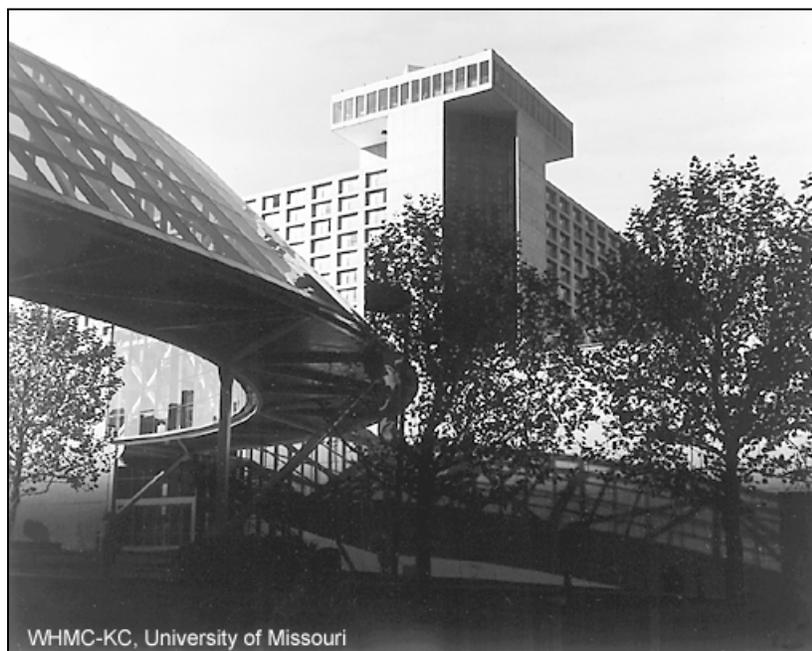


# **CROWN CENTER:** **An Emerging Vision for Urban Development**



*Western Historical Manuscript Collection*  
*Kansas City*

## **Charles N. Kimball Lecture**

**Mr. Robert A. Kipp**  
President, Crown Center Corporation  
Kansas City, Missouri

April 20, 1995

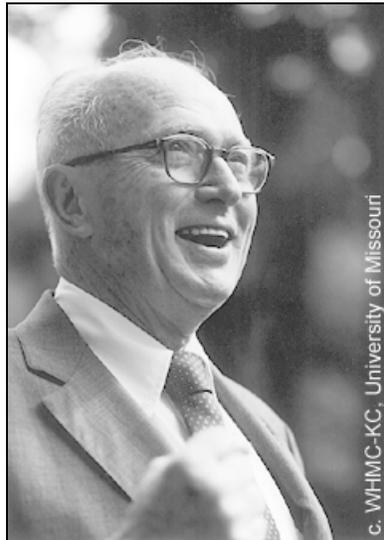
## The Charles N. Kimball Lecture Series

is a tribute to our late friend and civic leader, Dr. Charles N. Kimball, President Emeritus of the Midwest Research Institute, to acknowledge his support of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City and his enduring interest in the exchange of ideas.

Charlie Kimball was a consummate networker bringing together people and ideas because he knew that ideas move people to action. His credo, “Chance favors a prepared mind,” reflects the belief that the truest form of creativity requires that we look two directions at once – to the past for guidance and inspiration, and to the future with hope and purpose. The study of experiences, both individual and communal – that is to say history – prepares us to understand and articulate the present, and to create our future – to face challenges and to seize opportunities.

Sponsored by the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, the Series is not intended to be a continuation of Charlie’s popular *Midcontinent Perspectives*, but does share his primary goal: to encourage reflection and discourse on issues vitally important to our region. The topic of the lectures may vary, but our particular focus is on understanding how historical developments affect and inform our region’s present and future. The Lectures will be presented by persons from the Kansas City region semi-annually in April, near the anniversary of Charlie’s birth, and in October. Additionally, presentations may occur at other times of the year, if opportunities present themselves.

WHMC-KC appreciates the substantial financial underwriting and support for this Series provided by the **Charles N. Kimball Fund** of the Midwest Research Institute and by other friends of Charlie Kimball.



**1911-1994**

## INTRODUCTION

to the First Charles N. Kimball Lecture

### **Dr. James C. Olson**

President Emeritus of the University of Missouri

I am delighted to be here, and to welcome all of you, on behalf of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, to the first Charles N. Kimball Lecture.

Charlie Kimball, as I needn't remind anyone here, stands as a giant in the memory of this community for his leadership, his vision, and his innumerable contributions to the life of Kansas City and the Midwest. I could spend the entire hour enumerating his achievements, his contributions, and still not do justice to all of them. Instead of trying to do that, I am going to take a few minutes to talk about his interest in and contributions to the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, which has established this lectureship.

