

# MANAGEMENT REPORT

APRIL 2021

PRESENTED BY



# FROM THE DESK OF MATT PIVARNIK

Community Leaders,

I've been talking to many of our leaders and influencers in the community this year. Now five months into 2021, I am noticing a common theme from my conversations. Fear. A persistent anxiety is plaguing many of our citizens. This is not the same fear that dominated the landscape in 2020. The trials and tribulations of the past year are fading and a new concern is starting to take hold. It is a fear that 2020 took something else away.

A concern that we have lost our momentum. I've been thinking about that a lot lately. How can we confront this worry and overcome it? The great Chinese philosopher, Confucius, wrote in the 6th century B.C. that "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in RISING every time we fall." Yes, last year brought a host of burdens that put many communities to their knees. Yes, our progress slowed and stalled some of our dream, but the real glory now is showing the world how Topeka will rise up from this.

As we move into spring and summer this year, we have the opportunity to tackle our challenges with new vigor. I challenge each of you, if fear or anxiety begins to cloud your optimism...take a breath, look back at everything we have already accomplished together, and look forward to what is yet to come. 2021 will not be defined as the year Topeka faltered. 2021 is the year we rise.

***Thank you to HTK Architects for sponsoring this Management Report!***



## JEDO SMALL BUSINESS GRANT PROGRAM ANNOUNCED

This month, the Joint Economic Development Organization (JEDO) and GO Topeka announced that Shawnee County small businesses may now apply for funds through the JEDO Small Business Grant Relief Program. The JEDO Small Business Grant Relief Program is a grant program that provides relief to businesses suffering financial losses due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Grants range from \$5,000-\$30,000 and are dependent on the small business' employee count.

[Learn more/apply for grant >](#)

## VISITOR GUIDE NOW AVAILABLE

Exciting news, everyone! The 2021 Topeka Visitors Guide is now available in print and digital formats!

A great resource for both visitor and local alike, the guide highlights Topeka's hidden gems, best loved attractions, green spaces, restaurants and more.

To receive your own guide, [follow this link >](#)

## WSJ & REALTOR.COM RANK TOPEKA AS TOP HOUSING MARKET IN KS

The Wall Street Journal and Realtor.com released its [Emerging Housing Markets Index](#), ranking Topeka as the number one housing market in Kansas. A collaborative effort on the part of both entities, the index ranks metro areas according to real-estate market data, economic health and quality of life. Topeka ranked in the top 20 percent of American metros, #57 of 300 evaluated.

“The Wall Street Journal collaborated with Realtor.com to rank which housing markets are expected to provide both a strong return on investment—and are a nice place to live,” wrote David M Ewald, Wall Street Journal. “While other market-by-market comparisons focus only on housing metrics, the WSJ/Realtor.com Emerging Housing Markets Index also looks at non-housing indicators to help identify places that are not only good places to invest, but also where you are likely to enjoy living. Initially, the index will be updated quarterly.”

[Learn more >](#)

## CRM PROJECT

The CRM project continues to move forward. Final configuration documents began circulating in late April for the Partnership team to sign off on the overall design so that the consultants can begin development of the environment and automations. The last hurdle is to build out the accounting system and the CRM system interfaces. The Partnership team has been working with Sage Intacct to get a project opened and a developer assigned to our case so that the CRM developers. Ideally, the Intacct developers will work together to make the magic happen.

## PLUG AND PLAY TOPEKA SPRING EXPO

BioKansas, in partnership with GO Topeka and Plug and Play Topeka, will be hosting a golf scramble to celebrate the graduation of the first Plug and Play cohort of startup companies in Topeka on Thursday, June 10. This event will be held at Firekeeper Golf Course and will feature a virtual viewing of the Plug and Play Topeka Spring Expo featuring pitches from our 10 startup companies in animal health, food safety, livestock biome and energy & sustainability, and others. The 2-hour graduation lunch event will be bookended by an 18 hole golf scramble. The day will conclude with a 19th hole reception at Evergy Plaza.

