

History could be the catalyst that broadens perceptions about Westport

# PORT TOWN

WRITTEN BY KEVIN KUZMA PHOTOGRAPHED BY JONATHAN HOKE

Brave with alcohol, the young people walk the broad Westport sidewalks confident but oblivious to the historic events that once happened here. The crowds come for something that feels like the frontier spirit—for the rowdiness that sometimes spills out the bar doors and onto streets patrolled by folded-armed cops.

On Friday and Saturday nights, the patrons tend to find any building here without a spigot or food valueless. But these quaint old buildings that used to be general stores, trading posts, and repair shops for horse-drawn wagons were remade decades ago into Kansas City's preeminent bar district.

Towns like this one came alive all along rivers in the early 1800s as ports where goods could be traded with natives and pioneers moving west. Some local residents know that Westport was once the site of a historic Civil War battle. The

name alone gives away the town's earlier function as a port for steamboats.

Traces of history might be evident in the old brick buildings and narrow passages blocked by wrought-iron gates, yet those events are often underplayed in an area that has been written off as a party zone. Local businesses and historians are hoping to use Westport's distant and recent history to change the perceptions of an area whose history arguably runs deeper than that of Kansas City.

"Westport was the rosebud; as it expanded and bloomed, it became Kansas City," says Alana Smith, president of the Westport Historical Society.

The headquarters for the historical society is in the Harris-Kearney House at 4000 Baltimore. Smith runs walking tours from the house, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and doubles as a public museum. She says the historical society is in the "beginning stages" of its work, which will help promote a more complete picture of the area. The concept, Smith says, is to call attention to Westport's historical significance, which may inherently create a more family-friendly atmosphere.

The organization has plans to hire living history reenactors for the Harris-Kearney House—the oldest intact building in Kansas City—and it is developing an educational program for local schools. Historic-themed events will also be more frequent, Smith says. Last month, Westport held its 175th anniversary celebration, introducing some Kansas Citians to the story of the town they'd never heard before.

Flooding shut down a river port in Independence, Mo., in the 1830s, and settlers began searching for a place further west that could accommodate river boats. Westport Landing, a limestone outcropping on the river 5 miles north of Westport proper, became the shortcut to the community of Westport, which became the new destination for goods.



John Calvin McCoy founded Westport in the 1830s when he opened a general store at Pennsylvania and Westport Road. From 1854 through the end of the Civil War, Westport's population grew as thousands of wagons passed through while traveling along the Santa Fe, Oregon, and California trails.

Westport was near the halfway point along the trails to the West and one of the last places travelers could get horses shod and wagons repaired. The town's location made it like "the last QuikTrip," Smith says, before the prairies emptied out. There were no other towns beyond it where the wagon train drivers could get coffee, a harness for their oxen, or a new wagon wheel. Some travelers decided to set up shop in the burgeoning town.

On Oct. 23, 1864, soldiers from the Northern army trounced an outnumbered Confederate Army and eventually forced them to retreat. Union soldiers became a fixture in Westport given its proximity to Kansas, a free state, and the smaller skirmishes that would break out between the armies.

Westport has its own tradition. High spirits, and maybe some risk, are not far removed from it. What has made the area a mainstay destination are its long-standing businesses—such as McCoy's Public House, Kelly's Westport Inn, Pryde's Old Westport, and Torre's Pizzeria. The area remains unchanged, in some sense, as Starbucks and other trendy destinations that open here are eventually turned away.

"People come in all the time and tell us about how the pizza is exactly the same as it was when they were kids and their families brought them here," says Mitch Jones, general manager of Torre's. "That's how you know it's real—when so many people come in and say the same thing. It's amazing to think you can walk in and order something and it tastes exactly the same as it did 30 years ago."

**"Westport was the rosebud; as it expanded and bloomed, it became Kansas City," says Alana Smith, president of the Westport Historical Society.**

Longevity might be Westport's strongest appeal. Businesses aren't reliant on trends or gimmicks, a multi-million-dollar arena, or hopes for a professional sports franchise. For almost two centuries, Westport has adapted—and sometimes refused change—to carry on. Thousands of people have found something in these streets for almost two centuries. The search is what brings people back to this port town that was founded by people who felt as though they'd arrived.

For more information about Westport or to arrange a guided tour, contact the Westport Historical Society at (816) 561-1821 or visit [www.westporthistorical.org](http://www.westporthistorical.org).