As you may know, the Western Historical Manuscript Collection is the joint project of the four-campus University of Missouri and the State Historical Society of Missouri. Its objective is to collect and preserve the manuscript evidence of the history of Missouri. Our branch in Kansas City has special interest in and responsibility for the papers of those persons and institutions which have played an important role in the history of Kansas City. Charlie gave [his papers](#) to the Collection a number of years ago and, for the rest of his life, actually, after that, was active in encouraging others to do the same. I know that some of you here have been the beneficiaries of his urging that you deposit your papers with the Western Historical Manuscripts Collection. He was particularly helpful, also, in guiding the Collection in its development. This, I think, is a little-known aspect in his multi-faceted career on behalf of Kansas City.

When Charlie died, the Collection's advisory board, seeking to commemorate his long and effective relationship with the Collection, decided to establish a lectureship that would bring to the University persons who have something important to say about Kansas City and the larger urban scene.

We feel particularly fortunate in our first Kimball lecturer: I can think of no one who is better qualified to talk about Kansas City and the urban scene than Bob Kipp. He has been president of Crown Center since 1983. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the Hall Family Foundations and as Group Vice President for Corporate Communications and Services of Hallmark Cards. Before joining the Hall enterprise, he was City Manager of Kansas City, a post he held from 1974 to 1983. Carrying on in the great tradition established by Perry Cookingham, – who, though Bob did not work for him, I think that he feels he was his mentor – Bob has served and continues to serve on the boards of many cultural and civic organizations. He has been Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. He has been President of the International City Management Association and on the Board of the National Academy of Public Administration. He is one of Kansas City's premier civic leaders and, I should like to say, thinkers about the city.

It gives me great pleasure, therefore, to present as the first Kimball Lecturer, Robert A. Kipp, who will speak on a subject of great importance to Kansas City, "Crown Center: An Emerging Vision for Urban Development." Bob ...

**The presentation and printing of the Charles N. Kimball Lecture Series is made possible by a grant from the William T. Kemper Foundation, Commerce Bank, Trustee.**

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## **CROWN CENTER:** An Emerging Vision for Urban Development

**Mr. Robert A. Kipp**

April 20, 1995

Thank you, Jim. I was doing fine while you made glowing comments about Charlie Kimball, but I became a little squirmy when you shifted over toward talking about me. Having watched as the audience came in, I recognized many of you – many of you better authorities on this subject than I. It's a rather daunting challenge to talk about the history and development of Crown Center to people who were there, who participated and who knew a great deal about it.

I had this kind of amusing thought as I drove out here, thought about this occasion, and thought back to my school days in Lawrence. While I did relatively well in science, math, and English, I didn't do very well in history. I never could really get myself excited about what Magellan did when, nor remember the dates of Ponce de Leon; in short, I was not a good history student. I thought to myself, if Miss Cora Davenport, my high school history teacher, were to hear that I was addressing a distinguished group of historians and people interested in history, she would say, "You mean little Bobby Kipp is over there in Kansas City, acting like he knows something about history?"

Neil Diamond sings a song, one of his lesser-known songs, called "Morningside." It tells the history of an old man who died and who left a gift behind. It's a nice song. I suggest sometime, if you haven't heard it, that you look it up and listen to it. As he introduces the song, he says, "This is fantasy – pure fantasy." Well, history, I guess, is a mix, isn't it, of fact and fantasy. Those of us – there are a couple of mayors here in the audience who know this much better than I – but anyone who has been involved in public life knows how sometimes what gets reported and what gets interpreted is different than what really occurred. Add to that people's shortness of memory and try, as we will, to reconstruct history, we get as much fact as we can, but there's always a bit of fantasy mixed in – and, probably there will be a bit of fantasy mixed in as I talk about Crown Center.

It certainly is a compliment to be asked to inaugurate this series named for our friend, Charlie Kimball. I am sure that Charlie would be pleased with the concept of the series because he loved Kansas City, and he loved history, and he loved bringing together people who would share ideas. Yes, and Charlie loved a little fantasy as well. Charlie once paraphrased a quote from Alfred North Whitehead about what constitutes a nation's strength. In Charlie's version, the strength of a city lives in the number of superior individuals who live and work there. He, himself, was one of those individuals working on behalf of Kansas City, and he strengthened our town immeasurably with his wisdom.

This afternoon, I plan to talk about two others – the father and the son: J. C. Hall and Don Hall. Specifically, I'll talk about how the investment the Halls decided to make in our community to express gratitude for Hallmark's success was, in effect, a pioneering investment. I'll also talk about how Don Hall guided the transformation of his father's vision into the reality which is Crown Center, one of the first developments of its type in

the United States and one that has influenced many others. I'd like to do this roughly in three parts: first, talk just a bit about context, about what was going on in the period after World War II in terms of urban development and urban redevelopment; then talk some about the formative stages – the planning and the early vision of Crown Center; and then, finally, talk about the development of Crown Center – efforts to make it work, to adapt it to changing conditions.

