



PHOTO/ GREATER WICHITA C&VB, DARREN DECKER

Kansas' Land of Oz

Despite Wichita's humble cowtown beginnings, its residents, from cowboys to aerospace engineers, have built a real-life jewel of a city.

By Eileen Lockwood

Perhaps at least partly because of the famous imagery in *The Wizard of Oz*, many people may have the impression that Kansas is a flat plain that is plagued by tornadoes.

The flat image was refuted by Rebecca Ketchum, a pioneer woman in an 1853 wagon train. "If when you think of a prairie, you think of a plain, level piece of ground, you are greatly mistaken," she wrote to the folks back home. The state may sprawl flat farther west, but Wichita rises among the Flint Hills, a seemingly endless grassy landscape more like pyramids than pancakes.

The idea of frequent tornadoes comes closer to reality and has become so entrenched that Wichita was selected as the site for the 1989 film

Twister. The May 4th tornado that destroyed Greensburg, 110 miles west of Wichita, was a deadly corroboration. EF5-level storms, the worst kind, have hit the state six times since 1950, but Chance Hayes, the warning coordination meteorologist in Wichita's National Weather Service Forecast Office, says, "I've lived here 13 years and have never been directly impacted by a tornado."

Tamim Qaum, MD is not worried. He says, "All I heard about was tornadoes, tornadoes, tornadoes," before he moved here last year. "But most people who have lived here all their lives have never seen one except on TV." Square mile for square mile, Kansas is the most tornado-prone state, but Qaum points out that the probability of any one square mile being hit is one in 10,000 years.

Fireworks reflect in the Arkansas River in downtown Wichita during a July 4th celebration. The Century II Performing Arts & Convention Center is at left and the Hyatt Regency Wichita is in the center.

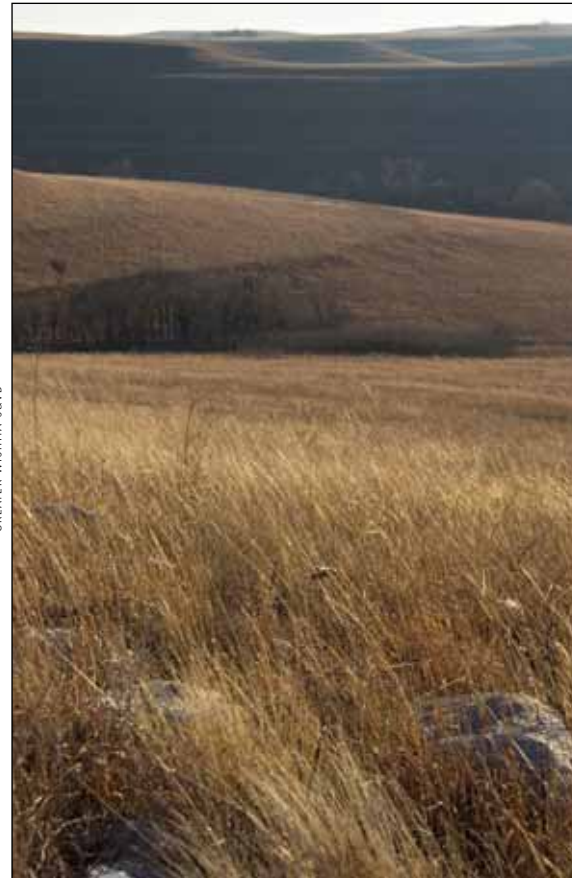
Wichita has been untouched by an EF5 since 1950.

The Greensburg disaster gave national reporters a chance to witness the steely grit of Kansans determined to start over. One man's declaration — "Greensburg WILL come back!" — echoed the historic sturdiness common to Sunflower State inhabitants. Within days, Greensburg neighbors were busy cleaning up for their new start.

No place like it

When the literary Dorothy was blown out of Kansas and over the rainbow in *The Wizard of Oz*, all she could think about was getting back home to Kansas and her family and friends. Real Kansans echo her sentiment that "There's no place like home."

Qaum's decision to join the



ABOVE, Wichita's River Festival has grown into a 9-day event featuring musical entertainment, a parade, barbecue, softball tournament, and more. RIGHT, The Flint Hills, just outside Wichita, create a rolling landscape quite different from the flat landscape many people perceive as Kansas.

Continued from previous page

Wichita Clinic, one of Kansas' largest group medical practices with some 160 physicians, was based on such everyday realities as: (1) a surprisingly low cost of living, (2) his two-minute commute, (3) top-rated schools, (4) "nicer people, patients and colleagues" yielding lower stress levels, (5) a small-town crime rate with large-city amenities, and (6) a myriad of activities for children as well as adults.

