



Tacitly Tactful

Winter 2025

By Gerry Carlson

The front page of the Spring 2024 edition of the Rockhill Times featured the work of many heroes who, during the last seventy years, waged public battles to protect the character of Rockhill from incursions by outside groups, whereas the lead of the Summer edition featured the private, unsung, ongoing efforts of numerous Rockhill citizens who tirelessly work behind the scenes to make Rockhill a wonderful place to live in countless small ways. This edition, our first of 2025, features a Rockhillian who would be eminently qualified to be featured in either of those two previous editions. Consequently, he is deserving of a lead story devoted solely to him and his unique contributions to Rockhill. His name is James Francis Wanser and he has been a resident of Rockhill for over three decades, referred to by many here as a newbie.



Jim was born and grew up in Sioux City, Iowa. As the middle child of seven, four boys and three girls, Jim must have learned at an early age a skill that he used in his professional career and that he now displays routinely in his endless quest to preserve Rockhill's integrity, namely firm diplomacy. He stayed in his hometown for his undergraduate degree at Briar Cliff College (now University), a Franciscan school at which his father was Chair of the Department of Biology. His mother was surprisingly an early practitioner in the field of computing, working at Zenith. Jim earned his bachelor's degree in psychology and biology and left Sioux City in 1973 to work on his master's degree in clinical psychology at UMKC, which hired him immediately upon its completion, although he did go on to further earn an Ed.S. degree in higher education administration. His entire career was spent at UMKC assessing every skill, trait or predilection that could be assessed. By his retirement in 2014, Jim had risen to become Director of Testing Services.

He later put his numerous assessment skills to good use as a successful private consultant and even taught statistics for five years at Rockhurst University. The overlap of Jim's hard and soft professional skills has benefited RHA innumerable times in his dealings with the city and with nonprofit organizations.

Attracted like the rest of us to our beautiful historic neighborhood, Jim moved to Rockhill in 1992, falling in love with the elegant Georgian Revival house at 612 Brush Creek Boulevard designed by Henry Hoit. And like us, he fell in love with a house and discovered one of the best historic neighborhoods in Kansas City. His home needed lots of updates, but he had restored a three-story brick colonial in Hyde Park and enjoys the process of restoration.

Jim has been a member of the RHA Board of Directors since 2008 and was President of the RHA from 2010 through 2014, a noteworthy time including when the Nelson-Atkins Museum was threatening to demolish the Kirkwood residence at 4520 Kenwood and erect an administrative building within Rockhill. Of course, Jim was a member of the talented Rockhill team that eventually negotiated a favorable Memorandum of Understanding that included us, the Museum, and the Southmoreland Neighborhood Association.

Jim has progressively become the recognized face and voice of Rockhill among city politicians and nonprofit organizations, especially preservationists. When you speak with local leaders, most seem to know Jim, and in a positive light. He has been particularly active for many years in the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Historic Kansas City (HKC) organizations. For the latter organization, he has served not only as a Board member, but as its President and Treasurer. His service to HKC has made him very effective, of course, in helping RHA deal with the rules of the Historic Preservation Commission. Jim was also an appointed member of the Kansas City Public Improvements Advisory Committee (PIAC), which provides grant money for public and neighborhood improvements. It goes without saying that knowing the rules for their grant applications and fund usage is invaluable. Jim's appointment to UMKC's Neighborhood Advisory Council allows the RHA Board to stay abreast of UMKC's plans and to offer timely input. Similarly, Jim was also a member of the Brush Creek Community Partners, which sought to unite stakeholders along the Brush Creek Corridor. Jim's skill set and calm personality allow him to function as an activist even within highly structured systems by encouraging communication and collaboration. An excellent example of this is the design of the Cleaver bike paths negotiated by the Rockhill committee that he recently chaired. It is not by happenstance that these paths are unique in Kansas City in being more attractive and more expensive than the norm. So, thank you Jim Wanser for all that you have done and continue to do to make Rockhill a wonderful place to live!

Next Coffee Club, February 15 @ 10AM

By Jeffie Mussman and Karen Moninger

The coffee club is a great way to catch up with neighbors and meet new ones! You're invited to the home of Joy Payne to enjoy coffee and conversation with the neighbors you know and the ones you've yet to meet! Joy's address is 414 East 45th Street #2 (a beautiful apartment in one of those wonderful duplexes directly to the north of the Nelson Atkins museum).

RSVP to Joy at: joypayne1@icloud.com

If you are interested in hosting future gatherings, please contact Jeffie Mussman at Jeffiemussman@gmail.com or Karen Moninger at kmoninger@gmail.com



Rockhill Road Bike Lanes

By Jim Wanser

Well, some good news and some not so good news.

