

As I see it

By Jim Allen, District 2

Greetings! I am James Patrick Allen, the new District 2 representative of the Board of County Commissioners. Please, just call me Jim.

It was a proud moment for me when I was elected to represent the people of District 2, continuing my almost-two-decade interest in public service. It's my privilege to earn your trust and confidence toward addressing the issues and challenges that affect our neighborhoods, cities, and the future of Johnson County—which has always been my home.

My parents moved to our great county after World War II, first living in Merriam and later settling in Shawnee. I was the second-youngest of seven children. When I was born, Shawnee had a population of roughly 900, gasoline was selling for 20 cents a gallon, a stamp cost three cents, and a new home required a mortgage of about \$16,000.

(1) What year was that?

I attended the Saint Joseph Catholic School system in Shawnee, studying at Saint Joseph High School and playing tight end on the football team (I wasn't really that good, but the team finished 8-1). By the time I received my diploma, Shawnee's population had reached 20,000. The price of gas had increased to 35 cents, stamps cost six cents, and an average mortgage was \$25,600. *(2) What year was that?*

I was in the first class to graduate from Johnson County Community College. My next stop took me to Kansas State Teachers College in Emporia, where I had the good fortune to meet Julie Berquist, a young woman from Salina, who became my wife. We'll celebrate our 35th anniversary in May. We had four sons and are proud grandparents to a granddaughter, Abby. After receiving my bachelor's degree at Emporia, I completed my MBA from Rockhurst College in Kansas City, Mo.

My career in insurance began at a time when Shawnee's population had increased to more than 29,000. Gas? It was being pumped at 86 cents a gallon, and a first-class stamp required 15 cents. The average price for a new home was \$71,800. *(3) What year was that?*

My interest in public service and initial political experience began shortly after I opened the doors of my insurance office, when I was elected to the Shawnee City Council. By that time, the population of Shawnee had boomed to more than 33,000, with a gallon of gas requiring \$1.24; a stamp, 20 cents; and a new home, \$89,800. *(4) What year was that?*

I represented Ward 4 for four years, moved, and was elected commissioner of Ward 1 for another four years. I decided to throw my hat into the race for mayor in a year that found stamps at 29 cents, cheaper gas at \$1.11, and more expensive new homes at an average of \$154,500. The population of Shawnee? It surpassed 40,000. *(5) What year was that?*

Now I have begun another chapter in my life. The five questions I asked above serve a dual purpose: they're a bit of trivia, and they reflect how our lives have changed over the past half century during our lifetimes in Johnson County. During that time, gas prices increased about 10-fold. Stamps will go up to 44 cents May 11, and new homes, until the current recession hit, were costing an average of more than \$250,000 (both

reflect 15-fold changes). The population of my hometown is now more than 60,000, a 60-fold increase since the year I was born.

As a public servant, my title may have changed from time to time but my goals haven't! My first priority continues to be protecting Johnson County's quality of life. My focus remains:

- Using a common-sense approach to setting policy and direction of Johnson County government.
- Addressing the delicate balance of financing essential public services without becoming a taxing burden.
- Doing what's right to create attainable housing, ensure safe communities and neighborhoods, protect the environment, and provide a public transportation system that moves people, not cars.

We have so much to be thankful for in Johnson County. I promise to forge ahead to enhance our quality of life for generations to come. It is your home, family, and neighborhood I am working to sustain.

My door remains open. I always welcome your comments and questions, as they help me make decisions and resolve issues and challenges that face Johnson County now and in the future.

You can reach me by phone (715-0432), fax (715-0440), or e-mail (Jim.Allen@jocogov.org). I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Finally, I promise to remain a commissioner who represents a local government of the people, by the people, for the people. That commitment will never change.

PS: The answers to my questions are: (1) 1951; (2) 1969; (3) 1979; (4) 1983; and (5) 1994.