WRITTEN BY NICHOLE HINES  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHARLES STONEWALL



# bracing for a *Positive Impact*

**“Virginia Brown grew up during the Depression bullied by her peers,” says Andrea Umbreit, marketing coordinator for Smiles Change Lives, of the organization’s founder. “Kids are judged and don’t want to open their mouths.”**

First impressions are everything. When we walk into a room and greet a stranger, the right thing to do is extend a hand for a firm handshake and exchange a warm smile. A smile is a natural reaction if there is a feeling of confidence about one’s appearance. There are more than 2 million children from low-income households suffering from moderate to severe misaligned teeth and/or jaws in the United States. They encounter years of bullying by peers that squelches self-confidence and can effect their grades and social interactions for many years. Quality orthodontic care for moderate to severe malocclusions—crooked teeth—goes beyond mere aesthetics with studies that show donning a disfigured smile increases the encounters of social and economic discrimination.

Smiles Change Lives (SCL) is a nonprofit organization founded in Kansas City, Mo., by Virginia Brown to provide braces to children from low-income families. Since 1997, SCL has grown to serve a five-state area including Missouri, Florida, Kansas, Minnesota, and Kentucky. Impending expansion areas include Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, and Wisconsin.

## Top 10 Ways to Adopt a Smile for the Holidays

1. Ask an employer to make a donation or use an existing employee gift-matching program.
2. Collect individual donations from your civic, social, or faith groups by hosting a holiday Adopt-A-Smile campaign.
3. Host a gift-giving silent auction with your family and friends during holidays and special occasions.
4. Create an online fundraising campaign through social-networking sites such as *Change.org*, *MySpace*, and *Facebook*.
5. Transform existing company or group events into benefits for the SCL Adopt-A-Smile program (golf tournaments, runs/walks, auctions, etc.).
6. Ask friends and family to make a donation to SCL in honor of a birthday, wedding, or holiday instead of traditional gifts.
7. Host a trivia or game night with proceeds benefiting SCL.
8. Encourage teenagers to choose SCL as the beneficiary of their dance-a-thon, lock-in, bake sale, tournament, or car wash.
9. Ask a local restaurant or business to host a party for your staff and allocate a percentage of the proceeds to benefit SCL.
10. Create a raffle contest among colleagues. The winner gets the prize, and SCL gets the funds raised from the sale of raffle tickets.

*Smiles Change Lives would be honored to have you select it as your charity of choice.*

“Virginia Brown grew up during the Depression bullied by her peers,” says Andrea Umbreit, marketing coordinator for Smiles Change Lives. “Kids are judged and don’t want to open their mouths.”

Endorsed by the American Association of Orthodontists for providing access to care, SCL is a program changing lives with the help of orthodontists who volunteer their time and services to a permanent contribution that will enhance self-confidence and well-being of every patient. The screening process is very rigorous, with a cost of \$500 per child for applications, clinical needs assessment, and oral-hygiene confirmation. Candidates must meet a series of criteria including residing in an SCL service area and agreeing to contribute \$250 toward orthodontic treatment. Candidates must also be aged 11 to 18 and have an annual income of \$10,000 or less per family member verified by a recent tax return.

SCL has a current waiting list of more than 300 children in Kansas City, and funding is needed to expand the treatment program. Volunteer orthodontists are standing by, waiting to begin treatment for approved applicants once SCL has adequate financial support. With the referrals from general dentists, dental clinics, case managers, churches, school districts, and other sources, it is imperative that SCL stringently abide by its application guidelines to ensure the volunteer orthodontists receive “the best, most dedicated families for care,” according to Umbreit. “One of 10 applicants gets braces,” she says.

In many cases, Umbreit says, the SCL treatment experience is the child’s first experience with a real doctor. SCL has a 98-percent treatment compliance success rate, which is attributed to the dedication of the kids, parents, and orthodontists, along with the \$250 contribution from the family.

Beyond physical appearance and self-assurance concerns, children who need braces may encounter physical discomfort due to a lack of quality dental care. Providing braces for a child in need can be an emotional makeover lasting a lifetime that will be reflected in a smile every time he or she walks into a room. 

For more information, visit [www.smileschangelives.org](http://www.smileschangelives.org).

