Carlsen Center director receives award

The Kansas City region is unusually blessed with several major arts presenters, including the Harriman-Jewell Series of William Jewell College, the Friends of Chamber Music-Kansas City and the Lied Center of the University of Kansas.

A fourth presenter, the Carlsen Center of Johnson County Community College, recently garnered national attention when its artistic director, Charles Rogers, received the Award for Excellence in Presenting the Performing Arts from the North American Performing Arts Managers and Agents. The organization presented the award to Rogers on Jan. 14 at a conference at the New York Hilton Hotel.

"I was totally shocked," Rogers said. "To me it's very gratifying to have my colleagues recognize the amount and quality of work we do here."

The NAPAMA Award is given each year to a distinguished presenter in recognition of the awardee’s dedication to the future of presenting the performing arts, professionalism, respect for colleagues and high ethical standards. The award includes a citation for excellence, and the recipient’s organization receives $1,000 toward its endowment for presenting.

NAPAMA board member Kerby Lovallo said, "Charles’ steady hand as an administrator, his discerning ears and eyes as a programmer, his adventurous spirit as a commissioner of dance and other work, may just be unmatched in the Midwest."

NAPAMA member Marie-Catherine LaPointe, president of Boulev’Art artist management, said, "Charles Rogers is living proof that risk-taking and quality are still values that are worth believing in and working for. His discretion, knowledge, hard work and sense of respect for all people in the business are famous."

Rogers, who began his position at the Carlsen Center in July 1999, reflected on his achievements there.

"I’m proudest of the collaborative things we’ve done, working with artists in support of developing a new work," he said. "Sometimes we’ve opened up some extra time for rehearsals of a new work. Their creative team is here with our students and community members. We all learn so much."

In particular, the Carlsen Center has commissioned or co-commissioned dance and musical works by leading choreographers and composers. In a rather remarkable six-week period from September through early November of 2007, three newly commissioned works received Mid-America premieres: music by composers Jennifer Higdon and Roberto Sierra and a dance work by Paul Taylor.

The connection with the Paul Taylor Dance Company has served as a jewel in the Carlsen Center’s crown. The company, one of the best in the world, has appeared a number of times in Yardley Hall, and the Carlsen Center has commissioned several new works, drawing significant attention from the arts world.

Besides the Taylor company, the Doug Varone Dancers have appeared several times at the Carlsen Center and have also received a commission. Varone is another shining light in the dance world. In addition to his own company, Varone choreographs Broadway musicals and operatic productions for many of the leading opera companies in the world, including the Metropolitan Opera.

In addition to sparkling performances and commissions of significant new works, the Carlsen Center has developed an impressive arts education program led by Angel Mercier.

Thousands of students from beginning to advanced levels have taken part in classes, lecture-demonstrations, and hands-on training with some of the leading artists in the nation and in the world.

The "Creativity to Innovation" initiative is visionary. The program takes the creative skills employed in artistic endeavor and applies them to classroom work and professional training.

Rogers smiled when discussing the initiative.

"Once faculty members work with an artist, they’re hooked," he said.

"Over my entire career I’ve valued the enduring relationships with artists, managers and colleagues," Rogers said, reflecting on his career.

For details about Carlsen Center programs, call 469-4445. For information about community arts education, call Mercier at 469-8500, ext. 4221.

Charles Rogers
Overland Park's decades of rapid growth – it is Johnson County's largest city – is a model. The city is frequently recognized nationally as one of the top places to live, work and raise a family.

Why?

Reasons abound, but none is more important for Overland Park's success than the partnership forged years ago between the city government and the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce.

Look around. Drive College Boulevard, 119th Street. Look at the massive Sprint headquarters, the University of Kansas Edwards Campus, the convention center, Corporate Woods and much more.

The chamber, which celebrated its 40th anniversary late last year, and the city worked together in a relationship that blended vision and hard-nosed pragmatism.

Two of the key players, former Mayor Ed Eilert and former Chamber President Mary Birch, were asked to comment on how it played out.

Eilert said his conversations with fellow mayors around the country revealed a far different picture from the one here. In many instances, he found, elected officials and chambers often were at loggerheads over issues such as taxes and civic projects.

"That wasn't the way it was here at all," said Eilert, who held the top elective office for 24 years before stepping down three years ago.

Eilert, now a county commissioner, credited Birch with building the chamber into its current status as a major partner in Overland Park's development.

Birch, who joined the chamber in the 1970s and served as its president from 1984 to 2002, said chamber members looked far beyond a narrow business-oriented agenda.

"We had a group ... who valued the quality of life more than their pocketbook," Birch said, adding that they were willing to improve the city "knowing that it would cost them."

The progress did not come without opposition at times, Birch said in recalling struggles in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the toughest fights was whether College Boulevard would be a four-lane or two-lane roadway. The chamber wanted four lanes with room for widening if needed.

Many citizens balked at the plan and urged the City Council to build two lanes. Opponents contended they did not want their tax money spent on a wide street so far away from the heart of the city.

The advocates for the wider road prevailed and the rest, as some say, is history.

The influx of office complexes and other development along College became a significant tool in spurring additional growth.