As you know, the end of World War II brought major changes in the way American cities were developing. The American dream began to take on a distinctly suburban look as record numbers of people left their older, inner city neighborhoods to settle on the city fringes. This move to the suburbs was the result of many factors – cheap land, inexpensive building methods, abundant energy, a soaring birth rate, booming automobile sales, changes in the highway system, and a tax law that favored home ownership. Not the least of the reasons was racial change, but I consider that to be a worthy topic unto itself for perhaps another lecture.

The exodus to suburbia had a devastating effect on the city core. As more and more citizens moved out, the heart of the community weakened. Areas that had pulsed with life began to decay. In Kansas City, many of us still recall the days of Wolferman's downtown, Bretton's Restaurant, Rothschild's, the Forum Cafeteria, the old Hall's store downtown, and many others. But tax-bases dwindled, crime increased and boarded-up windows became a more familiar sight. If, as city planner Victor Gruen notes, the term "de-centralization" was on everybody's lips in the early fifties, it was soon coupled with "urban renewal," a federal government effort to shore up decaying downtowns.

Urban renewal itself went through three general phases: first, there was the idea that you would just clear out the slums, it was a slum-clearance program in its first stages. Communities would use federal dollars to buy and bulldoze blighted properties in the city's core, with the thought that it would eradicate the cancer, and then things would be all right. And they did do that, but few developers were interested in building on the land, and block after block of empty lots proclaimed that program's failure.

This led to a second phase of urban renewal: the re-development phase, where incentives were used to get developers interested in building on the cleared land, and where stabilization and spot-clearance were tried.

Eventually though, urban renewal turned toward a conservation mode. The development of what was called "a workable program" to catch deterioration in its very earliest stages used a gamut of tools – planning, code-enforcement, public improvements, neighborhood participation, spot-clearance, and accessible, sometimes subsidized, financing, to try to catch this deterioration in its early stages and to stabilize an urban area. This, too, by and large, failed to produce the desired results.

It's ironic, I'd say parenthetically, that some of the cities that were most involved in those earlier, federal urban renewal programs, the slum-clearance programs and so forth – cities like Baltimore, Cleveland, and St. Louis, closer at hand – have had some latter-day success because of the cleared land which lay fallow for all those years. Major developments, like Harbor Place in Baltimore, were possible because of the availability of so much cleared land, land that had been vacant for years. Kansas City, incidentally, was a late-comer in national terms, to the urban renewal program. As a result, while we

did have many urban renewal programs, in the downtown area, we really only had one significant cleared site that many of you probably remember, remaining for a while at 12th and Main. Ius Davis worked long and hard on various schemes to create some sort of urban development at that location.

This national failure of urban renewal made it clear that cities needed a different approach to rebuilding the central core. As then-President John Kennedy told Congress in the early sixties,

*We must re-shape our cities into effective nerve-centers for expanding metropolitan areas. Our urban renewal efforts must be substantially re-organized, from slum-clearance and slum-prevention into positive programs for economic and social regeneration.*

A few visionary thinkers of the time were eager to embrace that challenge. Victor Gruen was one of them. In his book, *The Heart of our Cities*, Gruen wrote about an Italian immigrant to Boston – appropriate as we remember Charlie Kimball. This immigrant, who had newly arrived from Naples, was asked what he thought about his new home in America. While conceding that he enjoyed the conveniences of his new house, the man added, “I can get bathed and dressed much faster than I did in Italy, but then I don’t know where to go.” What he missed was the vibrant street life of Naples. Such street life was in short supply in America, except in a few places like San Francisco, or Manhattan, where the geography itself deterred urban sprawl.

Gruen concludes that a

*healthy urban heart pulsates with life, day and night, weekday and Sunday, in spring, summer, fall and winter. It is a place of infinite variety, whose buildings and structures form between them spaces of differing size and character, narrow or broad, serene or dynamic, modest or monumental. Sprinkled through the core are green areas, ranging from tiny landscaped spots to good-sized parks.*

That’s the Gruen vision. Gruen advocated not only a variety of structures, but a variety of uses for those structures: retail, office, residential, and so on. Other planners of the time also extolled mixed-use development, but real-life examples, rather than theory, were hard to find. They existed primarily in books like Gruen’s.

An idea with somewhat wider currency was the need to separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The thinking was that people were more likely to come to a place that avoided the conflicts and intrusions of automobiles. Motorized vehicles, as well as the roads, parking garages, gas stations, and loading docks they require, should be kept apart from the places where people walk and work and window-shop and dine.

Regional malls were an outgrowth of that school of thought, and many were built in the sixties. But regional malls were quite land-intensive and thus a suburban phenomenon. As such, they only further weakened the cities’ core.