An ophthalmologist with training credentials from Cornell, Harvard, and Duke, Qaum (pronounced Kwahm) firmly believes he could have found work in almost any city. "But we picked Wichita—and not without a lot of research. My wife and I looked at every single job in the country," he recalls, "about 150 altogether. We looked at the Midwest just to make sure we covered all our bases. But then we discovered what a gem it is."

Follow the cattle road

For one reason or another, new arrivals

in Wichita have agreed on that point for thousands of years. A 44-foot statue of a proud Indian stands at the confluence of the two rivers that meet at Wichita, the Arkansas and Little Arkansas (pronounced Ar-KAN-sas, unlike the state). Titled "Keeper of the Plains," it commemorates the Wichita Indians who lived and traded here long before European "newcomers" began arriving in the 1850s. These hunters/ trappers/traders were succeeded by cattle drivers following the famed Chisholm Trail from Texas. Herds then went east by rail. The era of the fabled "Wild West" was in full swing.

The rough-and-ready personalities of those cattle-driving days included the legendary Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, and Wild Bill Hickok, gamblers who off and on doubled as peace officers. In those rowdy times, one city council action was far ahead of its time. It banned the carrying of weapons within city limits. Signs posted on the roads into town warned that vi-

olators would be prosecuted.

Today, more than a century after cowboys hustled their last steers through the dirt streets, the western heritage lingers, complete with nostalgic wagon rides into the nearby undulating Flint Hills, chuckwagon suppers, Old Cowtown living history museum, and a mind-boggling array of gear from boots to ten-gallon hats at the 107-year-old Sheplers, billed as the world's largest western store. Wild West World opened in May, touted as the world's only theme park with rides and activities all geared to the old, exciting cowboy days.

Right in their own backyard

The Earps and Mastersons would be strangers in the city that now lures physicians like Qaum and Diane Steere, MD, a family physician who's been enchanted by modern-day



PHOTO COURTESY: EXPLORATION PLACE



PHOTOS/ GREATER WICHITA C&VB

ABOVE, Exploration Place, a children's museum and science discovery center. LEFT, The home of an early mayor of Wichita, L. W. Clapp. Clapp developed the city's park system. RIGHT, "Keeper of the Plains" stands at the confluence of the Arkansas and the Little Arkansas rivers.



Wichita since her decision "quite by accident" to practice here in 1990. She joined an eight-member medical group, Wichita Family Medicine Specialists, in 1996. "I had no intention of ever moving to Kansas," she now recalls. But her parents had relocated to Wichita from Michigan while she was at the Michigan State University Medical School. Visiting for Christmas, Steere decided to do a "practice" interview for her residency.

At Wesley Medical Center, one of the city's two large hospital complexes, she says, "I found by far the best family practice residency program anywhere." Her enthusiasm soon spilled over into her professional practice. "The wonderful thing about primary care in Wichita," she says, "is that I take care of whole families, sometimes generations of them. The family medicine residency taught me

to take care of everybody, from newborns and children to men, women, and grandparents, including cases of mental health and depression."

Complicated cases are referred to specialists, but, she adds, "Internists (and family practitioners) here have a special relationship with specialists, and there's not a lot of competitive feeling. I'm not sure that's common elsewhere, and it probably happens because we all train together in the Wesley residency program."

Sitting in the middle of a great prairie, modern-day Wichita surprises newcomers as a hub of enterprise with most of the trappings of a large eastern city.

"A lot of people think it's still the Wild West out here," Steere laughs. But they don't realize that, like a

growing number of other cities, big and small, Wichita has been reinventing itself for the last several years. After rounds of thriving and fading, its downtown has made a comeback, complete with some 31 bronzes that have created a kind of sculpture parade along Douglas Avenue, the main street. Businesses have moved back into renovated and new office space, creating a revived market for restaurants and shops.

In the middle of it all, the new Century II Convention Center sits on the Arkansas River bank and includes

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three theaters for productions large, medium, and small. A block away, a new 124,000-square-foot central library will open in 2011; smaller branches will be expanded or replaced. Wichita State University's lively music and performing arts programs gave rise to three theaters themselves. Mega-concerts are held at the Kansas Coliseum, which also hosts ice hockey and other sports events.

Fans of major professional sports head to Kansas City (190 miles) for Royals baseball and Chiefs football games, but WSU's highly rated basketball team is an excellent alternative. And, each year during the first two weeks of August, some 80,000 baseball fans swarm in Wichita for the super-marathon National Baseball Congress World Series. Forty-four amateur college teams from around the country play more than 85 games morning, afternoon, and night.

