

Reflecting on a great leader

I am often asked what I love best about my job. Like you, I have many reasons why I am passionate about what I do. But at the top of the list of what makes the chamber profession so special is working with diverse groups of business and civic leaders who join together to make a difference in our community. On July 1, I celebrate 29 years in this unique industry that has blessed me with the opportunity to learn from leaders from across the U.S. and a number of countries from Canada to China. Today I focus on one leader, not because he is the only person who has impacted my life, but because he exemplifies the qualities I have seen throughout my career in so many leaders, all rolled into one.

Like many of you reading this, I met Ben Craig shortly after moving to town. He called me immediately and invited me to breakfast, providing me a warm welcome and gifting me with knowledge that can only come from one of the founders of the Overland Park Chamber. With that knowledge came something even more valuable: his support, which has never wavered in the ensuing years, whether I needed a sounding board for an idea, an encouraging word or assistance with a project.

As Ben recently received his diagnosis of terminal liver cancer, his outlook on life has not changed. In each conversation I've had with him, his focus has been on others and the community issues we both care about. He has praised leaders for actions taken and for integrity demonstrated. We've talked about a number of things, including the challenges of the school finance formula and the Special Session, and the importance of voting in the upcoming primary election.

Ben told me he has been given the gift of time: time to make plans, and time to talk to those who are important to him. But I think we have been given a gift as well. We have time to reflect upon how much the "Ben Craigs" we have in our lives mean to us – and to tell them.



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Of course Ben deflects praise and reminds me that "this" was a team effort. Of course "this" could mean so many things in reference to Ben's leadership in our county these past fifty years. Some of "this" includes the founding of our Chamber, the development and expansion of **Johnson County Community College**, the creation of the JCCC Foundation and the millions of scholarship dollars that have changed student lives.

A few more: **Overland Park Rotary Club's** numerous projects where he has 52 years of perfect attendance, Deanna Rose Children's Farmstead where my nieces and nephews love to visit Ben's Bank and where my Rotary club built a new playground under Ben's leadership and countless political campaigns and dollars raised for numerous charitable causes.

Some don't know that Ben and I share the chamber bloodline as he was a chamber executive early in his career. He has been nurturing communities and their development ever since. He was an entrepreneur at the tender age of 17, opening a bicycle shop. Is it any wonder he would support business and free enterprise as a life-long banker?

Recently we talked a little politics as we visited at his home. He is saddened by the lack of cooperation in all spheres. He hopes for the election of leaders who will return to collaboration and consensus building, where we all know that we can't get what we want all the time, but if everyone listens to each other and gives a little, we can find solutions. Ben calls it the "Art of the Possible." Can there be a better legacy than to look for leadership qualities in our candidates this election season that will guide us to solutions and the Art of the Possible?

Ben has taught us well. He led with integrity, vision and by his personal example. My life is enriched by having known him, and our region is prosperous from his decades of commitment. I know the day will come when I will not have his smiling face and his cheery voice on the other end of my phone line available. But I will cherish these memories, as I recall his many lessons of leadership.

Thanks, Ben. You have shown me the art of so many things possible.