

Consolidation: A Green Flag, Not a Checkered Flag



Western Historical Manuscript Collection
Kansas City

Charles N. Kimball Lecture

Carol Marinovich
October 20, 2005

The Charles N. Kimball Lecture Series

is a tribute to our late friend and civic leader, Dr. Charles N. Kimball, President Emeritus of the Midwest Research Institute, to acknowledge his support of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City (WHMC-KC) and his enduring interest in the exchange of ideas.

Charlie Kimball was a consummate networker bringing together people and ideas because he knew that ideas move people to action. His credo, “Chance favors a prepared mind,” reflects the belief that the truest form of creativity requires that we look two directions at once—to the past for guidance and inspiration, and to the future with hope and purpose. The study of experiences, both individual and communal—that is to say history—prepares us to understand and articulate the present and to create our future—to face challenges and to seize opportunities.

Sponsored by the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, the Series is not intended to be a continuation of Charlie’s popular *Midcontinent Perspectives*, but does share his primary goal: to encourage reflection and discourse on issues vitally important to our region. The topic of the lectures may vary, but our particular focus is on understanding how historical developments affect and inform our region’s present and future. The Lectures will be presented by persons from the Kansas City region semi-annually in April, near the anniversary of Charlie’s birth, and in October. Additionally, presentations may occur at other times of the year, if opportunities present themselves.

WHMC-KC appreciates the substantial financial underwriting and support for this Series provided by the **Charles N. Kimball Fund** of the Midwest Research Institute and by other friends of Charlie Kimball.



1911-1994

INTRODUCTION

to the October 20, 2005 Charles N. Kimball Lecture

David Boutros

Associate Director, WHMC-KC

Good afternoon and welcome to the Fall 2005 Charles N. Kimball Lecture. I am David Boutros, Associate Director of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, the sponsor of the Kimball Lecture series.

If you have been to previous lectures or read the published notes we distribute, you know that I usually spend a few moments talking about the purpose of the series, the role of history in interpreting the present and anticipating the future, and Charlie Kimball, a valued friend and supporter of WHMC-KC. You also know that I am not above shamelessly promoting WHMC-KC as a major cultural resource in the region—actually something I do with pride because I was fortunate enough to be in on the establishment of the office and, for 18 years, piloting its destiny.

This year marks the 25th year of WHMC-KC's active presence at UMKC. In those 25 years, we have grown from literally no collections—our first arrived merely days after we opened our doors from Charlie Wheeler, who by the way is still sending us material—to a large, diverse cross-section of our community's history. Today, we wish to thank all the individuals, organizations, and businesses who have supported us and encouraged us in our efforts to preserve history—our donors who have entrusted us with their personal papers and family, business, and organizational records; the researchers, scholars, and students who used the collections to write articles and books, make documentaries, research architectural drawings to restore a building, or simply scratched a nostalgic itch; and our staff, student interns, and volunteers who devoted their time, energy, and knowledge to preserve and make available the wealth of information in our collections. Also donors who gave money and equipment to supplement the budgets of the University permitting us to do such special projects as the History Speaks Oral History Projects, and, of course, the Charles N. Kimball Lecture series. Lastly, we thank our advisors who through their friendship and wisdom have kept us moving ahead and growing—in particular those who were early supporters but are no longer with us, Charlie Kimball, Doyle Patterson, Jerry Duggan, and Herman Johnson.

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Daniel Serda

Executive Director of the Kansas City Design Center
Assistant Professor, Graduate Program in Urban Planning, KU

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon and welcome. My name is Daniel Serda. As many of you know, I wear several hats locally, in my faculty role at KU and as director of the Design Center, as David mentioned. Today, however, I'm proud to be speaking to you as a protégé and friend of Charlie Kimball.

Today's lecture is intriguing to me in many respects. Yes, I am a resident of Wyandotte County, but that's no prerequisite for talking to you today. I wonder how many of you know that Dr. Kimball's first job in Kansas City was at a small avionics firm in the Fairfax District of Kansas City, Kansas, where he helped design aircraft radar counter-measures during World War II? Well, as most of you know—or should know—it was that brief stint as an electrical engineer that impressed and captured the attention of Kansas City's business leaders, who later recruited Charlie to become the first president of what we now call Midwest Research Institute.

I had the privilege of knowing, and learning from, and spending time with Dr. Kimball during the last few years of his life. I spent many afternoons in his office facing Volker Boulevard and the Theis Mall, chatting away about history, politics, his beloved Mary Louise, and the past and future direction of our great city. Over those two or three years, we often came to the subject of leadership—and especially the question of how it relates to the continued growth and future prosperity of our metropolitan community. Dr. Kimball was greatly concerned with the question of how to cultivate leadership. "The quality of life in this community," he once said, "doesn't come from only the boulevards and fountains...those are the grace notes. What makes the quality of life here is the quality of relationships."