As you know, the neighborhood has been engaged with the city for the last couple of years regarding the rollout of bike lanes in the area. We had expressed our willingness to work with the city to connect the Gillham/ Harrison St. bike lanes across Cleaver II and then south to the Trolley Trail. We had asked that the southern connection between Cleaver and the Trolley Trail take place on Oak St. and not Rockhill Road. We further stated our opposition to any bike lanes on Rockhill Road, which was documented by a petition with 108 signatures from the neighborhood.

For the rollout of the bike lanes on Cleaver, a Cleaver Committee was appointed by the Rockhill Board President to work with the Chief Mobility Officer of the City to represent the neighborhood's perspective and desired outcomes. It was a good public engagement process that resulted in productive dialogue, with compromises from both the city and the neighborhood, resulting in what we now see on Cleaver Blvd. from Troost to Oak. While the introduction of bike lanes on Cleaver has required some adjustments for the neighborhood, it has slowed the traffic, reduced the noise, and made for a significantly safer pedestrian and cyclist experience. The aesthetics of what was to be built on Cleaver was very important to the neighborhood. Without a doubt, we have the best-looking bike lanes that have been built in the city thus far.

Rockhill Road has hung in limbo for the past year, creating a confusing and potentially dangerous situation for both cyclists and motorists. The cones would come and go, and cars would sometimes use the east lane, as well as cyclists. When we would ask various city employees about the status of the unfinished bike lanes on Rockhill, we were repeatedly told that they could not talk about them. Radio silence! Then, without any current dialogue, bike lanes were added on Rockhill from Cleaver south to MLK/Volker Blvd. Several weeks ago, a Chief Registered Engineer from KCMO Public Works shared that staff had been told to "get the job done"; i.e., to complete the bike lanes on Rockhill and Gillham West, indicating that it would happen "sooner than later" and if the neighborhood wanted input, now was the time. The City's intent was certainly confirmed by the recent build-out of bike lanes on Rockhill south of Cleaver. The Rockhill Board was presented with a couple of design options and voted to continue with the design utilized on Cleaver. The goal is continuity of design, built-in protective barriers, and minimal use of the bollards. There are only four curb cuts on Rockhill and Gillham West, which theoretically would only require 8-10 bollards. We have also asked the city to consider a traffic calming island at the intersection of Brush Creek Blvd. and Rockhill Road. We were told that designs for the bike lanes would be developed subsequent to feedback from the Rockhill Board.

While we are disappointed with the lack of public engagement on the addition of bike lanes on Rockhill Road, we believe our opposition and feedback from the neighborhood has resulted in bike lanes that are safer for all, look better, and to the degree possible, respect the historic character of the area. Your support and patience are appreciated as we continue to work for the best interest of the neighborhood.

Historic Plaques

By Brian Ball

The historic plaques have arrived and can be picked up after January 8th. RHA Board members received theirs at the December board meeting. I'm inviting others to pick them up at our home, along

with written documents that include the Rockhill National and Local nomination form and notes about coordinating with me to have installation by Larry Schubach (if you wish) and estimated cost of installation.

Meet Rima and Tobias

By Gerry Carlson



Rima Bonario and Tobias White, our newest residents of 612 Cleaver Blvd., have interesting paths in how they found their way to Rockhill. Rima was born in Hawaii, but grew up in London, Ontario, Canada. She moved back to the U.S. in her late teens, landing in Houston, Texas, where her extended family lives. Tobias also hails from the north, moving from Detroit, Michigan to Houston in his elementary school years. Rima and Tobias met, married, and had their daughter Sophia in Houston. They left Texas to try living in Hawaii, but after 11 months headed back to the mainland. They moved to Overland Park (for 11 years) and then to Las Vegas so Sophia could attend performing arts high school. With their daughter in college, it felt like time for another change.

Missing the Midwest, but not the suburbs, and liking old homes, they settled in Rockhill. Tobias works from home in IT, and Rima is an author and teacher who is especially interested in women's empowerment. They are vegans (most days!) who enjoy dancing, board games, sports, theater, and museums. Together they add to the admirable complexity of our neighborhood. If you haven't already met them, please give them a warm welcome.

What Inspired Me to Garden?

By Rockhill Homes and Gardens Club

In preparation for the Gardens & Architecture Tour of Historic Rockhill, that will take place May 17, 2025, to celebrate our 50 years as a National Historic District, two gardeners, who will have their gardens on the tour share their inspiration to garden.

Sonya Harshbarger: Welcome to the beginning of a garden, my garden.... This home was built in 1917 and has had many different caretakers through the years. I have seen photos of this dwelling in its early days. It had marvelous shade trees. One owner even allowed the home to be swallowed up with ivy and embraced a forest type of feel here. All trees and ivy had been removed prior to our purchase of the home.

