of Health and Environment, at renee.bryant@jocogov.org or 913-477-8325.

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**What you can do at home**

- Shop wisely by planning meals, using shopping lists, purchasing accurate quantities, and avoiding impulse buys.
- Interpret date labels as estimates of top quality rather than end dates for safety.
- Prepare appropriate amounts of food and save leftovers.
- Freeze food before it spoils, including milk, cheese, eggs and meat.

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**Stay up-to-date on these issues and more at [jocogov.org](http://jocogov.org).**

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**PAID ADVERTISEMENT**

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**Storm drains lead directly to creeks and streams**

**Clean water starts at home**

- Compost yard waste or dispose using curbside service. Don't dump in ditches or waterways.
- Direct downspouts onto lawns and away from paved surfaces.
- Check car for leaks. Recycle motor oil. Never pour it on the ground or into a storm drain.
- Reduce pesticides use. Most issues resolve themselves.
- Follow directions on product labels. Sweep chemicals off driveways, sidewalks, and roads so they don't get into storm drains.
- Direct mower clippings back onto the lawn, keeping them off paved surfaces.
- Pick up after your pet. Don't let pet waste wash into storm drains.

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**Never put anything into storm drains... only rain goes down the drain!**

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for more information contact [johnson.k-state.edu](http://johnson.k-state.edu) | 913.715.7000

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Art concept originally created by Tennessee State University’s WaterWorks program and funded in part with Tennessee Dept. of Ag, Nonpoint Source Program, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
Winter in review
An interview with Public Works Director Brian Pietig

by KEITH DAVENPORT

We recently sat down with Johnson County Engineer and Director of Public Works Brian Pietig to talk about his department’s work during our snowy winter.

JoCo Magazine: What is Johnson County Public Works responsible for?

Brian Pietig: The county’s Public Works department is responsible for the unincorporated area, meaning the areas that are not cities. So the cities take care of their jurisdictions, the state takes care of the interstates and highways, and the county manages what is really the rural area.

JCM: So there are some subdivision or residential areas in the unincorporated areas, right?

BP: There are, but we mostly have arterial roads. There are about 70 miles of residential roads and 370 miles of arterial roads.

JCM: What’s unique about managing snow events in unincorporated areas of the county?

BP: We have roads that are essentially unimproved, which means they don’t have street lights on the side of the roads that act as guideposts, or traffic signals every mile or half-mile. The roads are unlit. Our roads, because they are unimproved, have edge drop-offs, they don’t have shoulders. Sometimes our people literally have to get out to kick the snow to see where the road is. It’s a different animal. We also have gravel roads. You can’t salt them or plow them without moving away all the rock, too. It’s just different infrastructure, and not quite an apples-to-apples comparison with the cities.

JCM: So what do you do when there is snow on gravel?

BP: When it gets to about 3” we can take our motorgraders out and float a blade just above the surface and knock it off, but those roads will remain largely snow packed until the spring.

JCM: We think about your crews regularly during the winter, driving snow plows. What do these crews do the rest of the year?

BP: We have the bridges and the roads that we’re responsible for; we have a very narrow focus. In the spring, summer and fall we’re out maintaining those roads. That’s anything from grading gravel roads, chip sealing, mowing, filling potholes and that kind of thing. Our work is very seasonal.

JCM: We know a lot of roads took a beating this winter. What is Public Works’ plan for that?

BP: We’re lucky that our paved roads are in really good shape. We use a preventative maintenance called chip seal that keeps water from penetrating the asphalt, freezing and thawing over and over again to create potholes. Cities don’t have the ability to use chip sealing because of traffic volume.

Our gravel roads are what really took a beating. They go through that freeze/thaw cycle and create a muddy muck with potholes and ruts. We just have to wait until the sun and wind dry them out, then we can go out and start working on them.

Connect with us!
Stay updated on news and events throughout Johnson County through your favorite social media platform.
SUMMER CLASSES: YOUR TICKET TO A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

Summer is approaching, and you know what that means—it’s time to soak up knowledge, bask in new opportunities and earn valuable credit hours at Johnson County Community College. Throughout June and July, make JCCC your go-to destination for competitive tuition rates, smaller classes sizes and flexible online and on-campus options.