This event will allow community and business leaders to meet local Plug and Play leadership, as well as network with BioKansas, the region's leading influencer in the support and growth of Kansas' bioscience ecosystem. This is an incredible opportunity to learn more about the growing startup culture in Topeka and across the state.

For more information, to register or to explore sponsorship opportunities, [follow this link >](https://www.gotopeka.com/6421-2/) (<https://www.gotopeka.com/6421-2/>)

## STR'S DESTINATION REPORT/TRAVEL STATS (THRU MARCH)

February room demand was down about 18 percent from 2020 - a slight increase from January. As expected, our occupancy rate remained down more than 10 percentage points for the month (38.87%) vs. 2020.

March was a bit more interesting. On March 14, the data began to split as we compare ourselves to the shutdown that occurred last year. For the month, March room demand was up 34 percent from 2020 - by far the best year-over-year increase in a very long time. Our occupancy rate exploded to just over 48% - up 29% from 2020. Interestingly, ADR decreased slightly compared to last year. This was expected as we anticipate a slower recovery for hotel rates relative to demand. ADR for March was an estimated \$74.93 (down from \$78.81 in 2020) placing monthly hotel revenue at an estimated \$3,057,622 (up about 27 percent from 2020).

## NEW RESTAURANT REVITALIZATION PROGRAM TO LAUNCH

The restaurant industry has been among the hardest-hit sectors during the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. To help bring jobs back and revive the industry, the American Rescue Plan, signed into law by President Joe Biden, established the \$28.6 billion Restaurant Revitalization Fund at the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). The SBA will administer the funds to the hardest-hit small restaurants. details on application requirements, eligibility, and a program guide are now available in English at [www.sba.gov/restaurants](http://www.sba.gov/restaurants) or in Spanish at [www.sba.gov/restaurantes](http://www.sba.gov/restaurantes).

Ahead of the application launch and over the next two weeks, the SBA will establish a seven-day pilot period for the RRF application portal and conduct extensive outreach and training. The pilot period will be used to address technical issues ahead of the public launch. Participants in this pilot will be randomly selected from existing PPP borrowers in priority groups for RRF and will not receive funds until the application portal is open to the public.

## FORGE - 'GETTING HIRED 101'

The Leadership Herd held part 1 of a quarterly series last month with their "Getting Hired 101" panel event. Local leaders answered questions regarding resume tips, interview tricks, and much more! Missed the virtual event? No problem, you can view the zoom video here. (<https://www.facebook.com/TopekaForge/videos/2252150664917579>) Part 2 of this series will focus on resume building – stay tuned for a late spring announcement with further details!

April was full of virtual programming, Forge is pleased to be returning to in-person education and events starting in May! We will still be social distancing and be outdoors as much as possible, weather permitting. View the next page to learn more about Forge's upcoming events!

## TOPEKA YOUTH COMMISSION

This past month, the TYC was able to elect its new executive board and said goodbye to its past board.

Below is the 2021-2022 TYC Executive Board:

Co-Chairs: Brynne Liedtke (USD 450) and Rene Cabrera (USD 345)

Vice Chair: Lorraine Delaisla (USD 501)

Secretary: Shea Marney (USD 450)

Treasurer: Adrienne Caracioni (USD 501)

Chair of Government: Hannah Mott (USD 345)

Chair of Community Involvement: Makinze Gritman (Washburn University)

Chair of Community Outreach: Vicki Sims (Hayden)

Chair of Social Media: Hannah Sixkiller (USD 450)

We would like to give a big thank you to our former Chair, Bryce Liedtke, for all he has done to fulfill our amazing organization and can't wait to move forward with a new group of leaders!

## UPCOMING FORGE EVENTS

The Health Herd will kick off its first in-person event on May 13 to celebrate National Yoga Month with a “Mimosa Yoga on the Terrace” event being held at the Foundry Event Center. Cost is just \$5 and includes the yoga instruction and the mimosas! The first 40 people to sign up will also receive a complimentary tumbler!