## Smiles Change Lives Wish List

1. Corporate sponsors for events, advertising, and marketing campaigns.
2. Donated printing and design services for mailings, newsletters, and collateral.
3. Development and purchase of a tradeshow display.
4. Four new computers for its growing staff, volunteers, and interns.
5. Adopt-A-Smile sponsors to meet the growing demand for the organization’s program—there is currently a waiting list of 300 in Kansas City.
6. Volunteers to serve on committees and work at events, in the office, and on the database.

For more information or details on any of the items listed above, visit [www.smileschangelives.org](http://www.smileschangelives.org) or contact Andrea Umbreit at (816) 421-4949, ext. 229.



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## WEST ELEVATION



The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Central Plains Region, serves Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska, with documents and exhibits that tell stories from our nation's history. Its records cover 100 federal agencies within 45,000 cubic feet—with no attempt to sugarcoat the past—and 50 percent are United States District Court documents.

## SOUTH ELEVATION



# HALL OF HISTORY

WRITTEN BY LISA WATERMAN GRAY  
RENDERINGS COURTESY OF PGAV ARCHITECTS

Court documents from the landmark 1954 discrimination case, *Brown v. Board of Education*. Inmate records from Fort Leavenworth Prison. Black-and-white photos of President John F. Kennedy at Grand Teton National Park or a woman making military shells in Nebraska in 1944.

These are just a few of the fascinating historical records stored at The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Central Plains Region. NARA serves Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska, with documents and exhibits that tell stories from our nation's history. Its records cover 100 federal agencies within 45,000 cubic feet—with no attempt to sugarcoat the past—and 50 percent are United States District Court documents.

Now located at 2312 East Bannister Road, NARA will move to the Adams Express freight building west of Union Station following extensive renovations and the addition of a new wing for the stack area. "We have tried to move to a more appropriate location since 1985," says Reed Whitaker, regional administrator. He anticipates a grand opening in May.

The move will give NARA much greater visibility while placing it near other federal and historical entities—including a postal service office, the IRS, the National World War I Museum at Liberty Memorial, the Federal

Reserve, and the Kansas City Museum at Union Station.

"The Kansas City Ballet will be our neighbor and is very excited, the Downtown Council has been very welcoming, and our city councilwoman was excited [when she heard we were coming]," says Kimberlee Ried, archives and outreach specialist.

President Herbert Hoover created the NARA during the 1930s as a means of preserving the nation's historical records. And because taxpayers and Congress fund the NARA, all services and programs are free. That includes email requests for information, which this office pledges to fulfill within three days, in most cases.

A historical gold mine for attorneys, authors, genealogists, historians, students, and teachers, NARA is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Friday. Despite its current, rather isolated location, upwards of 250 people look through the 45,000 rolls of microfilm stored there each month. They can view census, war, land, diplomatic, and Bureau of Indian Affairs records, as well as information from the Revolutionary War through some of the Vietnam War, among others.

More than 200 people visit the text research stacks each month, where the temperature remains 68 degrees to 72 degrees with 25-percent relative

humidity and documents are stored in acid-free folders and file boxes for added protection. Staff members assist visitors in viewing documents while volunteers, some of whom are genealogy specialists, help individuals who want to view microfilm. A new docent program will begin after the move, and it will work in tandem with volunteers to serve the needs of genealogists.

"My best guess for hours in the new facility [is that we] may follow the lead of our neighbors," Whitaker says. "I don't know if we'll be open in the evenings."

Ried adds that NARA always tries to satisfy patron demand and preferences.

During 2007, this NARA office provided traveling exhibits viewed by more than 60,000 people. In addition, it has recently teamed up with the National World War I Museum to offer a fall film series at the museum's auditorium called *The Great War, The Great Movies: Women in World War I Film Series*. Titles in the series included *Nurse Edith Cavell* and *Iron Jawed Angels*.

The new facility will also have sufficient space for a temporary gallery, a regional gallery, and a permanent gallery onsite. Whitaker anticipates working with other organizations that lack exhibit space, such as Mahaffie House. "We hope to expand to other states to advertise their wares and the

[presidential libraries]," he says. "It's an experiment for the National Archives."

NARA will have two classroom areas in its new location, where staff can provide workshops and tours. In addition, the organization offers video teaching units and document-based study units, such as *My Family History and Me*, for children in grades 5-12; and *Traveling Trunks*, which include a World War II Navy seaman's bag and a World War II Army soldier's trunk. It has established Interactive Distance Learning partnerships with the Southeast Kansas Education Service Center at Greenbush; Pittsburg State University; and the University of Missouri, Kansas City.