Ready... Set...
Secure your summer plans.
Visit jccc.edu/enroll to learn more.
The legislative powers of Johnson County Government are vested in a seven-member Board of County Commissioners that exercises its authority to ensure the general health, safety and welfare of the public.

The board is composed of an at-large chairman and one representative from each of the six districts in the county.

Chairman Ed Eilert
913-715-0500

Becky Fast
1st District
913-715-0431

Jim Allen
Vice chair,
2nd District
913-715-0432

Steve Klika
3rd District
913-715-0433

Michael Ashcraft
5th District
913-715-0435

Janeé Hanzlick
4th District
913-715-0434

Mike Brown
6th District
913-715-0436

County commission districts

Eilert delivers 2019 State of the County address

At a new location in the Olathe Conference Center, Chairman Ed Eilert’s message during the March 26 State of the County address focused on all of the important work being done to Build Strong Communities.

More than 700 people attended the event, sponsored by the Johnson County Public Policy Council and hosted by the Leawood Chamber of Commerce. Chairman Eilert kicked off his comments with a pop quiz, where attendees tested their Johnson County trivia prowess with a live polling tool. He wove the correct answers to the questions throughout his remarks.

In his speech, Chairman Eilert provided updates on the new Johnson County Courthouse, Tomahawk Creek Wastewater Treatment Facility expansion, new Medical Examiner Facility, Meadowbrook Park and the new Lenexa Library.

“Building a strong community requires investing for Johnson County today and Johnson County yet to come,” said Chairman Eilert. “In doing so, it has been a very busy year with capital projects starting or nearing completion in all corners of our county.”

The chairman highlighted the work several county departments are doing, including the Department of Corrections and Johnson County Developmental Supports, to train clients in marketable skills and support them in their efforts to gain competitive employment.

The address also recognized the important work done by the county’s Human Services department and Mental Health Center to serve vulnerable populations. In 2018, Johnson County was selected as one of seven counties in the nation as a Stepping Up Innovator County by the National Association of Counties.

The chairman closed with commentary on the important work done by county staff every day in collaboration with community partners to make Johnson County one of the best counties in the country.

“Our future is brighter, our challenges will be met and our communities will continue to be known as great places to live, work and raise a family,” Eilert said.
What should Johnson County residents be watching for as spring turns to summer? Here are a few things to keep on your radar.

2020 Budget
The Board of County Commissioners and county staff have been working on Johnson County Government’s fiscal year 2020 budget for the past several months. The public will start to hear about budgetary plans for next year on Thursday, May 9, when County Manager Penny Postoak Ferguson presents an overview of the proposed 2020 budget to the board. On the subsequent Thursdays in May, the board will receive more details during department budget discussions. June 20 is the date when the board is scheduled to set its maximum expenditures.

All of these discussions are open to the public and residents are encouraged to attend in person or watch online. They take place at 1 p.m. in the third floor hearing room of the Johnson County Government Administration Building (111 S. Cherry Street, Olathe.) You can also watch the presentations online from a link available at jocogov.org.

Lenexa City Center Library
The new Lenexa City Center Library will open its doors to the public with an opening event from 1 to 5 p.m. on Sunday, June 2. The address is 8788 Penrose Lane, near Lenexa City Hall.

During the ribbon cutting, public officials will address attendees, and Emerita Poet Laureate of Kansas, Wyatt Townley, will recite a work commissioned for the occasion. Library staff will conduct tours of the new building, and attendees can meet Stephen T. Johnson, an award-winning children’s book illustrator who is installing a new work of public art at the site.

The new 40,000-square-foot building occupies two floors. In addition to high-quality library services, the new space features:
• Public meeting rooms
• Public computers
• A robust children’s programming area

Lenexa City Center will be the sixth Johnson County Library branch open on Sundays. It replaces Lenexa’s Lackman branch at 15345 W 87th Street Parkway.