There are many things I could tell you about today's distinguished speaker, including the roster outlined in the invitation to this event. Many of these things you probably already know: the first female mayor of Kansas City, Kansas; a former schoolteacher; a tireless supporter of city-county consolidation to create efficiency and build public accountability; a champion of neighborhood organizations and development; and the force behind the economic development we know as Village West.

All this being said—I'd really like to emphasize just one thing about Mayor Marinovich, which relates to the point Dr. Kimball made many years ago. Carol Marinovich is a public official who has led—as Dr. Kimball suggested—by building relationships, both personal and public. Before she became mayor, Wyandotte County suffered from a reputation as a place beset by self-serving politics, declining fortunes as an industrial and manufacturing center, and even worse, a loss of self-confidence as part of the metropolitan community.

In her two terms as mayor and CEO of the Unified Government, Carol Marinovich built relationships that served as the bridge to concerted public action. She built new working relationships with legislators and the state house in Topeka. She tapped into regional networks, metropolitan institutions, and philanthropic resources that many of her predecessors had overlooked and neglected. In so doing, she helped to build up a reserve of good will that will continue to benefit Wyandotte County for decades to come. I think you will agree that she is precisely the sort of person Dr. Kimball had in mind when he thought about the future leadership of our metropolitan area, and that we all have a great deal to learn and gain from listening to her presentation this afternoon.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Carol Marinovich.

Consolidation: A Green Flag, Not a Checkered Flag

Carol Marinovich

Former Mayor/CEO of Kansas City, KS & the
Unified Government of Wyandotte County, KS
Senior Vice President, Fleishman-Hillard, Kansas City

October 20, 2005

Thank you for selecting me to deliver this year's Kimball lecture. It is an honor to talk to you about a topic near and dear to my heart: Kansas City, Kansas/Wyandotte County.

Kansas City, Kansas, is not just a city to me.
Kansas City, Kansas, is not just the place where I was born.
Kansas City, Kansas, is not just the place where I was raised.
Kansas City, Kansas, is not just a place where I live.
Kansas City, Kansas, is "home."

I was so fortunate when I was growing up there, living in the same home with my grandparents. My Grandpa Kraly had a powerful impact on my life. Just how much, I didn't appreciate until years later. Grandpa Kraly immigrated to the United States from Croatia. He was proud of his Croatian heritage. He and grandma maintained many Croatian traditions: preparing the different foods such as *povitica*, *trena casa*, *strudel*, *kroicakebasa*, *sarma*, celebrating St. Nicholas feast day, and others.

Grandpa Kraly also was extremely proud of his American citizenship. I remember how time and time again, I'd sit at the kitchen table with Grandpa and we would discuss politics, local and national. And he knew what he was talking about. He listened to the news and read the newspaper from cover to cover. I especially remember Grandpa talking about the rights we have as Americans. He was appalled that anyone would choose not to exercise their right to vote. He would talk about people dying in other countries to obtain the rights so many Americans were already taking for granted. He took voting seriously. The gift he gave to each of his 11 children on their 21st birthday was a trip to voter registration. Grandpa Kraly would state time and time again that with the rights we have as citizens comes responsibility. And he took responsibility seriously.

I also remember many kitchen conversations about Kansas City, Kansas, politics. Grandpa Kraly would talk about the days when the "people in the cemeteries" voted—and sometimes he laughingly added "twice." He had firsthand knowledge about the patronage system, how you needed to be "connected" if you needed something from the government. This included getting or keeping a job.

The story in the family is that Grandpa Kraly got a job at city hall but then he lost it. He was assigned to deliver coal, or something like that. He was told to sign for more than what he received. He refused to lie, even though that cost him his job. He then sued the city for repayment of the money he "contributed" to the "flower fund"—required payments to a fund I don't believe actually purchased flowers. I think it fell more into the "lining pockets" category. One day, Grandpa came home waving a check—they had repaid the amount he contributed. My Grandpa Kraly was a man of principles. He was a man of responsibility.

Now I'm going to jump ahead several years—to 1995. I'd like to think that when I was taking the oath of office as Mayor of Kansas City, Kansas, Grandpa Kraly was looking down and smiling. Knowing him, he was probably strutting a bit.