As far as I know, the only early attempt at a mixed-use center built in an American downtown area was Gruen’s design of a development called Midtown Plaza in Rochester, New York. And that was an effort, really, to salvage downtown retail. There

were a couple of department stores in downtown Rochester that invited Gruen to develop a plan that would reverse the trend of erosion in downtown retailing. He devised a mixed-use plan that would link together those two department stores with a mall and would add an office tower and other amenities. The fate of that development was somewhat mixed. The retail part of it didn't work, and within a few years it deteriorated. The office part, I think, was occupied by Xerox, may still be occupied by Xerox, and has had some success.

But the dilemma of what to do with private motorcars vexed urban redevelopment planners. A symposium on urban planning held in Hartford – this is 1957 – stated the problem in dramatic language:

*There is a murder plot afoot against our highly urbanized areas. The method the killers have chosen is that of slowly poisoning the urban body by the injection of foreign particles into its bloodstream. These particles – autos and trucks – cannot be absorbed and, therefore, cause circulatory diseases. The plotters are assisted by those who “facilitate” automobile traffic through the widening of streets, the narrowing of sidewalks and the construction of giant garages, which attract more and more automobiles.*

Someone else has said that the overriding factor of urban development during the twentieth century has been our failure as a society to come to grips with the invention of the automobile. Even those who saw the situation in less dramatic terms than those, recognized the importance of improving mobility and accessibility in urban areas. One could reduce the need for cars by making good housing and neighborhoods close to work places, so there would not be as much need for the home-to-work trip by way of automobile. Another was to design more pedestrian areas so people would want to walk – would be attracted to walk. And, there were certainly those who advocated the creation of appealing mass transportation, whether it took the form of bus service, subways, light rail or monorail systems. Plans for various “new towns” brought together many of these ideas about accessibility, mixed-use communities, and urban revitalization. The federal New Communities Act, vintage 1968, paved the way for many of these – in places like Reston, Virginia, and Cedar Riverside in the central part of Minneapolis.

But long before any of these even existed in blueprint form, Crown Center was well underway – a new experiment in urban America.

So let's shift the focus now from that general context of the environment in the fifties and sixties to the specific environment of Kansas City, and particularly the situation around the location of the headquarters of Hallmark Cards.

The Crown Center area had been Hallmark's home base since 1922 when the site at 26th and Grand was chosen (by an employee vote, interestingly enough) over other locations. When the company moved into its present building in the mid-fifties there was growing concern about the neighborhood. Mr. Hall was especially concerned about Signboard Hill, the limestone outcropping opposite Union Station. As passengers arrived at the station on trains, they were greeted with a forest of unsightly billboards in a neighborhood of old warehouses, used car lots and vacant buildings. Hallmark began quietly acquiring some of these properties and the family began consulting with various individuals about the notion of creating an experimental city within a city.

I might note, as an aside, that during that time it happened I was working in Lawrence as a city planner, and I so clearly remember this because our Chamber of Commerce president in Lawrence came to me one day and said Hallmark Cards owns some land out by the West Access Road to what will become the Kansas Turnpike (yet to be constructed), and we need a plan for that whole general area. Hallmark plans to put a branch plant here in Lawrence, said he, but, if we do it right, we can attract to Lawrence the entire facility, headquarters, and some very visionary Hallmark investment plans. So I got busy with my drawing board and pen for a while, and prepared a land use plan surrounding the Hallmark site in Lawrence. Needless to say, we didn't attract Crown Center to Lawrence!

Hall's real advisors at that time included designer Henry Dreyfus, a long-time consultant to Hallmark; developer Jim Rouse, who offered his advice on planned communities; Walt Disney, who advised that any development site be buffered so it would not be hemmed-in like his Disneyland theme park in Anaheim; and architect Edward Durrell Stone, who had designed the Hallmark Gallery on Fifth Avenue in New York. Larry Smith, an economics consultant, was brought in to conduct an economic feasibility study.

During this time, an interesting exchange of correspondence occurred. It was clear that Hall was becoming impatient with planning, and planning, and planning, when there were no clear answers and no action. So he sent a letter to Larry Smith, the noted urban economist and advisor, saying, "I want specific answers to a series of questions," which he listed. Larry Smith replied that there would be risks connected with this idea; it was not a sure thing that it would work. He also set forth parameters that he thought would at least enhance the likelihood of success. He recommended the use of the State Urban Renewal Act with provisions for both property acquisition and tax abatement; he recommended creating multi-story retail and hotel buildings to maximize value of the development. He recommended creating a prestige office environment with upscale lease rates. And he recommended expanding the project size of the development to take advantage of the natural boundaries of Union Station and the railroad to the north, Union Cemetery to the south, Hospital Hill to the east, and Penn Valley Park to the west – a plot that was far larger than what Mr. Hall had envisioned when this project was first commenced, but was necessary in order to create the value he sought.

