



August 27, 2026

This summer marked 250 years, a quarter of a millennium, since our nation's founding. The ideals set forth in America's founding document in 1776 remain an invaluable guide and a core promise: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The road to America's 250th birthday has not been without challenges, and there have been moments when our country's future looked bleak. Yet we have grown and thrived because each generation has committed to those founding ideals and moved forward, leaving our communities and our country a little better than they found them.

For the first 250 years of the American story, the founders' core promise has been fulfilled every day by people whose names will never appear in the history books: entrepreneurs betting on themselves and the future, employers taking a chance on a new graduate, teachers instilling skills and knowledge in their students, employees working hard to build a better life for their families, and civic leaders giving their time to improve their communities. Through our work at the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce, we cross paths every day with people who, while living ordinary lives, make our country an extraordinary place to live.

Our city is young. Incorporated in 1960, Overland Park is 66, compared with our nation's 250. Our citizens, civic and business leaders, and public officials have worked together since our city's founding to create a place residents and businesses are proud to call home, with an intentional commitment to public education, infrastructure, and quality-of-life amenities.

The result? Overland Park consistently ranks among the nation's "Best Cities" to do business, buy a house, raise a family, and retire. Some of the nation's best public schools, world-class hospitals, and innovative companies of all sizes are located here thanks to the hard work and investment by our local government, business community, and residents over the past six-plus decades.

In 1976, I was in elementary school when we celebrated our nation's Bicentennial. I never imagined then that I would have the opportunity 50 years later to celebrate our Semiquincentennial. This is a moment to pause, reflect, and be grateful for the vision and foresight of our founders, who, above all, prioritized our freedom and the democratic principles that protect it. Our free enterprise system, which drives innovation and growth, and our ability to debate and engage in civil discourse on difficult issues set us apart from other nations and must remain our standard forever.

Reflecting on the great leaders, movements, and changes over the past 250 years fills me with optimism. When future generations celebrate America's 300th and 350th anniversaries, I believe they will look back on how we addressed our challenges as a model for their own.

While our country has changed greatly since 1776, our task as leaders remains the same as our founders established: build a nation where future generations can enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I am confident we can do it because every day our team works with people in Overland Park and across our country who are committed to the work of leaving a community and a country better than they found them.

With optimism,

Tracey Osborne Oltjen, CCE, IOM
President & CEO
Overland Park Chamber of Commerce