1995: I am now mayor of Kansas City, Kansas. My home needs some drastic remodeling. While some individuals had prospered under the patronage system, the community had not. So many issues and problems were simply ignored: chipped paint, broken windows, crumbling curbs and sidewalks, and high taxes. So many things needed to be fixed. The very foundation was crumbling. As a result of all these home problems, many of the neighbors had moved away. More were in the process of moving. I knew I needed to do a lot of work on my home and that required a lot of help.

Because of all the needed home repair, the neighborhood was dying. Crime rates were high. Residents needed to leave the neighborhood just for basic shopping and for simple entertainment. Just imagine a neighborhood of 160,000 people and not even having a movie theatre. The image was so awful that no one wanted to come to the neighborhood, let alone live there. Many who did live there, in fact, felt “stuck.”

I was fortunate. The other members elected during that same time to city government also shared my commitment to the rehabilitation of the neighborhood. They too believed in forging strong partnerships. We knew we couldn't do all the repair alone. With Council support, construction crews were hired through the faith community. Several churches saw the needs in the area surrounding their churches and committed themselves to help. These crews, or what we call Community Development Corporations, have done, and are doing, amazing work in the urban core. Some neighborhoods have been brought back to life with rehab and infill housing. In other cases, some new neighborhoods are being created. Blight is being replaced with quality housing.

Active engagement by the people who lived in the neighborhood was a critical piece in the revitalization process. We needed more active neighborhood organizations. Who knows better than the people living in an area what that area needs? Who knows better than the people what needs to be fixed? Active participation by the residents was crucial for long-term sustainability of any positive change. With a strong partnership between city government and our Livable Neighborhoods group, active organizations grew from a handful to over 100. What a difference organized and committed people can make! And make a difference they have!

Not all blighted structures can be repaired. As long as they stood, these health hazards festered with some becoming havens for crime and drugs. As a government, we started spending our limited dollars on eliminating blight through demolition of these abandoned structures.

Demolition is only a first step. Because of the lack of a single vision by the city and county governments, these problems were only given a Band-Aid fix. For example, when abandoned structures were demolished by the city government, the city then funded the maintenance of the vacant lots. The list of lots kept growing, and we kept throwing resources at it to address the problem. The long-term solution was to place those properties into the hands of responsible owners and put them back on the tax rolls. City government though didn't have that authority; county government did. We all needed to work from the same remodeling plan, but we didn't.

While the house was being repainted, the foundation needed to be addressed. Enter “consolidation.”

The idea of consolidating the city and county into one single government had been discussed off and on for years. But in 1995, it was picking up momentum it hadn't had before: it was a mayoral campaign issue; grassroots support was increasing. People were talking about it—our residential community and our business community.

Once again, I was fortunate. Most of the members of the City Council supported it, and members of the community were actively engaged to make it happen. State legislation, however, was required to place a consolidation measure on the ballot.

Entering into the picture were some good neighbors to the south: Senator Mark Parkinson and Representative Bob Tomlinson. Mark chaired the Federal & State Affairs Committee. A consolidation bill had been introduced in his committee but obviously wasn't going anywhere. Mark called me at home one night and said consolidation in Kansas City, Kansas, and Wyandotte County seemed to make sense and offered to help. The next Friday afternoon, Senator Parkinson, Mayor McTaggart of Edwardsville, Mayor Stolfus of Bonner Springs, Chris McKenzie, Director of the League of Kansas Municipalities, and I met in Lawrence and crafted the bill creating the consolidation study commission. Senator Parkinson then called the county commissioners that night at their homes to apprise them of the bill and obtain their support. How could they say "no" to a bill which forms a commission to: 1. see if consolidation is appropriate, 2. if appropriate, determine what the new government would look like, and 3. have the decision be determined by the voters? He caught them off-guard, and so the commissioners were cornered into supporting the legislation.

The bill was introduced, and through the course of the legislative session, we encountered typical political covert shenanigans, mostly prompted by some of the members of the Wyandotte County delegation. I should mention as an aside, I'm a democrat and Senator Parkinson and Representative Tomlinson are republicans. I found myself fighting my own party and having my support from the moderate republicans. Senator Parkinson eventually carried the bill successfully through the Senate and Representative Tomlinson carried it successfully through the House. The bill passed in March of 1996.

Governor Bill Graves appointed the five-member Consolidation Study Commission. Over the course of the next several months, numerous public meetings were held throughout the county. Their findings: two similar governments served the same citizenry, creating a leadership struggle; government overlapped functionally; population was declining and demographics were aging; the tax base was smaller; taxes were higher annually with dwindling services; and quality of life was declining. As a result, their recommendations were: unify the governments by dissolving the county commissioners, treasurer, clerk and surveyor, and the mayor and city council; create a new structure with an executive, legislative, and judicial branch; establish employee safeguards by reducing jobs through attrition; and develop a new classification system and a new compensation system.