Then, in 1960, Victor Gruen was asked to draw up a conceptual master-plan for a mixed-use urban renewal project. What were Hall's objectives for such a project? First, he hoped to make a contribution to Kansas City, not only by revitalizing a decaying neighborhood but also by serving as a catalyst to other downtown development. Second, he wanted to stem some of the flight to the suburbs by offering local individuals and businesses an urban alternative. He also hoped to attract new investment and payroll to our town. And, finally, he hoped Crown Center might encourage other American corporations to take a look at their historic inner city locations before locating away from the older sections of their cities.

The Signboard Hill Project, as it was known in those days, began to take shape, incorporating much leading-edge thinking on urban design. It would be a true mixed-use development.

(Another aside: Patty Moore, who is here today, helped me research some of the Crown Center history and piece it all together. When she reviewed a first draft, each reference to a “mixed-use development” had been typed as “mixed-up development.” In some ways it may have been a Freudian slip.)

It would be a true mixed-use development, where people could live, work, shop, and play. There would be appealing outdoor spaces with grass, trees and fountains. Pedestrians and vehicles would be separated, and most of the parking would be out of sight in vast underground garages. Throughout the planning, J. C. Hall insisted that everything had to be of the highest quality, a philosophy that, as you know, had been fundamental to the success of Hallmark Cards.

So, on January 4, 1967, the plan was unveiled at City Hall. Amid TV lights and cameras, Hallmark executives presented Kansas City Mayor Ilus Davis with the proposal for an 85-acre privately-financed project using Missouri’s urban development law. The name for the new complex would be Crown Center, a reference to Hallmark’s well-known trademark. As natural as that name sounds to us today, it was chosen after deliberation. Other names had been considered and rejected: Hall of Fame Place was one, Hall Town, Hallmark Hill, K. C. Circle, Crown Circle, Crowndale, and Gateway were all possibilities which could have now been on the tip of our tongues had they been chosen.

At the time of the announcement, new Hallmark president and Crown Center director, Don Hall, observed the following,

*The intent of the visit to City Hall is to win an official blessing for a noble experiment. Let private industry take a crack at urban renewal. Let one firm replace 85 acres of blight with a model urban community.*

While the vision had been his father’s, the execution of that dream was in the hands of Don Hall.

Don’s personal interest in architecture had a significant impact on Crown Center’s development over the years and caused it to become a showcase for world-class architecture. One of the early and important decisions was the selection of Edward Larrabee Barnes as master planner. He was to coordinate the work of other architects and personally design the first office complex, the central square and the retail center. Some of Barnes’ initial excitement about the project was reflected in a letter he later wrote to Don Hall. He said,

*I’ll never forget it. A great piece of empty land sloping away from the Hallmark headquarters, with downtown Kansas City in the distance. And we were asked what to do with it – to shape a whole new section of the city. This was an architect’s dream.*

Barnes was noted for creating buildings that seemed to grow from the sites on which they were erected, and his approach is easily seen in the five interconnected Pershing Road office buildings, which opened in 1971 – the first part of Crown Center to be completed. Sometimes described as a skyscraper lying on its side, these buildings

were stairstepped to accommodate the sloping contour of the hilly ground on which they were built.

Crown Center's list of architects includes some of the country's best: Harry Weese, who designed the Westin Crown Center Hotel, incorporating Signboard Hill into the lobby itself and adding a waterfall; Warren Plattner, who created the dramatic interior of the American Restaurant; Norman Fletcher, designer of the first residential community of Crown Center; Henry Cobb of the I.M. Pei firm, who designed the 2600 Grand office building; and, Dan Kiley, the landscape architect who laid out the park in the south area of our development.

The green spaces envisioned by J. C. Hall today are graced by monumental sculpture by such artists as Alexander Calder and Kenneth Snelson.

In the 28 years since ground was broken for Crown Center, we have had to adapt. George Ehrlich and I were talking about this before the meeting this afternoon and, in the process of adaptation, we've learned a great deal. We learned about public spaces, about hotels, office buildings, and residential development, and that is probably an understatement. Over the years we've learned about retail, especially what happens when you violate the first rule of real estate and choose a location where there is no natural market.

In the concept stage – and it is quite interesting to go back and read some of the concepts – J. C. Hall envisioned the Crown Center shops as a kind of international bazaar. He even purchased the Siamese Pavilion at the Brussels World's Fair to be re-erected at Crown Center. The idea was to bring the finest craftsmen and the finest purveyors of goods from all over the world – lace makers, goldsmiths from villages in Europe and Asia – and offer them the opportunity to compete for a place in this retail center, the likes of which would not be found between the two coasts. They would sell their wares in a maze of shops, part of which was called West Village.

