

Happy New Year, Johnson County!

New Year's resolutions tend to focus on improvements. The New Year brings another 12 months of opportunities to recommit to Johnson County, our "Community of Choice," ensuring that the quality of life we enjoy remains unequalled.

The late Kansas City columnist Bill Vaughan offered some insight about this time of year by saying, "An optimist stays up until midnight to see the new year in. A pessimist stays up to make sure the old year leaves."

With the passing of the old year and the arrival of the new, the county will continue to provide the best basic services possible while meeting the demands of the people who proudly call Johnson County their home.

As 2008 begins, I'd like to highlight some successes of the past year and glance at the year ahead.

In 2007, Johnson County continued to demonstrate budgetary restraint and held the line on property taxes for the 2008 fiscal year. That's living up to our goal of being good stewards of our taxpayers' money and wisely investing their money in ways that enrich the community and the quality of life to be found in Johnson County.

Last year, the county continued its longstanding, firm commitment to keep public safety as its top priority, starting construction of a new County Communications Center in Olathe and an expansion of the Adult Detention Center at the New Century AirCenter at Gardner.

The county, in partnership with the city of Olathe, also began expanding the parking garage in downtown Olathe. The city-county jointly funded project will almost double the number of parking spaces to serve downtown workers and visitors.

Finally, county government also established new records in 2007 through its employees, meeting human service needs of the Johnson County community by collecting 146.9 tons of food in the Feed the Need campaign and donating \$134,296 in the United Way campaign. Through those means, the county continues to deliver high-quality services and programs amid increasing demands by doing for people what they cannot do for themselves.

So, what's ahead?

Throughout 2008, the county will continue to dedicate significant resources to important infrastructure projects in partnership with Johnson County cities to connect, serve, and protect all citizens and to fuel economic development, growth, and the local economy.

The county will provide \$15.4 million to fund 13 projects in 11 cities through the County Assistance Road System program and almost \$14.8 million to fund 10 design/construction projects and other flood mitigation efforts through the Stormwater Management program.

In just a few weeks, the Board of County Commissioners will begin deliberating the 2009 budget, which will focus heavily on public safety and existing programs provided by county government. In a quest for a dedicated funding source, the county will ask voters, in an Aug. 5 primary election, to renew an existing quarter-cent sales tax to provide revenue for the county's growing public safety needs.

If approved, renewal of the sales tax would be effective Jan. 1, 2009, and would provide much-needed revenue for expanded jail operations, construction of a new crime lab and a low-risk offender facility at the Juvenile Services Complex, and conversion of the downtown Olathe jail into a countywide central booking and 72-hour holding facility.

Let me point out that these projects—while attached to county government—actually serve the entire Johnson County community. Our jails, crime lab, and juvenile justice programs serve all Johnson Countians, regardless of where they live.

Public safety is the *county's* top priority, but it also remains a *community* responsibility, and these projects, in partnership with a dedicated funding source, will benefit the entire Johnson County community.

Yes, the New Year is a time to pause and reflect, a time to consider new challenges and to set a bold course for the future. While things have been good, we know that things can always be better.

Our citizens expect the highest quality of county services and programs at the lowest possible cost. They expect to be safe in their homes and neighborhoods. They expect their children to receive the best education available. They expect leadership and wise investment of their money by their elected officials.

All these things, and more, will be the focus of your elected county officials as we begin another year working for you.

Again, I wish a happy and healthful New Year to all Johnson County residents!

*Annabeth.Surbaugh@jocogov.org; 913-715-0500*