During the next legislative session, Study Commission recommendations were submitted to the state legislature for adoption. Support was received from the same friendly neighbors to the south as before. A last-minute "kill consolidation" maneuver by a member, or I should say members, of the Wyandotte County delegation was introduced. It was an amendment stating that should consolidation pass, the school districts would automatically be consolidated. The purpose of this amendment was to ensure consolidation would be defeated at the polls. Consolidation supporters were activated. I called Governor Graves, who then sent his staff to the House floor to help thwart the maneuver. My chief of staff and I both manned our phones, calling legislators at their desks on the House floor. I might add, several other members of the Wyandotte County delegation, along with other democrats in the legislature, also stepped up to help. After witnessing the public meeting and public input process by the Study Commission, they thought the measure should be allowed to be placed on the ballot. Despite the last-ditch effort to sabotage consolidation, the amendment failed and the Consolidation Study Commission recommendations were approved.

A race date was set for April 1, 1997. Consolidation would be placed on the ballot. Coincidentally, it also was the day I was to first meet with representatives from a business located in Daytona. They were in the speedway business.

Now the consolidation campaign begins. Residents of Wyandotte County needed to be convinced to take a risk on a new form of government. Residents needed to be convinced that this new form of government would bring about a new day, one much brighter than those before. What a campaign that was! In my opinion, it is a prime example of what can happen when people

come together for the common good. It is a prime example of what can happen when people are willing to take a risk. It is a prime example of what commitment and passion can accomplish. It is a prime example of how people truly can make a difference. This well-organized campaign had the ingredients of a winning one: elected leadership support, strong grassroots commitment and energy, and business support.

Let me briefly describe each component.

Political leadership was provided to help organize the campaign and raise the dollars for the campaign. Political commitment also was evidenced when members of the City Council supported the issue knowing that if re-elected April 1 they would have to immediately run for office again if the issue passed. Running for office is not an easy thing to do. In Wyandotte County, it can be especially brutal in nature. I know. I've done it. And I have the battle scars to prove it.

The Citizens for Consolidation were a group of very committed individuals who lived and breathed consolidation over the course of the campaign. They were the speakers' bureau; they were the door-to-door campaigners; they were the yard sign coordinators. The co-chairs were Dr. J.J. Swanson and Reverend C.L. Bachus. I admire both of these men so much. Doc Swanson, who wasn't comfortable with public speaking, must have given several presentations a day during the campaign. I couldn't begin to count the number of hours he volunteered to the cause. Reverend Bachus put his name out there knowing many in his community were in opposition. He endured so much criticism during the campaign. But Reverend Bachus is a dreamer, and he not only dreams big dreams, but works to make them happen.

The business community from both sides of the state line funded the campaign. Their contributions were investments in the future of Wyandotte County. Their dollars would help lay that solid foundation for the home that needed so much work. Over half of the "investments" came from businesses located on the other side of the state line. These business leaders believed in regionalism and, quite frankly, put their money where their mouths were. I recall several months later one of the "investors" approaching me. He told me he didn't think we could "pull that consolidation off." I then asked why he contributed to the campaign. His response was, "I wanted to give you a fighting chance."

The old patronage system fighting against consolidation didn't coordinate their effort, nor organize effectively. Their campaign was disorganized, lacked money, had no clear leadership, and didn't have a message that resonated with the electorate. The opposition said they supported consolidation; not this plan. The voters weren't buying that message.

On April 1, 1997, the foundation was laid. It was the day when 60 percent of the voters said "yes" to consolidation.

As I mentioned previously, April 1 also was the day I had the first of what was to be many meetings with ISC (International Speedway Corporation). The first question that needed to be answered was "what is a speedway?" We, as government officials didn't even know what one looked like. We had started an economic impact analysis. The analyses we had already seen showed great economic benefits to communities that had retail, hotels, and restaurants. In other words, communities with a strong sales tax base would benefit. But how could Kansas City, Kansas, benefit? We didn't have the retail, the restaurants, and the hotels. We didn't have that sales tax base, let alone a strong one. How would the city benefit?

Development along the I-435/I-70 corridor had been explored in the past. Developers weren't interested because the community didn't have the housing growth other cities were experiencing. Maybe this speedway could help us get some development along the corridor started. Maybe we could make up for the lack of housing growth and create that people-mass wanted by retail by getting folks driving I-435 and I-70 to come to our community. This would not be the typical development model.