City leaders and agencies have carefully planted the banks of both the Arkansas and Little Arkansas Rivers with entertainment, historical, and cultural venues. "Museums on the River" (six of them) run the gamut from the living history of Old Cowtown to Exploration Place, a wonderworld of modern-day science with sections featuring flight, human life, nature, and the universe. Highlights include a spectacular planetarium, simulated flights over Kansas and nature "rides" above waterfalls and lava vents. Also in the museum mix is the Wichita Art Museum with its impressive collection of American art, and Botanica, The Wichita Gardens, an extensive display, located within Sim Park.

Nearby Old Town, a revitalized warehouse district, has become an extension of downtown, with restaurants,

a brewpub, shops, nightclubs, theaters, galleries, and museums. Musical comedies light up Cabaret Old Town, and the Museum of World Treasures in a massive ex-warehouse is one man's mind-boggling collection of diversified artifacts from mummies, dinosaurs, and war memorabilia to crown jewels and signatures of all 43 presidents.

All of the above is sustained by America's second highest concentration of manufacturing jobs and skilled labor—almost 65,000 strong in the four-county metro area.

Thanks to the applied genius of such early inventors/entrepreneurs as Lloyd Stearman, Walter Beech, and Clyde Cessna, Wichita is now known as the Air Capital of America. It was the major manufacturer of World War II planes. Local history aficionado Frank Chappell says, "Almost every pilot at some time during the war was in a Wichita-made plane." Older Wichitans remember scores of warplanes filling the skies almost daily on their way to bases and battlefronts.

Today, as much as 70 percent of U.S. general aviation aircraft is produced at four major Wichita plants. A fifth, Airbus North America Engineering, supplies technical support with 200 engineers. Hundreds of aircraft subcontractors and suppliers swell the work force, making it the largest in the world in aerospace manufacturing. The state-of-the-art National Institute for Aviation Research, housed at WSU, works closely with the industry. Since 1985, its staff has led the way in dramatic improvements in plane performance, technology, and safety.

Besides all of the above, Wichita is home to McConnell Air Force Base, whose primary mission is global air refueling.

Aside from its aviation fame, the city is home to the giant Koch Industries, which recently surpassed Cargill Corporation as America's largest privately held company. Interestingly, the

Wichita by the Numbers

POPULATION:

Wichita: 353,823
Sedgwick County: 463,802
Wichita MSA (4 counties): 587,055
Median Age: 33.2 years

CLIMATE:

Average Annual Rainfall: 29.3 inches
Average Snowfall: 15.7 inches
Average High/Low Temperatures:
January: 40°/19°, July: 93°/70°
Days of Sunshine: 225

TORNADO STATISTICS:

23rd worst of 25 deadliest tornadoes since 1840 hit Udall, KS, 20 miles south of Wichita, in 1955. Remaining 24 were in other states, including 5 in Missouri.
Wichita rated No. 17 of U.S. cities most likely to suffer tornadoes.

TRANSPORTATION:

AIRPORT: Mid-Continent Airport
TRAIN: AMTRAK (in Newton, 20 miles)
INTERSTATES: I-35, I-135, I-235

COST OF LIVING INDEX:

93.8 (100 is average)
AVG. HOUSEHOLD INCOME: \$53,494
MEDIAN EXISTING HOME PRICE: \$120,868
SALES TAX: 7.3 percent
OTHER:
Sedgwick County Employment: 237,553
Unemployed: 13,182
MSA Manufacturing Employment: 60,000
Average One-Way Trip to Work: 18.2 minutes
Four-year Colleges in Area: 8
Public Schools in Wichita: 13
Private/parochial Schools: 35
Public Golf Courses: 18
Private Golf Courses: 9
Musical Organizations: 14
Performing Arts Theaters: 10
Museums and Galleries: 40
Movie Theaters: 17

now second-place entity also has a large presence in the city with its Cargill Meat Solutions Corp.

A place to find a heart

The old cowboys would be even more astounded to learn that, with the quality of medical care now available in the old cow town, they could well have survived some of the common ailments of their time.

Case in point: the CyberKnife® radiosurgery system at Via Christi Regional Medical Center. Hospital literature cites it as “cutting-edge care,” in which a computer-controlled radiation beam targets tumors, often in previously unreachable places. It does so with pinpoint accuracy and fewer treatments than other devices, all in a setting that doesn’t require patient restraint with metal halos. The beam from a robotic arm adjusts instantly to any patient movement. Through the Wichita Community Clinical Oncology Program, cancer patients can participate in many of the same trials being conducted at the nation’s top research facilities.