My family became stewards of 611 East 46th Street in 2020. Since that time, the home and gardens have had a bit of a transformation. I would call it something more radical...maybe a rebirth. With the shade trees gone and only small shrubbery installed by the previous owner, it was a simple thing to remove all and begin anew. This time, hopefully, this space will be able to dig deep roots and stretch out to its full glory. As I often say, "A garden does best with love and TIME." This garden has the former but is lacking in the established feel you might experience in other gardens in Rockhill.

I am naturally attracted to a more formal space, accented with loads of evergreen elements to give year-round structure and some degree of privacy. The introduction of water elements helps to give an elevated feel to the space as well. One more way I am trying to establish a more formal feel is using symmetry and plant repetition.

The constraints of space have made this garden rather interesting to create because it is forcing me to think of ways to accommodate some of the plants I love through different training techniques, primarily espalier.

On the east side of the garden, I am beginning an espaliered ivy wall and pairing it with two Alice Oakleaf Hydrangea that will be sharply trimmed and shaped to meet in the middle into an arbor over the mirror and table. That bed is mostly shade and has some woodland elements, such as a variety of ferns, variegated Solomon's Seal, and diverse types of hostas. Other plantings that shine in that area and offer layers of color and interest are hellebores, brunnera, columbine, and a gorgeous golden bleeding heart.

I am also beginning a climbing hydrangea on the fireplace bump out in the east bed. In a few years, it should provide a backdrop for a beautiful fountain inherited from a dear friend. A garden bench opposite the fountain allows for a quiet moment of reflection with the soothing sounds of flowing water.

The north beds along the street are something of mirrors of each other. I wanted to repeat the same ornamental crabapple tree (Robinson Crabapple) to anchor the front beds and give a delightful bit of three season color. The smaller nature of the ornamental trees also allows the possibility of sun-loving plants in the area closest to the pillars and walkway. The De Runk boxwoods give clear definition to the urns in front, filled with seasonal plants.

I love to use herbs in cooking and have them tucked in around the beds to grab at a moment's notice. The thyme at the front walkway is so aromatic and quite lovely in the spring when covered in blossoms. I also plant curly parsley as it is a favorite food for the stunning blue swallowtail butterfly larvae.

Other plants of note are red-leaved beard's tongue, fuzzy lamb's ears, allium, clematis that spills over the stone wall, and milkweed (a necessary plant for the monarch butterfly larvae). This bed is a pollinator haven and a favorite for hummingbirds.

There are many different varieties of peonies throughout the garden as well. I was charmed by the fact that several of the names were the same as two of my three daughters, namely "Caroline" Constabel and "Julia" Rose Itoh Peony. The moment I find an "Olivia" peony, you can bet something will be sacrificed to allow space for it to live amongst the others. The peonies bloom at the same time as my late blooming tulips. I have four-hundred bulbs, with colors ranging from apricot to soft pink, which pop up throughout the garden beds. In addition, there are hundreds of crocuses that make a brave entry into the world as the first harbingers of spring.

The west side of my home proved to be the most challenging of the spaces to flesh out...indeed, it is still being imagined and will most likely endure several iterations before I figure out what will and what will not remain. One of the main problems was the sheer height of that wall, the narrow space between the driveway and house, and the sun punishing from 1 o'clock until sunset. I have no way to create softness there apart from the espaliered magnolia, which I began a few years ago. I am growing climbing roses and clematis along each side of the evergreen magnolia in the hopes of having layers of color, texture, and height. Small boxwoods are interspersed there amongst the other floral elements as well to provide some structure and winter interest.

I suppose one might wonder why someone puts so much thought and effort into something such as a garden. I can only speak for myself on this, but it seems to me such an incredible opportunity to feel completely connected to this beautiful Earth. It is magical to feel at one with the rhythm of changing seasons.

I have uncovered who I am as a person through the creation of a garden as well. With each decision from plant selection to placement, the lens of self-discovery becomes a bit clearer.... I need structure but still want a bit of whimsy and color. I love bees and butterflies and make an extra effort to provide for their care. I want songbirds around me, so I plant crabapples for their provision. I wish to serve delicious meals to my family, so I have herbs for food and healing medicine.

My garden is so much more than simply a collection of plants to me. It is a collection of memories. It is a reminder of time passing as one watches a commemorative tree or plant mature. Items such as a treasured plant that has been divided and gifted from a friend's garden, cast iron urns, statuary, and the like collected through the years from fellow gardeners, family, and dear friends keep them alive in my heart and mind. My garden is a living reminder of the life I have lived and the beautiful people who have shared their lives with me. Every moment I spend turning the soil and feeding/watering these plantings is like sharing an afternoon with those I love and have loved. It is also celebrating being alive and enjoying the now.