The administrator, a councilman, and I visited our first speedway. Frankly, I did not expect to have as positive an experience as I had at the track in Fontana, California. I couldn't stop thinking that opportunities for economic development like this don't come around every day—thousands of people coming to a community to visit a state-of-the-art facility and spend a lot of money in the process. My gut level told me the speedway could be the very spark we needed to get development initiated. Sometimes, you just need to go with what your instinct tells you. The next day, back in Kansas City, the administrator came into my office and asked the simple question, "Mayor, what do you want to do?" I looked up at him and responded, "Let's go for it."

The drivers have started their engines.

Keep in mind that during this same period, two governments are being consolidated and the entire governing body is running for election. Once again, I am very fortunate. The City Council members supported the speedway idea when it was presented to them. The only member who even knew what one looked like was the councilman who accompanied us to Fontana. The others bought in, sight unseen. I will never stop appreciating the level of trust they placed in me and the administrator.

The two Kansas Citys were invited to present a speedway proposal in Daytona. What if we're not successful in our endeavor? What if the headlines in the paper read, "KCK Loses Out to KCMO"? That thought scared me to death. The alternative was not to compete for the speedway. Losing this potential for future economic growth in the community frightened me more. Many needs in the urban core remained. The tax base needed to be diversified; the tax base needed growth. Taxes needed to be lowered more than we had already lowered them. These issues outweighed the risk. Development of a proposal moved forward. With full support for the project from Governor Graves and his staff, an outstanding proposal, which included participation of experts from various fields, was presented to ISC officials. Adjacent Kansas communities placed a full-page ad in the Daytona newspaper the morning of our presentation. In bold print at the top, it read, "Our Hearts Are Racing Too." As part of our presentation, with help from our Chamber, we had commissioned an "Our Hearts Are Racing" video as part of our presentation. It was the emotional part; it was the "people" part. Walking out of the ISC offices after the presentation, I knew we had done well. If we didn't get the speedway, neither the proposal nor the presentation would be the reason.

That evening while I was in my hotel room, I received a call from Lesa Kennedy with ISC. She wanted to meet. My heart was definitely racing then. The administrator and I at first felt it had to be a positive sign. Or then, we thought, maybe they simply had a few questions. Before I returned home, I knew that Kansas City, Kansas, received the exclusive negotiations. I didn't have to worry about that headline now. We had a press conference announcing the good news to plan.

The next step after the public announcement was the appointment of a Mayor's Task Force comprised of unbiased citizens from the potentially impacted area to attend a couple of races. Their charge was to look at the issues on the minds of our residents: noise, traffic, property values, economic development, and education. In the debriefing they held with me, they voiced one concern: they may not be credible because they couldn't find a down side. They saw exactly what I had seen—an opportunity for our community.

I am not going to go into details about the campaign for election to the mayor/CEO position which also was occurring during this time. I can't. I simply don't remember much of it.

In October, the consolidated government—the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas—is born. I'm elected as mayor/CEO, all six councilmen are elected as commissioners, along with four others who also are risk takers who support the speedway project.

When I say supportive, I truly mean supportive. Numerous public meetings were held in the area of the proposed speedway. Building the speedway meant relocating people. Weighing the common good with what will have a negative impact on some people is not easy for an elected

official. I will never forget the five-hour public meeting held in December of that year. Only one item was on the agenda: a \$252 million dollar development agreement with International Speedway Corporation. We held the meeting at the Reardon Center instead of City Hall to accommodate what we knew would be a large number of people attending. Emotions understandably ran very high that night. At least 400 people were in attendance, and the majority of the speakers had very negative comments to make. As a governing body, we did not know at the beginning of the meeting if a motion would be made that night. What would be in the best interests of the public? Toward the end of the meeting it became obviously clear that another meeting would only accomplish one thing: people becoming emotionally upset one more time. No testimony was provided that changed the opinion of the governing body. A motion was made for approval of the agreement. The vote was 10-0 in favor of the motion.

The green flag has been raised in the air.

Why does it seem that when specific costs are being analyzed in a project, they only go up and not down? That is what happened next. After approval of the agreement, the architects, the construction experts, and the dirt-movers really got to work. More rock needed to be moved, a state highway which ran straight now had to be rebuilt and curved. I remember Bill France whose father founded NASCAR remarking to me that no one will ever convince him again that Kansas is flat. In finalizing all the details, there were days the project was short—in the tens of millions of dollars. Fortunately, ISC was a great partner. We would work together to see financially what could be accomplished. Also, there was a governing body committed to making it happen. Toward the completion of the plans, I recall we were only \$3 million short. By then, that seemed like a piece of cake. The end result was ISC committed to more private dollars in the project and the public financing required thirty years, and not the twenty as the state law allowed. The governing body continued to demonstrate trust and support for the administrator and me to reach a successful conclusion.