For images of the new library as well as a time lapse video of construction, please visit jocolibrary.org/locations/lenexa.

Count Me in JoCo launch
Campaign created to make sure everyone in Johnson County gets counted in 2020

Next year, the U.S. government will attempt to count every resident in the nation. Mandated by the Constitution, the census takes place every 10 years and the next one begins April 1, 2020.

Several Johnson County cities, chambers, school districts, non-profits and other organizations joined Johnson County Government to form a Complete Count Committee (CCC). Among them is Workforce Partnership.

“We work with job seekers who experience barriers to employment such as unstable housing, low English proficiency or lack of internet access. Those barriers may impact their ability to participate in the 2020 Census,” said Workforce Partnership Executive Director Keely J. Schneider. “It is vital to ensure that even our most vulnerable populations are counted.”

This spring, the Johnson County CCC launched Count Me In JoCo, a year-long campaign to educate residents about the importance of the census and how they can participate. The campaign includes the launch of a new website, countmeinjoco.org. On social media, you can join the conversation with the hashtag #CountMeInJoCo.

Data collected in the census directs the proper portion of $800 billion in federal funds to local communities for local programs. “For every household that doesn’t get counted, we lose $39,000 in federal funding over a 10-year period that could have been used for maintaining roads, funding Medicare and other important programs,” says Alan E. Organ, M.D., PhD, U.S. Census Bureau partnership specialist.

Census data is also used to determine the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives, ensuring that states have fair representation in federal lawmaking. In addition, states use census data to redraw or confirm legislative and school districts.
**Three Questions**  
by LORI SAND

**Christopher Moss**  
Assistant Superintendent/Treatment  
I use a biological process to treat wastewater at the Middle Basin Treatment Plant.

**Nydia Smith**  
Women, infants and children (WIC) Dietitian  
I work with lower income families and share accurate information about nutrition and the benefits of breastfeeding. I also provide supplemental foods.

**Jeremy Struble**  
Railroad Specialist II  
I oversee the shortline railroad operations and conduct engineer and conductor training, while working daily as a locomotive engineer at New Century AirCenter.

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**What do you do?**

My responsibilities are primarily to assist with operation and management of the Middle Basin Wastewater Treatment Plant and supervise its personnel.

I provide nutrition counseling and education, tailor monthly food packages, and provide referrals to other community resources in Johnson County to pregnant and postpartum moms, babies, and children under 5 years of age who are participating in the WIC program.

As an FRA certified designated supervisor of locomotive engineers, locomotive engineer and conductor, I ensure that the JCAX Railroad meets all rules, regulations and codes. I am also involved with everyday operations as either a locomotive engineer or conductor, in charge of all movement of the train and railcar switching on the ground.

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**What do you like most about your job?**

I have a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in knowing the positive role my job plays in ensuring a clean environment and preserving overall public health.

There is a lot of false information about nutrition out there and many of our clients do not have access to a nutrition professional, so I love it when a family and I engage in nutrition discussions that will benefit the health of pregnant moms, babies, children and later on as adults.

I enjoy my job today just as much as I did when I started 20 years ago. I like the challenge of figuring out the most efficient way to switch railroad cars and deliver them to our seven tenants. I am also blessed to be able to work every day with a good friend of 20 years, Jeff Hale.

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**How does the work you do affect the lives of Johnson County residents?**

The work that I and my wastewater peers do contributes significantly to clean water reuse, disease control and an overall healthy environment for Johnson County residents.

By providing people with the education and foods they need at a crucial time of human development, I am helping residents live a healthier life. Also, about half of the clients I see are Spanish speaking and since I am bilingual and bicultural, there's no need for phone interpretation and nothing is lost in translation. These clients have expressed how grateful they are to be speaking to a Latina health professional.