Via Christi, which pioneered open-heart surgery in the region, is the state’s largest heart program and the only Kansas hospital that performs heart transplants. Since 1986, 170 patients have received new hearts there, says public relations director Roz Hutchinson. She proudly mentions that one of the first seven patients recently celebrated her 20th anniversary with her new heart.

Via Christi’s Comprehensive Epilepsy Center serves some 1,100 epileptic patients from 80 Kansas and northern Oklahoma counties. “It’s one reason people move to Wichita, particularly if they have kids with epilepsy,”

Hutchinson says. The Center is one arm of Via Christi’s state-of-the-art Neuroscience Center, which includes an ICU exclusive to brain, spine, peripheral nerve, and muscle disorders. An acute-response stroke team and a primary stroke center have received top quality rankings.

There are numerous other highly advanced treatment areas. “We tend to be a little self-effacing about our (hospital) community, so sometimes people are surprised that we have such special treatments. It’s like the *Wizard of Oz*. Click your little red heels and you’re here,” says Hutchinson.

Many of its services, as well as those of Wesley Medical Center, Wichita’s other large hospital complex, are enhanced by association with the University of Kansas Medical School-Wichita. After two years at the KU Medical School in Kansas City, KS, students transfer to KU-Wichita for two years for a total regimen of hands-on bedside training. Approximately half of the graduates stay in Kansas.

In February, *Physicians Practice* magazine cited Kansas as one of the five most physician-friendly states, based on physician-patient ratios, reimbursement, malpractice suit outcomes, cost of living, and the size of reimbursement rates compared to cost of living. According to writer Bob Keaveney, “The big flat, open spaces of America’s Midwest outshine the glitziest coastal states as attractive places to practice medicine. (Kansas is a place) where doctors can still be doctors and make a living, too.” But, he added, “the physicians’ favorite thing about Kansas is Kansas itself.”

Via Christi began as two hospitals—St. Joseph and St. Francis—each founded by an order of nuns in

Wichita’s early days. The Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, arriving from Rome in 1889, took charge of St. Francis Hospital, a three-story house with 12 beds. In 1925, the Wichita branch of the Sisters of St. Joseph acquired Wichita Hospital, building a 250-bed hospital in 1941, followed by a seven-story medical tower in 1976. The founding groups consolidated their health-care ministries in 1995 to form what is now the Via Christi Health Network, which includes a behavioral health campus, various clinics and diagnostic centers, home health care, and a durable medical equipment provider.

Wesley Medical Center, founded by a regional Methodist Church Organization in 1912, became part of HCA in 1985 and now provides traditional services and incorporates a critical care building with three adult ICUs, a family medicine clinic, a women’s hospital and a birth care center. More babies are born there (some 6,000 in 2006) than in any other hospital in a 13-state region, according to Helen Thomas, the marketing, public relations, and senior services director. A strong adjunct is the area’s most experienced NICU staff, which has been a forerunner in safety measures only recently being adopted by many NICU facilities. For instance, the use of surfactant to treat premature infants’ lungs was pioneered at Wesley. Besides the NICU, Wesley also provides advanced care for high-risk pregnancies and a pediatric ICU.

The medical center is home to a Level One Trauma Center, staffed by board-certified surgeons in-house 24 hours a day. With more than 72,000 visits a year, the emergency department is the busiest in Kansas, accord-

ing to Thomas, and enjoys the services of an interventional neuroradiologist, one of the few in the US, who uses brain catheters to stop strokes in progress. The newest addition is a freestanding emergency and diagnostic center 12 miles from the main campus.

Living in the land of Oz

You could say the hospitals' innovative energy follows on the heels of long-entrenched entrepreneurship in Wichita. Today's massive aircraft industry is the latest but not the first proof of this. In 1889, Albert A. Hyde was busy mixing ingredients that finally congealed into Mentholatum, still used as an analgesic, for perfumes and as a mint flavoring.

A few years later, W.C. Coleman signed on to sell lamps for store windows. Their gauze pressurized gaso-line-burning pouches, or mantles, produced the brightest light he'd ever seen. Rebuffed by skeptical storekeepers, Coleman dreamed up a new tactic: "Don't sell lamps; sell lighting!" In other words, rent out the lamps but sell the mantles and fuel. Today the company he founded produces campers' merchandise from the lamps themselves to camp stoves, canoes, and inflatable outdoor furniture. Its large outlet store includes a small museum with a dozen or more products of Coleman's genius such as old-time toasters, irons, and even a wallpaper steamer.