The Inspire Herd is continuing their ever-popular #ForgeCares video series this Spring. Be on the lookout for the following organizations’ videos on our social media:

- April 30 – Capper Foundation
- May 14 – Relay of Life
- June 25 – Greater Topeka Youth Foundation
- July 16 – Community Blood Center

Forge Executive Director Kelli Maydew will be presenting to the IABC (International Association of Business Communicators) on May 6. The virtual presentation will dive into Forge initiatives, ways to get involved, and a Q/A session. This professional development opportunity is free for IABC members and \$10 for non-members. Those interested can register [here](#) >

## BUSINESS ATTRACTION

In collaboration with Downtown Topeka and Visit Topeka, planning is underway to host a small group of site selectors in Topeka for a familiarization tour in June. Focus will be showing off the recent successes in both business expansions and quality of place investments like Downtown. The tour will also provide small group discussions with business leaders who can help make the business case for why their company continues to invest and grow in Topeka. These opportunities help Topeka stand out in the site selection process.

## PARTNERSHIP MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome our new March members:

Bling Bling Yard Signs

Lean Kitchen

The Market at McVicker

Two Men and A Truck

Ad Astra Per Aspera Counseling, LLC

Parker Inspections

Topeka Vendor’s Market

Paradise Puppies

Bite Toffee

Team Blake

First Tee of Greater Topeka

We also celebrated ribbon cuttings for the following businesses:

The Trust Company of Kansas

Sunflower Chiropractic

## FINANCIAL RESULTS

2021 continues to perform in line with expectations. In March, the Partnership was able to provide some compensation adjustments to employees who were negatively affected by COVID in 2020. This was made possible by the PPP funds secured in late January. As a result, March payroll expenses came in over budget resulting in a YTD net loss of 38K.

The PPP funds are currently represented as debt on the books until the proceeds are formally forgiven. At that time, the Partnership will recognize revenue to offset the net loss. Additionally, VTI revenue continues to outperform the conservative 2020 budget.

## COLLAB EFFORT WITH THA BRINGS NEW BIZ TO UNDERSERVED MARKET

Minority and Women Business Development (MWBD) and the Topeka Housing Authority (THA) will open the doors to the THA Empowerment Center, a pilot incubator program used to seed and grow small businesses in underserved communities. This project, a collaboration between THA and MWBD, aims to serve as a catalyst for economic prosperity by creating and fostering these businesses. The THA Empowerment Center will open its doors on Friday, May 14 with five business startups. The THA tenants have thoroughly investigated their market. They participated in Fast Trac, worked with a business coach to fortify their business plan. They will continue to receive support through coaching and consultation, programming and financial resources.

## METL COALITION

The METL Coalition (Manhattan, Emporia, Topeka, Lawrence) has been meeting virtually, watching the 2021 legislative session closely and has weighed-in on several important issues. COVID-19 has limited the group's activity calendar considerably but that won't prevent them from reenforcing the METL brand in May. When they return for the veto session in early May, the 28 legislators who represent the METL region will find a gift waiting for them to remind them of the group's appreciation for their public service and reenforcing our various shared priorities.

## BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

In April 2021, GO Topeka saw continued resourcing of our partnerships with businesses throughout the community, from labor information to serving as a liaison for permitting and other professional services. The pipeline should see several newly added projects in the next few months, as businesses continue to research opportunities to potentially grow and expand in Topeka and Shawnee County.

## VISIT TOPEKA BLOGS

Producing new blog content every month, the Visit Topeka marketing team is constantly working to bring you new and interesting content that awakens your inner traveler.

Check out some of our most recent blogs:

<https://visit.topekapartnership.com/blog/post/country-stampede-survival-guide/>

<https://visit.topekapartnership.com/blog/post/the-capital-city-art-experience/>

<https://visit.topekapartnership.com/blog/post/get-into-the-arts-at-mulvane-art-museum/>

<https://visit.topekapartnership.com/blog/post/teresa-cuevas-co-founder-of-mariachi-estrella-de-topeka/>

<https://visit.topekapartnership.com/blog/post/tulips-at-twilight-springtime-wonderland/>

<https://visit.topekapartnership.com/blog/post/dont-take-our-word-for-it-take-their-word-for-it/>

## TOTAL RESOURCE CAMPAIGN

The Total Resource Campaign is still in the review process so we can kick off our Campaign with new and updated sponsorships. We should have the new sponsorship booklet available in June - just in time for our August kick-off led by our Chair Martha Piland.