History buffs also might enjoy NARA's books. The first is *Great Plains Originals, Historic Documents from America's Heartland*. Created in cooperation with *The Kansas City Star*, the book offers an illustration-heavy collection of historic documents. The second book, *Your Land, My Land, Two Centuries of American Words and Images From the Regional Collections of the National Archives*, should be available in local bookstores and *Kansas City Star* stores in time for Christmas. 

For more information, visit [www.archives.gov/central-plains/kansas-city](http://www.archives.gov/central-plains/kansas-city).



# Bringing Dreams to Light

Cordish Companies brings the dream of visionary Stan Durwood to life through Kansas City Power & Light District.

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER MANN  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY PHIL PETERSON

When Cordish Companies vice president Blake Cordish cut the ribbon a year ago to open McFadden's Sports Saloon, the first of dozens of tenants eventually opening in the Kansas City Power & Light District, he paid homage to Stan Durwood.

There may have been many in the crowd that November day last year who weren't familiar with the name, but those who knew of Durwood likely knew at least a little about his longtime, and yet failed, dream to revitalize downtown.

That dream of Durwood—the founder of Kansas City-based AMC Entertainment, Inc., the second-largest movie exhibitor in the United States and, back in the 1960s, the inventor of the moviehouse multiplex—to rejuvenate downtown was born in the 1960s, long before many even realized there was a problem with the quickly withering area.

Durwood, who died in 1999, was first inspired to take up the torch for Power & Light in the mid-1960s upon the urging of longtime civic and business leader Ruben Bergendoff of engineering firm HNTB.

The new highway system was about to open, and Bergendoff gathered a group of civic leaders, herding them on a bus for a tour of the roads that would take car-crazy Kansas City-area commuters in and around downtown.

In 1996, Durwood told *The Kansas City Star* of that day: "We rode back downtown together, and I was saying, 'That's really impressive,' and Bergendoff turned to me and said, 'The highways go two ways—they go out, and if there's nothing to come back in for, people won't.' And I started to understand what he was saying. People needed a reason to come downtown."

That's when Bergendoff reached over, slapped Durwood on the left knee, and said, "And you're just the guy to get it done!"

"I wanted to yell, 'Stop the car and let me the hell out of here!'" Durwood said.

But he took Bergendoff seriously.

To help explain his fervor for downtown during that 1996 interview, Durwood pulled a well-worn copy of *The Nine Nations of North America* by Joel Garreau off a bookshelf behind his desk.

The book advocates doing away with artificial, arbitrary state and other dividing lines and splitting the United States and North America by what the author advocates are more sensible, logical boundaries.

Not surprisingly, Kansas City is capital of the so-called Breadbasket nation.

Durwood's assessment of downtown at that time: "The heart of the city is losing blood; it's losing function and is just down to a handful of office buildings. It can function as a much bigger thing."

Durwood tried to turn this dream into a revitalized downtown reality at least four times with others taking up the baton for the then-dubbed "Centertainment plan," the ongoing effort that failed, too, after Durwood died.

Elissa Durwood Grodin, one of Durwood's daughters and an author of children's books who lives in Connecticut, recently recalled her memories of Durwood's ongoing passion to bring new life to downtown.

"What I do remember is that Stan was on fire with the prospect of rejuvenating downtown Kansas City for as long as I can remember," Grodin says. "It was the great dream of his life, I believe."

"He made it sound so exciting that even as young kids, we were enchanted by his stories of how terrific and beautiful downtown could become. The whole family used to pile into our station wagon when we kids were quite young on the occasional Sunday afternoon and drive around downtown and environs at a relaxing, meandering pace for hours. I can remember my dad talking about how the landscape of downtown could be transformed into a thriving center where everyone would want to come."

*"What I do remember is that Stan was on fire with the prospect of rejuvenating downtown Kansas City for as long as I can remember," says Elissa Durwood Grodin, one of Durwood's daughters. "It was the great dream of his life, I believe."*

Back in 1996, Bayard M. Grant, Durwood's former brother-in-law and a longtime friend, said he partly attributed the failure of Durwood to bring his vision to fruition to his lack of experience as a developer.

