

A Bold Voice for Business

An Interview with Tracey Osborne Oltjen, CCE, IOM,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Overland Park Chamber of Commerce

EDITORS' NOTE Tracey Oltjen is an experienced CEO with a demonstrated history of working in the nonprofit organization management industry who has served in her current role for nearly 18 years. Prior to her current position, she served as Vice President of the Joplin Area Chamber of Commerce and the President of the Edmond Area Chamber of Commerce. Oltjen holds a BA degree focused in English and communication from William Jewell College.



Tracey Osborne Oltjen

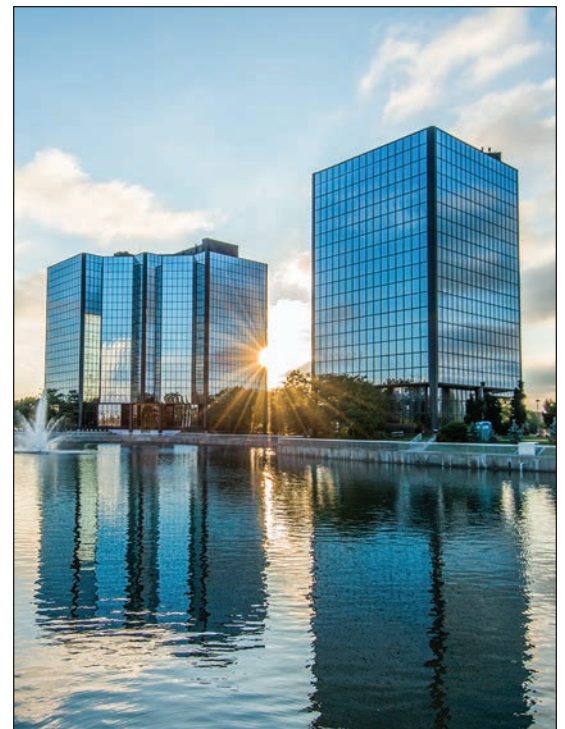
How do you define Overland Park Chamber of Commerce's mission and purpose?

Our organization exists to make Overland Park prosper. We accomplish this through our mission: We bring people together, lead the hard conversations and tackle the big issues. We work hard every day to make Overland Park the best place to build a business, a career and a home.

Will you highlight Overland Park Chamber of Commerce's services and solutions?

We're the conveners, the matchmakers and the advocates. We're here to introduce people who should know each other, create opportunities for professional development and build a better, more prosperous community. Our three buckets of services are economic development, advocacy and member services.

INSTITUTION BRIEF Overland Park Chamber of Commerce (opchamber.org) exists to make Overland Park prosper. It is the voice for business – the resource, advocate, convener and changemaker – that drives economic success forward in the city, county and state.



Today, Overland Park comprises more than 190,000 residents and a geographical area of 75.6 square miles, making it the second largest city in Kansas



The Overland Park community has been ranked at the top of dozens of national rankings because of its attractive and safe neighborhoods, low taxes, nationally-ranked public schools, state-of-the-art healthcare, and diverse cultural and recreational amenities

- Economic development attracts new companies and jobs to our community and also means we're working to ensure existing companies prosper and grow. We've been the official economic development agency of the City of Overland Park since 1989. We partner with private companies and development-focused organizations on both sides of the state line to enhance the economic vitality of the entire metro area.

- We are passionate advocates for the interests of business at all levels of government: local, state and federal. We listen to the concerns, goals and challenges of businesses and work with lawmakers to facilitate policy that ensures an economic climate that helps business and our community prosper. We were one of the first chambers in the country of our size to employ a full-time lobbyist on our staff team, guaranteeing that the interests of business are represented whenever our lawmakers are meeting in Topeka.

- The Chamber's role in member services is to connect, convene, educate and celebrate our businesses.

Some join the Chamber for just one of these services; others want all.

If people know one thing about a chamber, they know that we cut ribbons. We do that, but it's just the beginning of a meaningful and productive relationship with us. As connectors, we can introduce businesses to their next employee, supplier, banker, city council member or good friend. As educators, we mentor and train emerging leaders, preparing them for their next role in the company or for community leadership. As advocates, we champion the policies they need to remove barriers to growth, such as proposing removal of restrictions of temporary signs during COVID to allow banners announcing delivery and new hours. As leaders, we're attracting new investment, talent and customers to the community that helps everyone's bottom line.

Will you discuss the strength of Overland Park Chamber of Commerce's membership and the engagement and commitment of its members to the Chamber's work?

The diversity and vitality of our region's economy is represented in our membership, from large employers like T-Mobile's second headquarters, headquarter companies like Black & Veatch and SelectQuote, growing tech headquarters like Netsmart and WellSky, and small businesses in nearly every sector from retailers to restaurants to salons to consultants. Most chambers of commerce across the country have 90 percent of their membership represented by businesses of ten or fewer employees. Because of the diverse business size in Overland Park, our small business membership percentage (fewer than 10 employees) is around 50 percent.



Black and Veatch IP Learning Center

Our members can choose various paths of engagement. When I joined the Chamber team in 2004, I was most impressed with the members who served on our Public Policy & Advocacy Committee. This group meets regularly with legislators and vets proposed policies for recommendation to our Board of Directors. These members are fully invested in the process because they understand the connection between governmental action and the prosperity of their community and their business. I had previously not experienced lay people who so completely understood critical policy issues such as how the state's school finance formula impacted their district. They invest time and energy to craft our policies, talk with lawmakers and discuss strategic initiatives to improve our region.

Policy is just one example of member engagement; others include investing in economic development to target workforce development, job creation and capital investment. Our members are the foundation of strategic initiatives such as the expansion and modernization of U.S. Highway 69, the major North/South artery of our region. Their voices, time and investments are the resources that empower the Chamber's vision to be the bold voice for business – the resource, convener, advocate and change-maker – that drives economic success forward in our city, county and state. They both deserve and demand bold leadership from our organization.

What are your priorities for Overland Park Chamber of Commerce as you look to the future?

Our employers – large and small – struggle to find talent. In surveys, meetings and roundtables, attraction and retention of staff has been, and continues to be, their top priority. We're embarking on a five-year community and economic development strategic initiative focused on ensuring our competitiveness as a community. Whether we're talking about our region or the world, the business environment is getting more competitive, not less. We must be intentional in our approach to business investment and community vitality. This initiative is designed to position Overland Park and our businesses for prosperity in the global marketplace.

In 2019, we partnered with the City of Overland Park and VisitOP in a community visioning process called ForwardOP. Through this process, our residents called for our community to be innovative, welcoming, and forward-thinking. These principles guide us as we move into the future. These are not only the principles that Overland Park citizens of today want, but we believe businesses and citizens of the future seek as well. ●



Overland Park's 83 parks offer athletic fields and courts, playground equipment, picnic shelters, and miles of recreational trails