## MOTOR COACH/ TOUR MARKET REBOUNDED

Tulip Time and the will to travel; brought motor coaches and their guests back to Topeka during April. The Visit Topeka staff worked with five group tour planners to coordinate their itineraries around sightseeing for tulips and add additional activities around the community.

The motor coach/tour market is rebounding fast, and Visit Topeka is looking to capitalize on the surge with a campaign aimed at 500+ tour organization in our database. In April, we will target six month and one year planning cycles which will hopefully have more residents seeing those motorcoaches around town soon.

## TOP CITY INTERN 2021 PROGRAM ANNOUNCED

The 2021 Top City Interns program will return for its fifth year on June 1 with a kickoff celebration at Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center. In all, 70 in-person interns and a total of 200 interns will be working throughout the summer. Presently, 18 different Topeka area companies are involved. At the June 1 kickoff event, interns will gather to socialize, learn more about Topeka, and get a behind-the-scenes tour of the Zoo from Director Brendan Wiley. With this and other Top City Intern events occurring throughout the summer, interns will be able to witness Topeka's quality of life while also gaining professional and social experiences.

[Learn more >](#)

## SPORTS SALES

With spring sports starting, sports sales see the optimism continue. Planners are looking ahead to the fall and next spring for their events. In addition, valuable meetings with groups looking at larger scale future events are starting to happen, which bodes well for our city. Currently, the pipeline has 11 leads with 7,369 room nights and \$5.8 million in economic impact.

Staff booked one event this past month as well as lost a piece of business. The lost business was the 2023 Kansas Shrine Bowl. In 2020, the Kansas Shrine Bowl was able to host their game at Hummer Sports Park during an abbreviated weekend and staff was optimistic about the return. Unfortunately, we will not be able to host in 2023 but will continue to look at this game as an opportunity in the future.

## PARTNERSHIP DEI STATEMENTS

After taking time to carefully craft each of its statements addressing diversity, equity and inclusion, the Partnership entities are now displaying their approved DEI statements on the Greater Topeka Partnership website.

To view these statements, [follow this link >](#)

## DTI SUBMITS FINAL 'BID' UPDATE

Downtown Topeka Inc. has submitted final 2021 Business Improvement District (BID) updates to the City of Topeka. The city will begin send out 2021 BID information to businesses located in the district in early May.

## NEW WAYFINDING SIGNS IN DOWNTOWN

As you drive and walk around downtown you will notice 55 new wayfinding signs that have been implemented over the past few weeks. This directional signage highlights downtown parking garages and tourist destinations. The overall look and feel of the signage is cohesive with the rest of the city and will be a welcomed update.

## CONVENTION SALES

The return of spring has brought a steady flow of meetings and conventions in Topeka. There are two state conventions hosting their annual conferences this month with more of an up-tick in events later into spring and summer. Meetings are currently being held with local groups to discuss the possibility of working together to bring in regional or national pieces of business that the groups are affiliated with; an example of this includes discussions of bidding on national train conventions that would be a good fit for our city to host. The pipeline currently holds 31 leads with 17,032 room nights for an economic impact of \$5,869,200.

The sales team turned one piece of business definite, as well as lost a piece of business due to cancellation. The lost business was the TopCon Expo that was scheduled for this fall and is not returning at this time. There are multiple proposals out for review and awaiting decisions to see if Topeka is chosen as their host city.

## PARTNERSHIP EVENTS

Are you a wave, a fist-bump, or a handshake kind of person these days? We don't care, we're just happy to see you...IN PERSON! April marked the return of Business Unwind, hosted at Cortez Transportation. We were able to greet each other, network, and enjoy some great cocktails provided by Blacksmith Hall and beer donated by Strathman Sales Co. Thank you to Cortez Transportation, and congratulations to Tami and Carlos on their upcoming nuptials next month! Join us next month on May 18 at Schendel Lawn and Landscape.