When West Village opened, it was hailed for its architectural boldness, but it failed to attract the craftsmen from all over the world, nor did it attract the shoppers from all over the world. Later, we abandoned West Village, and replaced it with a more conventional open-escalator design.

That change was instituted about the time I left City Hall and joined Hallmark to work with Crown Center. One of the first things I did was to ask as many people as possible to tell me what they liked about Crown Center; tell me what they didn't like about it; tell me if they visited there or not and, in either case, what their motivation was; and, if they were Don Hall, how would they change Crown Center. It was a very interesting experience – there was universality in some of the themes that were expressed. Essentially, people said to relax – this is Kansas City, this isn't New York, and what we would like is a place where you can be less formal, have fun, and enjoy shopping that is no more expensive than elsewhere in Kansas City. We would like more of a Kansas City place.

So, in the early eighties, we began to change. To bolster retail, we shifted to an entertainment-oriented strategy. We added the cinemas, the American Heartland Theater, the outdoor concerts which, together, have attracted something like five million visitors annually and have helped keep our shops 90 to 95 percent leased. Retail remains a

challenge for us because we still do not have a natural, residential market around us. So we have to work at attracting business from the entire metropolitan area, and from guests who stay in our hotels.

We also learned early on that the Crown Center Square, with its terracing, trees and fountains, gave a human quality to the Center but needed to be a more active place. That was a lesson being learned by many places around the country at that time.

Dave Strout, kind of a Renaissance man who had done some wonderfully creative exhibits at the New York Gallery for Hallmark, was brought in during the early seventies to develop cultural and civic programs. And we also turned to a New York consulting group called People for Public Spaces. The results have been interesting. The array of attractions over the years has included colorful ethnic festivals with music and food from around the world, a popular concert series, creation of the Christmas Village under the Mayor's Christmas Tree, food service from kiosks, a tent-covered ice rink, Snoopy's Pumpkin Patch, and even a huge Boy Scout campout one February complete with Indian dances and a campfire.

We also learned that the Center was not well integrated for pedestrian purposes, so we built the Link. This glass and steel elevated walkway was designed by Portland architect Bob Frasca to connect the Hyatt and Westin Hotels with the 2405 Grand office building. It has done two things: it has added a distinctive design dimension to the Center; it has also provided a place in and of itself, something that we didn't expect when it was built. We had studied that question of pedestrian linkage a lot and had a number of designs. Then one afternoon Irv Hockaday, Don Hall, and I reviewed these different schemes with the architects. Almost without drawing a breath, Don said, "That's the one to do," although clearly not the least expensive of the designs. People are drawn to the Link, not only to get from one hotel to the other, but just because they enjoy the environment. So we find many, many people there to get their morning exercise or just because they enjoy the feeling of walking through the Link.

We learned that the Hyatt and Westin hotels, when marketed together rather than individually, could be a mainstay of the city's convention and tourism industry. In fact, of the four elements in the Crown Center mix, the hotels, together with office development, have proved to be the strongest.

In building one of the largest office communities in the Midwest, we realized that a realistic size for a new office building is about 250,000 square feet. When I came to Crown Center, there was a proposal by a noted architect, Cesar Pelli, for a new office building – 600,000 square feet – to be just north of the Hyatt, and 600,000 square feet is about what had been built in those first Pershing Road office buildings. It was a beautiful Pelli design, but far too big for our Kansas City market, so we evaluated the economics of it, thought about it for a year or so, and then made the decision not to build. The size of office buildings needs to be geared to the rate at which the office space can be absorbed into our marketplace in the order of 100,000 square feet or so a year. An office building of 600,000 to 800,000 square feet will have vacant space for six to eight years, and such a project is not economically feasible.

In many ways, the residential part of the mix has been the hardest. We had originally intended for about half the development to be residential. But several things happened.

First, our existence spurred other residential development around us. Second, the bottom fell out of the residential real estate market in the early eighties when interest rates soared. Third, we found that persuading a suburban-minded population to move back to the city was far more difficult than we had thought. But, most of all, we learned that high-rise condos are the extreme opposite of homes in suburbia where you pace the rate of construction with market demand. With a building like the San Francisco Tower at Crown Center, you may carry unsold units for many years and that makes the economics unfeasible.

We have learned a lot about parking, and we are still learning. Although underground parking is aesthetically pleasing, its cost makes it noncompetitive with suburbia. But the problem is not just cost. People like visible parking with a clear linkage to their destination. When you leave home, going to a restaurant or shop, you may not realize it, but psychologically you make the trip and you park the car. We all like to have a comfort level about that, knowing where to park and what the path will be to our destination. That is not the case with underground parking. You have to take a leap of faith that if you go in the tunnel and deposit your car, you will be directed to your destination and back. People react negatively to that. When people come to the concerts on Crown Center Square, the surface lots to the south fill up quickly while underground space remains empty, even though it is much closer to the concert site. This aversion to underground parking is why in recent years we have built visible, multi-level parking adjacent to buildings.