Jeffie Mussman. When the Rockhill Times editor asked me to write about my approach to gardening, I wasn't sure I was the best person for the task because I wouldn't really describe myself as a gardener. I'm more of an admirer of gardens. In fact, one of the reasons I wanted to move into Rockhill from our home in southern Overland Park over 17 years ago was that I was "visually hungry." The combination of architecture, the landscape, and the sense of place drew my husband, Galen, and me back into the city from a 20-year hiatus in the suburbs.

We began our Rockhill journey at 704 Emanuel Cleaver II Boulevard. We were stewards of a beautiful garden that the previous owner had created, following a professional landscaper's design. Over the course of 12 years, we tinkered with it, but there was nothing major needed. All that changed and the fun really began six years ago when we decided to downsize to one of the mid-century modern homes just northeast of the Nelson Atkins Museum – 4401 Rockhill Road. It was a total re-do, including the garden and landscaping. An L-shape wall of sliding glass doors in the living room plus sliders and oversize windows in the kitchen and dining area look out into the courtyard style garden, so it's a very important part of our living experience. The home had been vacant a few years, so what we saw initially included volunteer trees and lots of leaves – we could hardly see the beautiful two-tier brick patio in the backyard.

We kept a mature Japanese Maple tree, which I trimmed bonsai style. That was something new for me. Thankfully, it turned out just fine. We also kept an enormous Iron Wood tree, and a low hedge row of boxwoods and some mature yews. That left lots of space for new plants. I've always admired Japanese style gardens, so that was my guiding principle. Low to no maintenance was a priority for us, so we decided not to add a lawn. We added a sweep of Annabelle hydrangeas, grasses, hornbeam trees to act as a tall hedge along the back of the fence line, a few more Japanese maples, junipers, and countless varieties of sedum for ground cover. Sprinkle in a three-bowl fountain, some Mexican pebble "riverbeds", a few large limestone "boulders" and over the course of the next few years - we're done. Now I can enjoy my favorite part of gardening—sitting and looking.

Fall Picnic on October 6, 2024

By Susan Carlson

On October 6, 2024, the neighborhood gathered in the pocket park at 45th and Kenwood for our annual Rockhill Neighborhood picnic. Ed Straley organized the annual picnic for many years and made it the “must attend” event that it has become! Erika Vento-Gaudens stepped up to organize another very successful and well-attended picnic this time. Let’s hope she is willing to continue in this role in future. Photos are below.





Beware of the Postal Porch Pirate!

By Jamie Closson

Many of our neighbors enjoy the heartwarming tradition of exchanging small gifts during the holiday season. Typically, these gifts are left in mailboxes or on porches—a gesture of goodwill and community spirit. However, this year brought an unexpected twist involving an unknowing substitute mail carrier.



A few days after Christmas, I noticed a substitute mail carrier and casually mentioned to Don that he bore a slight resemblance to our regular mailman—but wasn't quite him. Don then told me the substitute had explained the week before that our regular mailman was on vacation for a couple of weeks. The substitute added, "But don't worry, I'll make sure he gets your gift. David sure received a lot of gifts this year!"

When Don relayed this to me, I said, "Oh no! I didn't leave a gift for our mailman. That must have been something meant for us!"

Quickly, Don tracked down the substitute carrier and explained the mix-up—that no gift had been intended for the mailman, and the package in question was actually for us. The substitute assured Don that he would retrieve the gift from the station and return it.

The next day, the substitute brought back a slightly crumpled gift bag. But when we peeked inside, we discovered a card that was addressed to a completely different neighbor! Without hesitation, we delivered the gift to its rightful owner. Though we never recovered the gift originally meant for us, our kind neighbor surprised us with a new one.

Interestingly, the gift giver revealed that the gift we returned to the correct recipient had originally been left on *their* porch and not in a mailbox.



So, what's the moral of this story? While the tradition of porch and mailbox gift-giving is a lovely one, we may want to exercise a little extra caution—especially when substitute mail carriers are on duty!

One Stop Shop for Rockhill News

By Tom Winter

Be sure to check out the RHA website: <https://rockhillkc.org>, where you can find current events, links to neighborhood news, and shortcuts for City services. Previous issues of the Times can be found at www.rockhillkc.org/archives.html

The spring edition of the Rockhill Times is due out in early April. The format has been changed to a single column so those of you who read on your phones can do so easily. Please share other suggestions if you have them, including notices of recognition or events, or good gossip to scarlson@kumc.edu.