Next month, we will be celebrating our local economy at the Small Business Awards on May 11. Eighteen nominees will be celebrated, but ultimately six will walk away with the honor of winning within their category. Thank you to our presenting sponsor, Envista Credit Union! Downtown After Hours will be resuming on May 13 at Brew Bank, hosted by Kansas Commercial Real Estate Services, Inc.

We welcome you to join us for a drink or two at Tap That Topeka, the biggest beer fest in the Midwest, on June 12. Tickets can be purchased at [tickets.topekapartnership.com](https://tickets.topekapartnership.com). The Second Saturday Concert Series will kick off that night as well at Celtic Fox.

## BRING BACK THE BOULEVARD

### Earth Day Clean Up

South Topeka group Bring Back The Boulevard had a Trash Pickup Day in celebration of Earth Day. Clean up work took place at the Gwendolyn Brooks Park at 37th and Topeka and along Topeka Boulevard.

### \$5K Donation from S Topeka Boulevard Businesses

This month Bring Back the Boulevard received a \$5,000 donation from local South Topeka Boulevard businesses. This generous donation will go toward the development and beautification efforts the Boulevard group is hoping to achieve.

## RIVERFRONT UPDATE: UPCOMING RIBBON CUTTING & MORE

Riverfront Advisory Council and sub committees have been working with City, County and State officials for the official unveiling and ribbon cutting for the Weir Project. This event is scheduled to take place Friday, May 7 at 2 p.m. at the Weir, in partnership with the ribbon cutting and opening of the Great Overland Station at 4:30 p.m.

The Riverfront Advisory Council will soon have a new logo and website.

## RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

### **Membership Sales**

Our Sales Manager TJ McDonald attended a virtual membership sales conference with the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives. The two-day conference focused on the art of selling memberships, workshops for strategic recruitment and member engagement, mission selling, customer service and so much more! Look out Shawnee County businesses, TJ is ready to bring you on as a member!

### **Ambassadors**

Our Partnership Ambassadors held their first in person meeting in March. The Chair, Jim Garrison, was excited to welcome the group of volunteers in person at the Blind Tiger Restaurant and Brewery, and is looking forward to the 2021 year of ribbon cuttings and events. Ambassadors had their first “Flash Mob” at on St. Patrick’s Day at Celtic Fox. The group can’t wait to have their next gathering at another member establishment.

## CHAMBER ACCREDITATION

The Chamber has submitted its application for accreditation to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The nine-part application covers such topics as governance, finance, HR, program development and technology. Whether this first attempt at earning the U.S. Chamber’s prestigious stamp of approval is a success, the Partnership has already benefited. The application points toward several best practices which Partnership staff has already worked to implement. The U.S. Chamber is expected to announce its decision in the June-July timeframe.

# LEADERSHIP GREATER TOPEKA EVENTS UPDATE

## LGT Class of 2021

The 2021 program has begun with the annual retreat and the recently completed session 1. Adjustments in touring locations has been the biggest adjustment to the program that has been made in response to Covid. Session 1 of the class centered around Topeka's history of diversity, discussing Brown v. Board, Red lining, social justice and advocacy. The class has named themselves: "The Best Class Behind The Mask."

## 2020 Graduation

The Leadership Greater Topeka class of 2020 graduation has been delayed due to the pandemic We are scheduled to finally celebrate, so SAVE THE DATE: May 12, 2021 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Evergy Plaza; entertainment by The Serrano Peppers.

**[REGISTER HERE >](#)**

# KS PTAC UPDATE

Fiscal Year 2021 began Feb 1, 2021. Update on progress towards FY21 goals.

**NEW CLIENTS** - Guided 21 new small businesses through the process of becoming registered to do businesses with the federal government.

**COUNSELING** - Held 169 hours of one-on-one counseling sessions with existing and new small businesses.

**EVENTS** – Held three training events the topic covered, Introduction to Government Contracting. This was held virtually and hosted by JCCC.