We have also learned that a diversity of architectural styles is exciting, providing visual interest and variety to a cluster of buildings, and we believe that it is important to include local architects and engineers in the design process. Out-of-towners bring wonderful perspective, but they do not always understand local conditions. For example, some of the materials specified for our early development did not work in our climate with its wide temperature swings.

Perhaps the most important lesson we have learned is that the public is price-sensitive – whether dining in a restaurant, leasing office space, shopping or staying in hotels. People are not interested in paying a premium just because it is Crown Center. Our hotels are managed by two different world-class hotel management firms; but with each change of managers, the first observation is,

*Our hotel rates are way too low. These are the lowest rates of any major city in the country. We simply have to move those rates up, and there is no reason why we should not be able to.*

Each new manager sets out to do it, invariably with the same result.

I recall one instance during the baseball season: we offered a baseball package for weekends at the hotels for \$59 for a hotel room and two tickets to the Royals. A new hotel manager said, “Five dollars – they will never notice the difference.” He made the

package \$64 and the business went to zero. Immediately it went to zero. He returned the rate to \$59 and the customers came right back, thank you.

The fact that we are still learning underscores Crown Center's status, which is a work in progress. Today, we have three additional buildings in concept design, and a master-plan advisory group that meets about once every year or two to advise us on our designs and updating our master plan. We put this group together after our original master planner, Ed Barnes, had become less active. As in the past, we have selected architects of significant stature to advise us: individuals like Harry Cobb, Dan Kiley, Bob Frasca, Gerhard Kallman from Boston, Bruce Abrahamson from Minneapolis, Bob Berkebile of Kansas City, and Sasaki and Associates.

The realignment of Grand Avenue and the concept of the South Park with its tubular sculpture by Richard Snelson came through this advisory group. It is a very interesting process to observe when they convene to discuss broad issues of development within an urban setting, and then to translate broad policies into specific solutions – often self-criticism, clearly differences of opinion. Then the dialogue produces a resolution, usually with a better solution.

Don Hall continues to play an active role in the design of Crown Center. He attends all master planning meetings and his ideas shape the buildings themselves. I will give just one example. Harry Cobb was commissioned to design the 2600 Grand building. The thought was that this building would provide the south gateway to Crown Center, and this concept was reflected in Cobb's initial design. When Don Hall reviewed this initial design, he expressed concern that the building must not turn its back on downtown. None of us had really thought of that; we had all thought a lot about how it would appear approached from the south. Harry Cobb, a distinguished designer by anyone's terms, had also missed that point. Subsequently, he re-designed it so that now, if you look at that building, you will see a building facing both directions. As Harry Cobb said, that is the kind of help every architect wants from a client but seldom, if ever, receives.

The dream of Don's Father – to build a dynamic city within a city – has been realized.

It may not look exactly the way Joyce Hall pictured it in his mind, but perhaps he would be pleased with the result, and pleased that Crown Center inspired mixed-use urban redevelopment in other cities as he had hoped. Since the sixties, the Halls have hosted business people and urban planners from around the nation, all wanting to have a look at this complex.

Its basic concept has been emulated in place after place: Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Tulsa, Houston, Portland, among them. Planner James Rouse, who made his reputation re-vitalizing urban cores in Philadelphia, Boston and Baltimore, once credited J.C. Hall and Walt Disney with influencing his thinking about the development of new and workable living environments.

In his autobiography, Joyce Hall observed that Crown Center has been compared to ancient Roman bazaars and the piazzas of the Middle Ages. His own assessment was simpler. "To me," he wrote, "it is a place where people in Kansas City can spend

pleasant days and nights experiencing what is new in the arts, food, shopping, and just plain good living.” It is a place Victor Gruen’s immigrant from Naples could appreciate – a place to go.

In closing, I want to thank you for the opportunity of being the first Kimball Lecture speaker. By inviting me to do this, you have underscored one of the real benefits of your series, for you spurred us to research our own history – and Crown Center’s conceptual antecedents. Participants in current events are rarely diligent about documenting what is happening, thereby necessitating this imperfect reconstruction process. Much of the early work that led to Crown Center was not systematically recorded; but because of your invitation, our records are now at least a little more complete. In any case, it has been fun to help, as in Neil Diamond’s song, to tell a story and create a fantasy.

(applause)

**Olson:** Well, Bob, that history teacher who was not so sure as she might have been about your abilities as an historian should have been here, because I am sure you have greatly improved over what she thought at least.

Bob has consented to answer a few questions, and I wonder if any of you have them.