In addition to rail service provided by the Johnson County Airport Commission, other services include General Aviation at the New Century AirCenter and Johnson County Executive Airport, Business Park facilities, a water system and shortline railroad. They ensure a premier gateway to Johnson County, contributing to business growth and a high quality of life; attracting development and growing the economy, benefiting all county residents.
10 things
you need to know during severe weather season

Everyone wants to stay safe during a severe weather event, but few people think about being prepared until the sirens start going off. With severe weather season upon us, now is the time to understand best safety practices, make a plan, and get your family ready for the wild weather to come.

1. Learn what to listen for in a weather forecast.

Tornado WATCH: Be prepared. Conditions are favorable for development of storms that are capable of producing a tornado.

Tornado WARNING: Seek shelter. A tornado has been spotted or could occur on short notice.

2. Brush up on outdoor warning siren 101.

When you hear an outdoor warning siren, seek shelter and additional information. There are about 200 outdoor warning sirens in Johnson County, which are owned and maintained by various jurisdictions and tested and activated by Johnson County Emergency Management.

3. Sign up or update your NotifyJoCo account.

NotifyJoCo is the county’s emergency notification system with the ability to call and send texts and email alerts. You may designate up to five locations for which you would like to receive the alerts. Visit notifyjoco.org or call 913-826-5555.

4. Consider using a NOAA weather radio.

Weather radios are a vital piece of the preparedness puzzle because they automatically notify you of the hazards you select. Modern weather radios aren’t like those your grandparents used; you can choose the alerts you want to receive (tornado, flash flood, severe thunderstorm, etc.) for the location you specify.

5. If you’re caught outside during a tornado...

If you can, attempt to drive away from the tornado. If driving is not an option, park off the road with your seat belt on and cover your head, or go to a low-lying area and lay flat.

6. Continue to monitor the situation.

Just because the warning sirens aren’t going off doesn’t mean it’s safe to leave your shelter. Wait to hear that the warning has been cleared by monitoring a trusted local source.

7. Prepare and make a plan.

To stay safe, be prepared with a plan, use NotifyJoCo and a NOAA Weather Radio, and listen to local media. The county offers an emergency preparedness guide at joco72.org.

8. Report any severe weather you see.

Do you see severe weather outside? Report it to the National Weather Service via social media @nws kansascity and to Johnson County Emergency Management @joco_emergency. If you think you see a tornado, call the National Weather Service immediately at 1-800-438-0596.

9. It doesn’t have to be a tornado to be dangerous.

Severe storms can be characterized by large hail, and winds over 80 mph; not to mention heavy rain and lightning, the deadliest hazard of severe weather.

10. Become a Weather Ready Nation Ambassador

Weather Ready Nation Ambassadors work to inspire others in their community and sphere of influence to be better informed and prepared for severe weather. Learn more at weather.gov.
Anatomy of a Severe Weather Alert

When severe weather is sighted on the horizon in Johnson County, our staff and volunteers act fast to keep you safe. There are lots of ways to be notified when severe weather is coming your way - but it's important to make a plan so you're prepared before it's too late.

Be Prepared

Don’t let severe weather catch you by surprise. Make sure you have at least three ways of receiving an emergency alert, including weather sirens.

1. Weather sirens will alert you to an emergency, but don’t depend on them as your only info source. Keep in mind some rural areas may be out of siren range.

2. Local TV stations will display weather alerts; a weather radio (available at most grocery stores) will turn on in the event of severe weather in your area.

3. Sign up for NotifyJoCo at notifyjoco.org to receive emergency alerts. You can receive a call, text, or email based on your preference.

How a weather alert reaches you

Severe weather is spotted by the National Weather Service (NWS) radar, or by trained storm spotter volunteers, who then notify Johnson County Emergency Management.

The NWS notifies broadcast media, including TV and radio stations, and triggers Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) to notify all cell phones in the affected area.

Johnson County Emergency Management (JCEM) activates weather sirens in the affected area; residents who have opted in to weather alerts through NotifyJoCo are automatically notified.

From first sighting on the radar to sirens blaring in your neighborhood, the whole weather alert process is streamlined to take less than a minute in order to alert residents to dangerous weather as quickly as possible.