Upcoming Training Events register to attend here: <https://www.wichita.edu/research/kansasptac/ptacevents.php>

**VALUE** - Assisted KS PTAC clients across the state with obtaining Federal Contract Awards worth \$3.8 M. These contracts have been awarded between 2/1/21 – 4/27/21.

KS PTAC provides assistance working in the government market space. Currently KS PTAC is providing on-demand learning options through our network partners for those interested in Government Contracting. If interested please register to work with KS PTAC at [www.KansasPTAC.org](http://www.KansasPTAC.org).

# MOMENTUM 2022 ADDITIONAL UPDATES

Outreach with Partnership organizations with strategies and prospective consultants are being conducted as research begins on the process and implementation of the next strategic plan for the community.

The goal is to determine the method of delivery for the next strategy by the 3rd quarter of 2021.

Talent Development Taskforce is currently working to develop an inventory of career guidance, training and curriculum offerings between the various school districts. This will be used to assess any gaps in the offerings and opportunities with in the community that students may not be fully aware of in its entirety.

Digital Equity Taskforce through the City is currently reviewing funding options and finalizing a framework to carry a Digital Equity Plan forward.

## SBA DISTRICT DIRECTOR MEETS SBC; EXPLAINS RESTAURANT PROGRAM

Michael L. Barrera, US Small Business Administration District Director, Kansas City District Office presented to the Small Business Council in April. Barrera is newly appointed to the Kansas City District and has vowed to make the Topeka area a top priority as he strengthens the outreach efforts of the SBA. His first initiative included an overview of the Restaurant Revitalization Program. The restaurant industry has been among the hardest-hit sectors during the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. To help bring jobs back and revive the industry, the American Rescue Plan, signed into law by President Joe Biden, established the \$28.6 billion Restaurant Revitalization Fund at the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). The SBA will administer the funds to the hardest-hit small restaurants. details on application requirements, eligibility, and a program guide are now available in English at [www.sba.gov/restaurants](http://www.sba.gov/restaurants) or in Spanish at [www.sba.gov/restaurantes](http://www.sba.gov/restaurantes).

Ahead of the application launch and over the next two weeks, the SBA will establish a seven-day pilot period for the RRF application portal and conduct extensive outreach and training. The pilot period will be used to address technical issues ahead of the public launch. Participants in this pilot will be randomly selected from existing PPP borrowers in priority groups for RRF and will not receive funds until the application portal is open to the public.

## DOCKING STATE OFFICE BUILDING

The Governor and some others had been proposing the new KDHE lab (see “KDHE”) be housed inside the Docking State Office Building, a large eyesore on the southwest corner of the Capitol Complex. This held appeal because it would have brought close to 100 professional jobs to downtown and complemented the emerging innovation district. Once it became clear that leadership in the House and Senate had no desire to locate the lab next to the Kansas Statehouse, the fate of the Docking Building become complicated and uncertain. So, the Chamber and DTI decided to simplify, clarify and amplify their shared position on the matter: (i) the State should not rehabilitate unnecessary office space inside Docking and, thus, harm our local developers who have invested to create office space in downtown for State tenants; (ii) the corner of 10th & Harrison needs to be restored in some manner; and (iii) the KDHE lab MUST stay in Topeka. Any solution, from among the many being considered, which satisfies all three of these important priorities will almost certainly win both groups’ support.

## MITCHELL TO KEYNOTE SMALL BIZ AWARDS

Darlene Mitchell, retail expert and thought leader, will be the keynote speaker for the 41st Annual Small Business Awards Luncheon. Darlene is a merchandising expert, inventory management specialist, boutique, and brand strategist with 25-plus years of retail industry experience in diverse executive, leadership and management roles. She’s held various leadership roles at the world’s most recognized retail brands, including Payless ShoeSource, Gap, Old Navy, Chico’s, Hot Topic/Torrid and Pacific Sunwear. Mitchell will also host a separate session called Retail Therapy immediately following the Awards luncheon. Small Business Week is held May 5 – 11. The Awards Luncheon will take place on May 11 Interested in joining, contact Glenda Washington at [glenda.washington@Topekapartnership.com](mailto:glenda.washington@Topekapartnership.com).