Pizza Hut, now with some 12,000 stores worldwide, was born in the city in 1958, gestated by two brothers in a tiny, red-roofed building with a \$600 loan from their mother. The Chamber of Commerce hopes to continue that tradition with a new tier of entrepreneurs, using the slogan: "The status quo has never had status with us."

A few years ago, physicians themselves took those words to heart when they began establishing independent specialty hospitals. The new facilities include two heart hospitals, a spine hospital, a surgery and recovery center, and two simply designated "specialty hospitals." One ambitious entrepreneur, Joseph Galichia, MD has carried the concept several steps further. Since opening his Galichia Heart Hospital in 2001, he's expanded his holdings into a multi-specialty practice with 21 satellite clinics in Kansas.

The complexes cite fees comparable to the general-service hospitals, and patients with multiple and extremely acute problems are referred to Via Christi and Wesley, but spokespeople at both general hospitals, quoted in a 2005 *Time* magazine article, produced statistics showing that the newcomers were draining their most profitable niches. This, they said, could force them to set limits on charity and Medicaid services, although that hasn't happened yet. Whether spurred on by the competition or simply improving care, both Via Christi and Wesley have continued to add services, facilities, and state-of-the-art equipment.

Legislative efforts to level this competitive playing field have so far languished, and one advisory commission concluded that the competitors "do not have a significant impact" on acute-care hospitals.

The CEO of one Wichita facility points out that his—and the other specialties—offer doctor-owners greater control over patient care, ease of operation on a smaller scope, easier scheduling of procedures, and greater efficiency, freeing up significant time for office hours.

Edwin French, the CEO of MedCath Corporation, with 11 heart

hospitals and other enterprises in eight states, says, "We raise the bar for the community." The debate continues.

In Wichita, innovation and farsighted planning have been a strong suit in some government sectors, too.

Wichitans from toddlers to seniors take advantage of the city's parks, 123 altogether, ranging in size from a few as small as the .37-acre Victorian Park wedged onto a traffic island, to the 624-acre Pawnee Prairie Park. Many of these parks and greenways contain golf courses, baseball fields, pools, tennis courts, and space for planned activities, but wild habitat areas take up 30 percent.

All of the above are a legacy of an early mayor, L.W. Clapp, for whom one large park is named. Clapp's dictum: "Every Wichita citizen should enjoy nature without traveling far from home."

For Steere's husband, the best part of the park system is its many golf courses. Not only that, Steere says, "Sometimes you can golf 11 months of the year here." Steere herself is an avid runner and is happy that the city is laced with an abundance of trails for hiking, biking, and running. Special bike trails stretch for several miles on each side of the Arkansas River.

Strangely enough, with a huge number of Wichita residents involved in some physical activity, *Men's Fitness* magazine cited the city as America's 19th fattest in 2005, noting that only one in five adults eats the minimum recommended servings of fruit and vegetables per day. Flab conclusions are mixed, though. A nationwide research firm has named the State of Kansas America's 10th healthiest.

Regardless of the confusion, Wichita's YMCA is working hard to

turn around the poundage challenged. It counts 165,000 people (about a third of the population) who take advantage of its pool, exercise, and sports activities at eight branches and an indoor sports center.

With a four-year-old son, a two-year-old daughter, and a newborn, Qaum is especially pleased with the city's array of activities for children, many of them in the parks or organized by park employees. His son is in a swimming class, and the Sedgwick County Zoo, ranked No. 8 in the country, is a favorite place to visit. The park system also offers a 10-week series of children's activities—Summer of Discovery—in nine park centers, including sports, games, crafts, cultural arts, and several field trips. An \$80-per-week fee covers all of the above.

Non-park possibilities include children's theater, dancing, arts, and physical education activities.

Of many summer events for adults, two perennials attract multitudes. The Wichita Flight Festival salutes the city's heritage with a weekend of air shows. A unique "bathtub race" highlights the nine-day Riverfest every May. Each boat on the river must have some kind of tub on board.

Also very important to Qaum and his wife are highly rated schools: public, private, and parochial. They especially compare the large number of advanced placement classes (17) at private schools with those in the affluent Long Island town of Jericho, where a colleague of his practices. "But the cost in Wichita is a fraction of what we would pay in New York," he says.

Ditto, in a big way, for housing. "Compare living in Wichita to living near top-rated Massachusetts General Hospital, where I rotated as a Harvard medical student. Rent for a one-room studio apartment ran about \$1,500 to \$2,000. In Wichita, you can rent an entire house with double or triple the footage for less than half those prices," he says.

So there's no place like home in Wichita, and it's as affordable as it is desirable. ■

Eileen Lockwood is a free-lance writer based in St. Joseph, Missouri.