**Question:** I’d just like to make a comment about the inside parking. I think it is so well done in Crown Center. The colors, and numbers, and letters, and signs, and arrows, and I always know where I am going. The worst one in town is in Manor Square. Have you ever tried to get around in Manor Square parking lot? I don’t know where I am. So...

**Olson:** Thank you. Okay, back here...

**Question:** I was wondering what you think about possible retail uses at Union Station. How that might compete with Crown Center?

**Kipp:** Oh, thanks for that question. (laughter) It’s probably one of the most misunderstood stances of Hallmark related to Union Station. Our thought about retail in Union Station is that, if anyone were fool enough, we would love for them to do it. Many believe that because of Crown Center, Hallmark has quietly pocket-vetoed any idea of retail shops at Union Station. The facts are quite the opposite. There have been a number of prospects over the years who have looked at Union Station as, among other things, a retail location. They have always come to the conclusion, which is the only conclusion that any logical investor would come to, that it is not a place for retail. And, of course, if they check our experience, we bear that out. We lose money on retail development which serves as an adjunct of the broader Crown Center. It would be an unwise economic investment for someone to do, but, if they were to choose to do so, we would certainly support it. It would add to the critical mass and improve the chances of people being attracted to this destination.

**Question:** Could you comment on the context of Crown Center in relation to downtown and the Plaza?

**Kipp:** Someone, long before I joined Hallmark, but when we were talking about the development trends of the city, made this observation: in the course of a century,

what has happened has been that downtown has crept from the river, where it began, slowly south. It's continuing to creep south, toward Crown Center, and we can expect that process to continue. That person's opinion may be true, but I hope not. Certainly Kansas City has this unique challenge presented by the triple presence of downtown, Crown Center and the Country Club Plaza. You can't make those one geographically, so the next best thing to do is to join them together with a convenient transport system. Enabling movement within that whole, larger area – quickly, conveniently and comfortably – would be a major stride forward; a well-planned and implemented public transportation system will do that. So, we have spent time working with the planners, national and local, on light rail, looking toward the time when that becomes a reality to help stabilize downtown, Crown Center and the Plaza.

One of the things that is implied in everything I said, is that we at Crown Center have the benefit of what you could call patient money, and that is an understatement (laughter). Normal real estate investors expecting an attractive return on a half billion-dollar investment would not do Crown Center. So there is a civic dimension consistent in the Hall family commitment that benefits the community.

When I first came to Crown Center from City Hall and talked with Don Hall, he said, "Now, when you get here, you're going to hear a lot of criticism about Crown Center and about our investing money in Crown Center. Naturally, we want to invest prudently; but, I want you to know that we're not through yet."

**Question:** Can you tell us something about the three new projects on the horizon, you mentioned?

**Kipp:** What I mentioned was that there are three building designs. Those are not projects on the horizon. At the moment, while we are always open to a project, there really is nothing that is imminent. From time to time, where we have had interest, we have commissioned an architectural designer to do a preliminary concept design. If you were to walk into my office tomorrow and say, "We really need 300,000 feet of office space, we want to be in Crown Center, and we're willing to pay a lease rate that would justify a new building," we would be prepared to work with you. We are always in preliminary conversations with prospective tenants, but recently there has been more supply than demand for new office space.

**Question:** You talked about retail. How is the residential development going?

**Kipp:** Well, as you know, we haven't done any residential redevelopment while I've been there. We continue to market the apartments, which we own and rent. The Tower condominiums have all been sold. They weren't sold quickly, but they now have been sold, so they are not in Hallmark or Crown Center ownership, they are in private ownership and they re-sell from time to time. The resale market seems to be okay although it is price-sensitive. If it creeps up a little too much on a per-square-foot basis, the unit doesn't sell; and if it drops down to the right range, it sells. We have good success with our office leasing. We just haven't found a key, although we've explored it from time to time to continue that residential development, because of the economics.

**Olson:** I suggest that there be one more question.

**Kipp:** Okay. You want to be the last question, Al? [Mauro]

**Question:** In the formative stages of Hospital Hill, we had the great fortune to meet with Mr. Hall and Mr. Gruen. Without the Hall's vision, Hospital Hill would not have been possible.

**Kipp:** I think that's right. If all of us in this room today were, just for moment, to imagine that area absent the Halls' influence, we would shudder at the thought!

Thank you all for attending.

**Olson:** Thank you again, Bob. You have set a high standard for this series and, in a very real sense, I think you have pointed the way for future planning for the series. I am sure my colleagues on the committee will be able to move forward along the path that you have charted, just as Joyce Hall charted this splendid, stellar path for Kansas City. Thank you all for coming.

# WHMC-KC

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**Cover Photo:** "The Link" at Crown Center connecting the Hyatt and Westin Hotels with the 2405 Grand office building. *Picture Collection (KC26), WHMC-KC*

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