## 'IT'S YOUR BUSINESS' PODCAST SERIES LAUNCHED

It is time the world hears about Topeka's exceptional entrepreneurs! Katrin Bridges has teamed up with India Yarborough of the Capital Journal to cohost one podcast every month telling the story of a Topeka startup. Bobby Sloan, founder of StayHomeKansas.com (<https://tinyurl.com/kye3kvwt>) and Leslie Fleuranges, owner of Tender Loving Care Pet Nursing Hotel (<https://tinyurl.com/3sn29yjm>) have been the first guests. Subscribe to the series wherever you get your podcasts - Spotify, Apple podcasts or anywhere else! Starting in May, we will add Plug and Play Topeka startups to the lineup. So stay tuned!

## LOCAL PLUG AND PLAY TEAM FORMING

After the first Plug and Play Topeka hire Lindsay Lebahn was brought on as Program Manager last month, a second full time staff member has been added to the program. Bhawna Thairani joins the team as venture analyst. Bhawna has experience in life sciences investing while working at venture capital firms Cultivation Capital and Mighty Capital, and has also worked for startup accelerators like StartupBootCamp and MassChallenge. Welcome Bhawana!

## AFRICAN AMERICAN TRAVEL CONFERENCE

Visit Topeka staff attended their first in-person tradeshow for 2021, which is also the first show since late 2019. The African American Travel Conference, held in Louisville KY, yielded meetings with thirty planners from across the United States. The African American Travel Conference was held at the same time and location as another similar conference, Boomers In Group, and staff took the opportunity to hustle some additional meetings, netting over thirty unplanned contacts from the second conference. The African American Travel Conference was to take place in the Capital City last April but rescheduled to April of 2022 because of the pandemic. Visit Topeka has again started laying the groundwork and will have many opportunities for volunteerism and sponsorship in the coming months. But if you have questions, please feel free to contact Visit Topeka sales staff.

## VISIT TOPEKA STAFF MISC.

Visit Topeka staff members have been actively engaged in regional, state and national groups. In the past month, staff has participated in the Northeast Kansas tourism coalition meeting. The focus of the group is tourism promotion in the region and Visit Topeka specifically talked about the upcoming African American Travel Conference. On the state level, staff participated in the board of directors for Travel Industry Association of Kansas (TIAK), which applauded the move of the State Tourism department into the Department of Commerce. SportsKS is another statewide tourism coalition which continues to see the momentum of sports travel and will host their first quarterly in person meeting in May with Jackie Stiles as the guest speaker. TourKS, a statewide coalition which focuses on group travel, is currently working on their new marketing plan and branding as they come out of the pandemic.

## KDHE

In late March, a joint legislative committee published a surprising recommendation that the KDHE laboratory currently located at Forbes Field, and badly in need of a new home, be put out for bid to determine whether any other Kansas community was willing to offer an incentive package to entice the lab out of Topeka. The Chamber and DTI immediately engaged with the entire Shawnee County delegation, the Governor's office and other legislative leaders to make a very aggressive case for keeping the lab in Topeka and not pitting Kansas communities against one another this way. As the legislature returns, there is cautious optimism that, while the matter may be discussed, relatively few in the Statehouse ultimately favor putting the lab anyplace other than the Capital City.

## BLACK BUSINESS AFTER HOURS RETURN

Business networking provides business owners the capacity to collaborate with others and to expand their network. The Black Business After Hours, launched in 2018, set the stage for many new business relationships and opportunities. Due to the pandemic, it had been placed on pause. It served as a platform to provide community insight, ideas, information and introduction of new business trends and connections. The Black Business After Hours will return in May and be held bi-monthly.



# SHAWNEE COUNTY'S LABOR MARKET

The official labor statistics for Shawnee County were recently reported by the Kansas Department of Labor.

As of March 2021, Shawnee County had a 3.6% unemployment rate; this represents a significant decline in the local unemployment rate. For additional context, 3.6% is the among the lowest rate of unemployment reported for the month of March, between 1990 and 2021. Last month, February 2021 the official unemployment rate was 4.4% and 6.7% for January 2021.

