

Conversation with the Chairman

Johnson County sets the standard for national benchmarks in quality of services, value received for tax-paid investments, and overall quality of life available to its residents. That's according to a survey of Johnson County citizens conducted this summer. According to survey results, two of three citizens agree that Johnson County is an excellent place to live and raise a family.

And, impressively, Johnson County led all comparable communities in the quality of government services provided and the perceived value for invested tax dollars. In fact, I'm proud to say that three of four citizens believe they receive excellent value for the management of their tax dollars by county government. These high scores indicate that, overall, Johnson County government is doing a good job of meeting—and in some cases exceeding—the needs and expectations of its citizens.

Compared to national trends, Johnson County was one of the few communities across the nation to receive such significantly high marks across all categories, suggesting that the new form of government instituted under the Home Rule Charter has been successful in meeting needs and expectations. For example, Johnson County ranked 40 percent above the national average as a place to raise a family and 31 percent above the national average for overall quality of services and value received for tax investments.

The 2009 Citizen Survey was administered by the Olathe-based ETC Institute, a leading market research firm specializing in local government issues and involved nearly 3,000 households. The survey—the third conducted by the county government in the past five years—is part of ongoing strategic planning efforts to assess citizens' levels of satisfaction with the services and programs county government provides. Among several factors, the survey measured community needs, quality of service, availability, affordability, accessibility, expertise, timeliness, and responsiveness.

Chris Tatham, president of the ETC Institute, said Johnson County was actually “setting the standard” in many areas in the standardized survey instrument, showing continuing increases in satisfaction levels in almost all categories, including overall quality of life, quality of government services, and value received for invested tax dollars.

In particular, respondents ranked the following services and programs as the highest in terms of overall satisfaction: the Johnson County Library, Johnson County Parks & Recreation District, Johnson County Elections Office, and emergency medical services.

The biennial surveys are only a litmus test, however, providing a snapshot about how citizens feel their county government is doing at a particular period of time. While I am very pleased with the positive results of the 2009 survey, we must continue to anticipate, plan for, and address both the challenges and the opportunities facing our community. For example, survey results showed that citizens believe more emphasis could and should be given over the next two years to public safety and law enforcement (including the operation of the county jail), human services, and public transit and transportation-related issues.

So the 2009 Citizen Survey is both an ending and a beginning. It confirms what we already know: that Johnson County government is well-managed, provides top-quality services at an affordable price, and supports a community of choice where people want to live, work, and raise a family. It's reassuring to know that we're on track and meeting the service needs of our citizens. But work remains for us to do.

A few years ago, the Nike corporation ran an ad that included the following slogan: “There is no finish line.” That reminds me of the job before us today. The need to better manage our resources, to budget wisely and invest our tax dollars for maximum benefit, to ensure that the quality of services doesn’t diminish over time—these goals must always be in our minds and our hearts as we seek to serve the people of Johnson County, both today and the generations of the future. It remains a work in progress, with no finish line.

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