We needed a change in the state legislation to allow for thirty-year public financing. So off to Topeka we went. It was so much fun the previous two years working on the consolidation issue. I could hardly contain my excitement in returning. The appropriate legislative changes were drafted for increasing the ability to use future tax dollars for thirty years in this tourism district. Besides being politically challenging as an issue, it also was an opportunity. We kept thinking about development occurring next to a speedway. How could we ensure that not only was development going to occur quickly, but how do we also ensure that it is high-quality and well-planned, keeping to the theme of destination? There was only one way: control the ground. We had learned that lesson from the Woodlands, our pari-mutuel facility. Development surrounding the Woodlands was anticipated. However, speculators purchased the ground and no development occurred. As part of the new legislation, we added four hundred acres adjacent to the proposed speedway as part of the tourism district. I don't know what we would have done without Governor Graves and Lt. Governor Sherrer. They were with us at the beginning of the project and continued to play significant roles as we progressed. I won't go into details of the legislative process—the stories of political maneuvering, posturing, and sometimes ugliness. It could encompass an entire presentation. Coincidentally, or should I say ironically, help was once again given by neighbors to the south and major opposition was provided by some members of the Wyandotte County delegation. The end result was the legislation passed to fund the speedway and create the tourism district we now call Village West, and property owners were ensured 125 percent for the purchase of their property.

I must admit that this time during my tenure was probably one of the most challenging and the most stressful, but it also was one of the most exhilarating.

A speedway was now under construction, and we had a tourism district to plan and develop. A governing body willing to take risks stepped forward one more time. When staff recommended purchasing one or two hundred acres of the four, to a person each member said to buy it all. And, by the way, also find the money with which to do it. As a government, that is exactly what we did. The worst case scenario, in our opinion, was that the taxpayers would own four hundred acres of prime ground if development didn't immediately occur.

During the fall of that year, groundbreaking for a speedway was held and a master developer for the tourism district was hired. We had a dream: people from all over the country coming to Kansas City, Kansas. At the same time, create an area with amenities which our residents wanted and which they deserved; create an area of which they would feel a sense of pride.

On June 2, 2001, I attended my first race at Kansas Speedway. I recall walking up to the entrance with my husband, marveling at the great facility, looking with awe at all the cars and people, and with tears in my eyes saying to him, "We're here in KCK and look at all the people coming. They're here in Kansas City, Kansas!"

The green flag has been waved. The race had begun.

I had a ritual each year of going to the roof of Kansas Speedway and looking over at the property we now call Village West. There wasn't any development adjacent to the speedway that first year. But each subsequent year, I could see new construction occurring. Village West started with Cabela's and Nebraska Furniture Mart, our two great anchors and destinations unto themselves. Village West is now home to a number of restaurants, several hotels, and a minor league baseball stadium. Opening later this year is a movie theatre and the Legends retail. The Village West area generated \$15,000 a year in property taxes before it was developed. Now it generates over \$6 million.

Last year as I was driving around the Village West area during the Nextel race weekend, I stopped at the Russell Stover store. Two retirees were sitting outside eating ice cream. They recognized me, and we started to converse. During the course of the conversation, they told me they had come out to watch the traffic and read the license tags. The pride they wore on their faces seeing all those people coming to their hometown will always be an image I'll remember.

Kansas Speedway and Village West, in my opinion, would not be part of the Kansas City, Kansas/Wyandotte County landscape today if consolidation hadn't occurred. One single vision with strong commitment and a willingness to take risks by a governing body was required.

Before consolidation, the community continued to suffer a decline in population, higher taxes, lack of retail and amenities, a poor image, a minimum number of new housing starts, stagnant (or declining) property values, and a high violent crime rate. In short, it was a dying community.

Today, since consolidation, violent crime has decreased by 50 percent, the tax rate has been lowered more than 20 percent, housing starts this decade already triple the number from the previous ten years, assessed valuation of property continues to rise, the population is stabilizing, the image has dramatically improved, and residents now have a number of dining options and entertainment opportunities with more retail coming soon.

Consolidation also has helped in addressing revitalization of the urban core. We now can place those abandoned properties we maintained into the hands of responsible property owners and back on the tax roll. Fixing problems with long-term rather than a Band-Aid approach can be used.

Consolidation is a story not just about creating a new form of government; it is a story of vision, risk taking, partnerships, commitment, and passion. It is a story about a dying community coming back to life.

Consolidation laid the foundation. It is now up to the present and future governing bodies to ensure that the positive course taken continues. It is up to the people of the community to ensure they follow that course.