In total, there are 3,277 people out of work in the county; this figure is more in line with that we usually saw prior to the recession. In contrast, the number of employed workers is at a record high for the month of March at 88,761 employed workers. There are cases, where the number of unemployed workers decrease, but not

because they were able to find employment, but instead because they left the work force entirely. This was not the case for the county; while the labor force is not a record high, we are seeing some significant expansion in the pool of available workers willing to get back to work.

Overall, we are seeing some positive news in the local labor market; employment is increasing at a decent pace, and it appears that we are heading toward a more natural level of unemployment.

Local Area Unemployment Statistics			
Region	Unemployment Rate		
	Mar-21	Mar-20	YoY Δ
Shawnee County	3.60%	3.70%	-0.10%
Kansas	3.70%	3.50%	0.20%
USA	6.20%	4.50%	1.70%

## DOWNTOWN RESTAURANT WEEK

April 14 – 28 locals and visitors alike participated in the inaugural Downtown Restaurant Week! DTI in partnership with AIM Strategies brought together 31 downtown establishments to kick-off the two week long event to highlight the excellent eateries and dining establishments in Downtown Topeka.

Local media coverage included:

<https://www.wibw.com/2021/04/08/downtown-topeka-to-host-downtown-restaurant-week/>

<https://www.ksnt.com/news/local-news/downtown-topeka-holds-first-restaurant-week-since-pandemic/>

<https://www.94country.com/event/downtown-topeka-restaurant-week-april-14th-28th/>

<https://www.cjonline.com/story/entertainment/dining/2021/04/09/twenty-nine-downtown-topeka-businesses-team-up-restaurant-week/7155455002/>

## LEGISLATIVE VETO SESSION

The Kansas legislature returns to Topeka for the so-called Veto Session on May 3. Among their remaining jobs is passage of an education budget. The general state budget, with the education component held-out, passed at the end of the regular session. Importantly, the Governor exercised her line-item veto authority, rejecting several key provisions of the general budget bill. Key among them was a proviso which shifts ultimate authority over federal COVID relief dollars from the Governor to the legislature. Legislators are expected to try to override that veto as early as Monday.

They will also try to override the Governor's veto of a bill pertaining to the rights of transgender athletes. That bill passed the House and Senate, but not by a veto-proof margin. Proponents of the bill have been working to persuade enough legislators who may have voted against the bill to side with them in overriding the veto. Advocates in the travel and tourism industry worry the economic impact of a law restricting the rights of transgender athletes would be devastating as national sporting organizations and other groups have made clear they intend to only do business in states which embrace diversity in its many forms.

## GO AND KS DOC PARTNERING TO ATTRACT AVIATION INDUSTRY

The GO Topeka team is working closely with the Kansas Department of Commerce on active opportunities in the aviation industry. Seven new leads in the industry are being developed, and GO Topeka is starting to convene more conversations on building up the specific industry assets we are light on like training. Topeka is on the shortlist for one aviation company and is waiting to hear about making the cut on another that will narrow their list in late May.



## BOARD GOVERNANCE

Each of the four main Partnership organizations are making good progress working through their respective nomination processes. They are all on track to present candidates to be elected directors for terms beginning on January 1, 2022. The deliberative process all Partnership boards take ensures they work from a broad pool of talented volunteer leaders and focus on ever-increasing diversity.

## AUDIT

The GO Topeka Audit will wrap up in a matter of days. The final report will be presented to the GO Topeka board and JEDO in May. Visit Topeka's final audit report will not be too far behind that. The consolidated Partnership audit will be the last report finalized and will be delivered to the Finance Committee in June.

## STATE REP. BORJON VISITED THE MWBD COUNCIL

State Representative Jesse Borjon met with the Minority and Women Business Development Council to provide an update on legislative activity and to uncover specific needs of the community. Rep. Borjon has requested the Small Business Council and the Minority and Women Business Council to participate in a small business focus group to help him better align with the needs of the business community.