

The Kansas City, MO FHS Reunion April 2024, as seen through Kathy Bates Johnson's rheumy eyes.

Kansas City Here We Come, and come we did. A group of approximately 60 FAHS alums from the classes of 1963-64-65-66-67 gathered in Kansas City,



Missouri from April 23-26, 2024. We walked, taxied, Ubered and happily light railed all over this delightful city. Homebase was the Hotel Phillips, part of the Hilton Curio Collection. Centrally located, just blocks from the light rail and easy walking to many sights and restaurants – for those who like old/vintage venues, it was just right. Night one found us happily gathering on the mezzanine level with an incredible browsing buffet and bar.

It was connected to our hospitality suite, so most of us never left the hotel the entire evening. No need to go out to dinner, the spread included seafood, cheeses, veggies, meatballs – something for everyone and everyone ate lots of somethings. As anyone who has attended past gatherings knows, the first night is special, most everyone wants to stay close and catch up with old friends – especially those who are attending for the first time. They are fun to observe because they can't stop smiling and pinching themselves that they are among these old friends. I've been attending our gatherings since the first one in Chicago in 1985 – I still marvel that we gather and get right back to sharing our special high school experiences and it always seems as though no time at all has passed.



The light rail had our age group in mind – just a few blocks from our hotel, it's hop on/hop off with no fee. A group of us hopped on for the ride to breakfast at the Union Station Harvey Restaurant – a few miles down the line we were there and occupied two tables on the main floor of the grand Kansas City Union Station. A good time to connect with old friends – lingering over meals is something this group has mastered. For those attending for the first

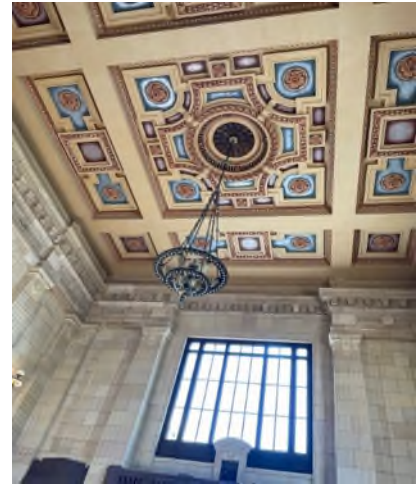
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or second time, like Tony Caluya, FHS '65 who flew in from Hawaii, to the likes of Janet Surkin Heidorn, '65, who has never missed a reunion, we ate and laughed and laughed and ate.

Those grand old railway stations are gems in themselves, we did a tour of the



Union Station photography halls showing the development of this station from the beginning to an update some years ago to its present grandeur. The "Harvey Girl" restaurants started here and continued through the western US. It was fun to see where it all began.



After breakfast the group peeled off in different directions. Kansas City doesn't appear to have been as affected with closed storefronts as many cities still are post-pandemic – there were thriving small businesses in old buildings with leafy trees lining the streets. A large group headed to the end of the light rail line to River Market at City Market, dating to 1857. The highlight was the Arabia Steamboat Museum that displays paraphernalia salvaged from a ship that sunk in the Missouri River in the mid-19th century. Some of us opted to visit at the upstairs café, but those viewing the exhibit were highly impressed. Those of us who opted to visit at the café were also highly impressed with our ability to recall so many happy Frankfurt memories.



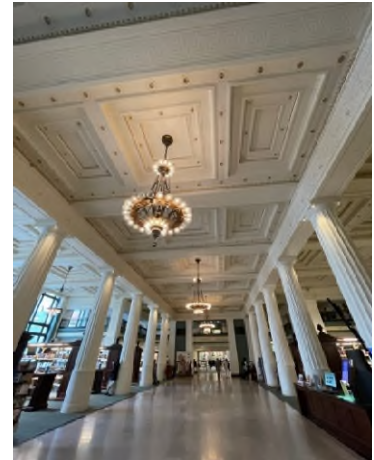
Then back to the hotel, pop in the hospitality suite, which one does to be sure to not miss anyone who has just arrived, then dress for the Kansas City Barbeque dinner at the lovely Overland Park home of Sue Brady Ventura, FHS '64. This was a BBQ feast - they served every variety of BBQ from beef to ribs to chicken and every variety of BBQ sauce from sweet to peppery. We sat in the lower level, in the kitchen, in the dining room, outside on the deck, and from everywhere one could hear the jazz band that performed all evening on the upper loft level. People would wander from one venue to the next to visit with yet another classmate.

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This fabulous evening was hosted entirely by the Venturas, and we thank them for their kindness and generosity and great BBQ! (Photo by Terry Skelton, Class of '65)



Erica, my daughter, accompanied me to Kansas City. We had a mini agenda of things we really wanted to see, which included the magnificent main Kansas City library – and in particular its



parking garage, which has been painted as library shelves with the spines of books with titles in the colors of the original publications – good for Kansas City to know the importance of keeping their downtown library and making it so accessible.



Another item on our to-be-sure-to-see list was the 21C Museum Hotel, just a few blocks from our hotel – there are a few of these amazing hotels throughout the US. They are in rehabbed older hotels with curated exhibits on the ground floor. Here is the tile floor with my feet included - they are only the beginning of the treats to be seen – and it's free.

A huge attraction to many of us was the World War I museum. Again, an easy ride on the light rail to Union Station, then walk a couple of blocks to the museum – all very easy if you don't walk it in a monsoon, which of course, we did. Fortunately, we were with John Sandidge and Carol Danko, both Class of '66, who provided extra rain gear (to John's detriment – he, was a bit damp by the end). But this museum is worthy and a real tribute to those who fought in the war to end all wars... There are several movies explaining and showing what our soldiers endured and exhibits from tanks/guns to garments. Best of all were the retired military docents who could explain the exhibits and answer most any question. Very touching.

The last night was the obligatory and much-anticipated German dinner (which this year turned out to be Austrian/German, but who's counting) at the Grünauer Restaurant. They had initially told us they couldn't accommodate our large group in a separate room, so we had made individual reservations at staggered times. When we showed up, the manager recognized our group and cancelled our reservations. So, we laughed and visited and visited and laughed and eventually the manager came around and enough tables were found throughout the restaurant to seat our large group. It was worth the wait – from first bite through dessert it was delicious. Since the tables were all put together at the last-minute to accommodate us, many were seated with classmates

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with whom they'd never visited in the past. I can attest to many laughs and fondly-shared stories and, as every year, heartfelt comments on how lucky we are to have so many of us continue to meet each year.



Depending on interest, people wandered this charming city visiting the American Jazz Museum, Kansas City Royals baseball stadium or the City Market. Erica and I chose the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum for our last hours. It is fascinating and touching with some great short movies to view, and an indoor field with amazing statues in position. And then a few weeks later, the statistics from these leagues were incorporated into the MLB statistics. It was a real treat to have viewed this tribute to those incredible athletes.

It was yet another fabulous gathering of old friends. I want to pay special tribute to my old friend and friend of many of us, **Mauro Nava, Class of '66**. Mauro lived in Gibbs in Frankfurt as did I – we rode the same school bus for years and have had great visits through the many years he and Melissa, his delightful wife, have been attending our gatherings. We had a great time visiting in the hospitality suite the last night of the Kansas City reunion, reminiscing on our fun times in Frankfurt. Sadly, just two days later Mauro passed away in San Antonio. This dear friend will be sadly missed, but I and we are thankful we had those happy times. We welcome Melissa as an official member of our group for years to come.

(Photo by Terry Skelton, Class of '65)

