

## **As I see it**

*By Ed Eilert, District 4*

Some friends of Johnson County government need more friends from the Johnson County community.

They are the special volunteers, called Friends, who help the Johnson County Park and Recreation District and its Theatre in the Park, Johnson County Library, Johnson County Museum, and Johnson County Developmental Supports through nonprofit organizations supporting these county departments and agencies.

The **Friends of Johnson County Library** organization has been around for more than half a century and now numbers more than 900 members. It was the grassroots organization that founded the library in 1952 and operated the first volunteer libraries in the county until county funding was received three years later.

The library's Friends have provided leadership and support, raised community awareness of library programs and services, and served as a vital core of volunteers for the library in so many ways, including special events, operating two used-book stores, and staffing used-book sales during the year.

It's easy and inexpensive to become a Friend of Johnson County Library. Annual individual memberships cost \$20 and family memberships are \$25. Membership forms are available at the 13 library locations or the Friends bookstores at the Antioch and Blue Valley libraries. You may also mail a check, with your name and address, to: Friends of the Library, PO Box 183, Shawnee Mission, KS 66201. Membership may also be made online at [www.jocolibrary.org/friends](http://www.jocolibrary.org/friends). For more information, call 913-261-2319.

The **Friends of Johnson County Museum** group was founded in 1988 to raise awareness of the Johnson County Museum and funds for its operations. The nonprofit organization has approximately 250 active members.

The Friends support the museum in critical ways, including raising monies to support exhibit development, marketing of museum programs and exhibits, and special events. The Friends fund two part-time staff members, who provide tours of museum exhibits and sites.

Membership fees for the Friends of Johnson County Museum start at \$25. More details about the organization are available through the museum's Web site, [www.jocomuseum.org](http://www.jocomuseum.org). A membership form may be downloaded at [www.jocomuseum.org/docs/donate\\_form.htm](http://www.jocomuseum.org/docs/donate_form.htm).

Founded in 1989, **Friends of Theatre in the Park** is composed of individuals, families, and businesses that support the Johnson County Park and Recreation District's Theatre in the Park at Shawnee Mission Park. In 2007, these Friends numbered more than 400.

The group contributes financially and also recommends program improvements, assists with auditions, coordinates the annual Meet-the-Cast Picnic, helps patrons, and coordinates July Fourth festivities and the annual Celebration of the Stars.

Memberships are available at several levels, and benefits include advance show tickets. For more information, call 913-631-7050, ext. 445, or visit [www.theatreinthepark.org/friendsoftip.cfm](http://www.theatreinthepark.org/friendsoftip.cfm).

The theater's 2008 season begins June 13 with "Oklahoma!"

**Friends for Parks and Recreation** is a community-based action group that began in early 2005. The group helps the Johnson County Park and Recreation District meet goals set out in its 20-year Master Action Plan. It is an independent nonprofit organization of advocates who believe in and support parks and recreation for all people. Restoring ecosystems, protecting wildlife habitat, preserving historic sites, and sponsoring educational programs are among the group's goals.

These Friends are building a community-based support system of contributors and volunteers, businesses, and public and private partners. The group operates concessions at the Kansas City EarthFest each spring, conducts park clean-ups, and is raising funds to restore the historic Mack House at Oakridge Farm, adjacent to Shawnee Mission Park.

For more information, call 913-894-3329 or visit [www.friendsforparks.org](http://www.friendsforparks.org).

The **Friends of Johnson County Developmental Supports** was born on Valentine's Day 1990. Its mission includes supporting issues and challenges related to mental retardation and developmental disabilities, operating an Art Shop featuring original work by JCDS clients, and encouraging charitable giving to JCDS. The county agency has provided community-based services for people with developmental disabilities since 1972.

Annual memberships range from \$25 to \$1,000, with each level of membership offering advantages. For more information about becoming a Friend of JCDS, call 913-826-2626.

I encourage all donors and volunteers to consider membership as a Friend of any or all of these worthwhile organizations. Every donation of time, talent, or money should be celebrated for the gift that it is.

Friendship is always vital—as an individual and as a community. As a county, we depend on the network of nonprofit community-based organizations that provide care, enrichment, support, and assistance for our residents. These organizations depend on community volunteers and contributions.

There are different ways each of us can get involved. It can begin by simply asking yourself the question: “Why not me?” The answer may be, “I'll become a Friend!”

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