Indeed, it is longtime, well-known developer Cordish Companies that's finally been able to help turn Durwood's vision into an \$850 million mixed-use entertainment district. And a part of Durwood lives on in the district through two AMC-owned-and-operated theaters: the newly reminted Midland by AMC live-entertainment venue and the soon-to-open six-theater AMC Theaters at the former Empire Theater.

When Cordish Companies gained the redevelopment rights for Power & Light five years ago, company president David Cordish—like his son Blake would four years later—paid homage to Durwood.

"AMC deserves credit," David Cordish said. "It goes back to Stan Durwood. He had the vision for the Power & Light District. In fact, I liked the name so much, we kept it." 



WRITTEN BY **NICHOLE HINES**  
PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED BY **AWESOME AMBITIONS**

# Awesome American Dreams

## Managing the Middle of the Class



The American Dream: If you can conceive it, you can achieve it. True for many of us, just a dream for the rest. Every day, many American babies are born and welcomed into households that are prepared to nurture, love, and guide them from childhood to adulthood burgeoning with high aspirations of a successful future. For the rest, success is just a dream. Children with limited supervision, born into families with a lack of resources and nominal examples of positive role models, are at high risk of dropping out of school, teen pregnancy, drugs, and death. Awesome Ambitions is a nonprofit organization that was cofounded by Cynthia Newsome and Angela Curry in 1998 to identify at-risk 9th-grade girls in the Kansas City, Missouri Public School District to navigate them through some of the perilous obstacles they are likely to endure.

At-risk girls have their names submitted by school guidance counselors; they are children identified as needing special intervention to raise self-esteem and to begin planning a self-sufficient future for themselves. A girl who is chosen for the Awesome Ambitions program is a student who would otherwise fall through the cracks without the management of adult supervision. She is the child in the middle of the class, not the high achiever focusing on college or the troublemaker wasting time in the principal's office.

Awesome Ambitions girls are assigned a professional woman as a school liaison—a mentor who is committed to meeting with her mentee twice a



month at her school. Monthly meetings with a liaison encourages every girl to make a commitment to meet the expectations of excellence set by Awesome Ambitions. Beyond the hands-on approach of the one-on-one sessions with a liaison, participants attend extended workshops that introduce them to diverse speakers. The off-campus workshops are held several times throughout the school year to present a collection of important topics such as boy-girl relationships, future goal setting, health issues, effective communication skills, and volunteerism within the community. In addition to the volunteers who undertake positions as liaisons, others offer services as program facilitators, advisors, and friends to as many as 140 girls per year.

The 9th-grade year is an Awesome Ambitions introduction bearing the responsibility of learning basic skills that highlight self-worth, assert success in school, and emphasize goal-setting. Consecutive high-school years within the program narrow and intensify the scope of life skills to include challenging definitions of success, professional career options, college visits, and business

dropouts with only 1 percent to 2 percent of participants not graduating from high school. This is in comparison to a dropout rate of 4 percent to 5 percent of students who are not in the program. More than half of participants achieve honor roll in their schools, and more than 60 percent adopt a more serious attitude toward their studies. Counselors also report an eagerness by the girls to participate in school activities.

Awesome Ambitions girls are tracked after graduating from high school as well. Graduates are encouraged to come home, share experiences, and inspire the younger girls who are now following their path. Connecting the girls to Awesome Ambitions graduates and professional women volunteers who are living their dreams entices the girls to conceptualize and realize their own aspirations.

Success should be defined by an individual based upon her own personal goals and aspirations. Awesome Ambitions participants are given a template by which to begin planning a productive, purposeful life. Anger,

*Girls are given a template to plan a productive, purposeful life.*

internships. Senior year, preparation includes but is not exclusive to college application and enrollment or vocational training.

Accountability is key not only for the girls' success but for that of the staff of volunteers as well. Driven by the effective tracking results provided by counselors' end-of-semester reports, new and innovative life tools are continually added to the Awesome Ambitions program. A heightened sense of self-awareness and their valuable role within the community begins to emerge as the girls matriculate through the program. Over the last decade, Awesome Ambitions has served more than 600 girls, contributing to a decrease in

abusive relationships, low self-esteem, and other oppressive obstacles stand in the way of ambition and a positive sense of self-worth without Awesome Ambitions. However, Awesome Ambitions provides guidance that opens a pathway of success for many girls who were not born or raised believing the American Dream was theirs to capture and helps bear their dreams to fruition. 

For more information about Awesome Ambitions, contact Kathy Hardee at (816) 395-0644.