Only then over time can the checkered flag be lowered.

Questions and Answers

Question: What can you tell us about the numbers of people and where they come from?

Marinovich: I am not sure the exact number. I know the speedway itself has pulled people from all fifty states, which is exciting! And in just my informal surveys, like when I go to a T-Bones game, there are more non-Wyandotte County tags sitting in the lot than others. But you will find them at the speedway at least from throughout the country. For Cabela's and Nebraska Furniture Mart, we are probably capturing a two-hundred or two-hundred-and-fifty mile radius of shoppers coming to those two facilities.

Question: Will there be gambling in Kansas City, Kansas?

Marinovich: I was reluctant for sixteen years or at least fourteen of those sixteen years, but gaming has been part of the governing body's legislative platform. We need approval at the state level to place it on the ballot, and it's very difficult to get it passed at that level, even though over 80 percent of the people in Kansas City, Kansas, said yes to gaming when we illegally placed it on the ballot. It's really difficult. One of the problems we encounter is when you go for a gaming legislation, you can't get folks to even agree on one piece of legislation. I think a lot of self-serving needs occur—different parties, for example, want expanded gaming in private clubs. Or the horse people or dog people agreeing on what type of gaming should be at pari-mutual facilities, and sometimes they won't even agree on that bill if they don't feel like their cut is enough. At the last session, for example, we couldn't even get members of the Wyandotte County delegation to agree on one bill. So, it's very difficult—even pro-gaming folks can't wrap their arms around one single gaming bill and have a united front, which I think makes it even more difficult to get something passed in a conservative state like Kansas.

Question: I was wondering, you talked about some of the economic development and the impact it had on the built environment. Could you speak on some of the progress and of the human or social environment that you are particularly proud?

Marinovich: I would say two issues—one was establishment of the Mayor's Domestic Violence Task Force, bringing that issue more to the forefront. As a result of the continued accounting of domestic violence, we are trying to improve what we do within our own court system and provide more support for victims of domestic violence. The other issue was the Mayor's Access to Health Care Task Force that I created and has evolved into its own not-for-profit organization, which is still operating today—going out for grant dollars trying to improve health care for the uninsured and the under-insured. Those would be the two of which I am most proud. Then, of course, when you're looking at revitalization efforts and a number of our seniors in the older urban communities, making those communities safe communities, is of extreme importance.

Question: To what extent would you recommend consolidation for some of the other counties in Kansas, for example I live in Manhattan, Kansas. Would Manhattan and Riley benefit? And what about Lawrence and Douglas, or Topeka and Shawnee?

Marinovich: I can only speak to my community and consolidation made sense for Kansas City, Kansas, and Wyandotte County. A number of communities are looking at consolidation—in fact, Topeka and Shawnee counties have a consolidation issue coming up very soon. It is up to the communities to decide what's important to them and whether or not they believe a new form of government could help lead them in a positive direction. The end result made sense for us, especially that single vision on moving forward in terms of economic development. That is being able to approach issues with a long-term solution, as opposed to putting a Band-Aid on them, which was the primary feature of our consolidation that was very effective. But then again, any government is only as good as the people elected to serve them in that government.

Question: This is probably more of a comment than it is a question. It has been a real inspiration to watch what has happened in Kansas City, Kansas, and Wyandotte County. Having spent a good many years in the field of education and observing your work in those fields, I am very proud of you as well. You have put together a world of experience, a very complex set of problems in suburban relationships, and it seems to me that it would be extremely worthwhile if somewhere in your own career or somewhere you could put together the equivalent of a doctoral dissertation. I am very serious about this because the job of change in urban areas is so important, and the experience that you have in that situation is perhaps one of the real models for work in many, many different areas. I would really like to encourage you to think about doing that.

Marinovich: Thank you! Once a teacher, always a teacher, right Doctor? Well, that means a lot coming from you, Dr. Plucker. Doctor was the superintendent of the Kansas City, Kansas, Public Schools while I was a teacher there. Also, Dr. Plucker, before I left office, and I don't know what the status is now, I asked members of the business and philanthropic communities to assist in raising some dollars to create a history of consolidation, and the Kauffman Foundation stepped up, so the unified government now has those dollars to create an unbiased factual view and videotape. Also, I think it's important that not just my perspective, but the perspectives of Kevin Kelly and Mike Jacobi, who are kind of the godfathers of this consolidation movement, and others who were actively engaged, must be part of that history. So the dollars are there to accomplish at least to a certain degree what we would like to see happen. So hopefully, that will eventually be completed.

Question: Has there been renewal of old neighborhoods, including commercial and urban areas as the result of all of this?

Marinovich: Yes, we started revitalization prior to consolidation and then, since consolidation, we were able to do much more because the new growth has assisted us in providing dollars that we could put toward the revitalization efforts. There are a lot of plans that are under way for the revitalization of the urban core—everything from the infield that I talked about to new housing, the loft development in the old city hall, and in the near future, loft development of the old Kansas Newspaper building. Along with that, Community Housing Wyandotte County (CHWC), one of our community development corporations, is and has been working on business development along our Sixth Street corridor. Now, what we are really lacking in the urban core area is retail and amenities. The emphasis has really been on increasing the housing, so that we can make up that people mass that retailers want, so we can get those amenities to them in time. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done in the rebuilding of the urban core. It is an area that was forgotten for over thirty years, so it's going to take years of catch up to bring it to the point where it needs to be.

Question: Your plans came about, and it was hard work; we see the success of the speedway and Nebraska Furniture Mart, and the hotels and restaurants. Are families moving in the area? Will there be schools, are there any new schools in the area, is there a chance that this will be a development for the future younger people to settle?

Marinovich: In fact, I believed that a housing boom would occur in the western portion of our community near the speedway. It is happening and has been happening. What we underestimated was how quickly it would occur. That is the Piper School District and they are going public discussing building two new schools to accommodate the growth they are experiencing in that area. The challenge now for the local government is finding all of the dollars for the infrastructure that is needed. We are going to need better roads with all of that growth—a lot of which are the two-lane roads. One area where I wasn't successful as mayor was getting an excise tax on developers. I thought that if you needed a new road because of a development, then the developers should help pay for that new road. But I couldn't get the majority of the governing body to agree with me. I'm hoping they won't lose sight of that because there is anywhere between fifty and eighty million dollars of infrastructure needs out in the Piper area as a result of all its new growth.

Question: In the early stages of trying to attract the speedway, when Kansas City, Kansas, and Wyandotte County were competing with Kansas City, Missouri, and Platte County, was there an opportunity for both sides of the state line to cooperate and thus reduce the public subsidies required? And if not, is there a way in the future to do that?

Marinovich: I don't know if there is now. There wasn't an opportunity at that point. There were two sites that International Speedway was looking at: one near the airport and one in western Wyandotte County. I think that's where the state line does create some issues. We as a metropolitan area have a lot of positive things happening. Governing body members have good communication, good relationships. When I was mayor you could disagree on an issue but because those relationships were established, it was just a difference of opinion on an issue. I believe one of our greatest challenges as a metropolitan community is economic development. There is far too much competition within the metropolitan area for different developments. Look around: we get a Cabela's and another community wants a major competitor that also has public subsidy. When they say it's not going to impact, I don't believe that. There is still that competition. How does a mayor of a community say, "I'm going to by-pass this economic development opportunity and allow this other city to have it"? There are those reality checks that I think really hinder the type of relationships we should have in terms of economic development. We don't go around stealing from each other, but there is still far too much competition where communities are competing against each other—which then has the potential of increasing public subsidies for certain development projects. What I always found frustrating was being a mayor of an older urban community. The idea behind its incentives originally was to put the older urban communities on an equal footing as green space. It worked, but now green space is subsidized and enhances and creates even more competition within the metropolitan community. My goal in Village West was to get that development going in order to grow our community development outside of Village West that would pay full property taxes. I vetoed one measure in my eight years as mayor/CEO and that was for a medical office building. The unfortunate part, it was my doctor's medical office building that I vetoed because they wanted a ten-year tax abatement, and our plan was always to encourage development that creates growth so we can start generating immediate tax dollars to the community. I find it amazing as a former elected official, that whatever incentive a local government can provide always ends up being that magic number that makes the deal work! You are absolutely right. There needs to be better coordination and less competition among all the cities, counties, and the metropolitan area. But it is not there today.

Question: I just wondered if you had any comments about the relationship of governmental entities in Kansas City, Kansas, and Wyandotte County and the Native American group.

Marinovich: Okay, the question was relationships among Wyandotte County and Native American groups. There really hasn't been much opportunity. The one issue, quite frankly, was a disagreement, and it wasn't because they were a Native American group. It was a clash between the Unified Government and the Wyandottes of Oklahoma because we didn't want a casino directly across the street from City Hall. That they were Native Americans was irrelevant to a certain degree. The only reason why it has a little more relevance was that it involved Indian Reservation Land and their freedom to do what they wanted without following our zoning issues. That is the only thing that impacted that. Other than that, there really hasn't been that much opportunity, at least while I was mayor.

Thank you very much! Thank you.

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