"The development of College Boulevard changed the economy of the city, the county and the state," Birch said. "It started everything."

Statewide approval of liquor by the drink in the mid-1980s, which the chamber supported, brought another wave of development, Birch said, starting with a wide array of new restaurants and bars. The convention trade, including hotels, gained new life as thousands of visitors a year poured into the city.

Eilert and Birch pointed out that much more than efforts to attract and retain businesses were involved, however, although that was important.

Eilert said the chamber's emphasis on "quality of life" issues, such as support of public education, was important in making Overland Park an attractive place for families.

"During the early to mid-'70s," Eilert said of the earlier years, "the city and chamber developed a strategy. Chamber-focused
efforts led to much of the office development (such as Corporate Woods) and set the stage for what happened in the '80s."

The city-chamber relationship, Eilert said, further solidified over the next decade.

It was then that the chamber worked to "make sure the schools remained top quality" through lobbying at the Kansas Legislature for adequate K-12 funding and more local control of education.

The chamber was instrumental, too, in the decision to move the city "away from the property tax as a major funding source and focus on the sales tax," Eilert said.

That resulted in Overland Park consistently having the lowest property tax among Kansas cities. An estimated 20 percent of the sales tax is paid by nonresidents, an additional advantage.

Eilert said he believes the collaborative initiatives were possible because the chamber leadership understood that education and progressive projects attract hard-working people who want outstanding schools for their children and a positive community setting.

Indeed, the chamber's efforts are in full play right now.

The organization has, according to its Web site, provided dozens of volunteers to place 500 yard signs in support of Overland Park's one-eighth-cent sales tax renewal now on the ballot in a mail-in election. The revenue would finance continuation of the city's residential street and thoroughfare improvement program.

By now the chamber is active on many fronts, among them the ongoing, well-established lobbying program at the Kansas Legislature. Education remains a high priority because the business sector knows the value of well-prepared employees.

So, at 40, the chamber is an important factor in Overland Park's progress.

Eilert summed it up this way:

"Much of what we enjoy in the city is the result of the partnership between the city and the chamber."

Contact Bob Sigman at 384-6034 or e-mail bsigman@sunpublications.com
HOMECOMING CANDIDATES

Tina Bailey
Parents: Ken and Linda Bailey
School activities: Basketball, National Honor Society, FCA, History Club.
Post-graduation plans: College, but doesn’t know where yet, probably University of Kansas. Wants to become an interior designer.

Natalie Dickter
Parents: Burt and Patricia Parry, and David Dickter
School activities: Musical "Grease" (played part of Rizzo), school plays, Hornet Highlights, choir, co-president of the Letterwomen’s Club, ways and means chair of National Honor Society, student council representative, Drama Club.
Post-graduation plans: Major in music theater at either Butler or Oklahoma City University, minor in communications.

Paige Pond
Parents: Jerry and Linda Pond
School activities: Basketball, Letterwomen’s Club, History Club, FCA.
Post-graduation plans: Go to University of Kansas and major in a health-related field.
Ark Valley
News
Valley
Center, KS
Circ. 1993
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1/24/2008
34100

Todd McKown
Parents: Ron and Terri McKown
School activities: Basketball, National Honor Society, History Club, student council, Lettermen's Club, senior ambassador.
Post-graduation plans: Plans to go into pharmacy and play basketball in college, but is undecided on location.

Seth Mertins
Parents: Stuart and Jolene Mertins
School activities: Wrestling, History Club, DECA, senior ambassador.
Post-graduation plans: Attend college, but is undecided on location.

Alec Toews
Parents: Scott and Dawn Toews
School activities: Basketball, tennis, P.A.L.S., senior ambassador, History Club, National Honor Society.
Post-graduation plans: Considering attending University of Kansas to study pharmacy.
Bremby surprised by responses to decision

LAWRENCE, Kan. (AP) — The state official who blocked two coal-fired power plants in southwest Kansas last year says he was taken aback by at least some of the responses to his decision.

"I was not surprised by the reaction, due to the importance of the issue, but I have been surprised by the negative responses directed toward me personally by people I respect," the state's top environmental regulator, Rod Bremby, wrote in an e-mail to the Lawrence Journal-World.

Bremby, who was the assistant city manager of Lawrence during the flood of 1993, answered a series of questions by e-mail but declined to speak to the newspaper for its story Sunday.

In October, Bremby denied a $3.6 billion plan from Sunflower Electric Power Corp. to build two coal-fired plants outside Holcomb. Bremby, Kansas' secretary of health and environment, cited the plants' potential emissions of carbon dioxide, seen by many scientists as a major contributor to global warming.

While environmentalists hailed the decision, supporters of the plan, including many legislators, said the Sunflower project is vital to economic development. Some contend Bremby was caving to pressure from special interest groups and Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' office.

"I do think in the coal-fire decision, the decision he made was probably outside of his authority," said Senate President Steve Morris, R-Hugoton.

But John Nalbandian, former Lawrence mayor and chairman of the University of Kansas public administration department, said Bremby has a mind of his own.

"I think Rod is convinced this is the right thing to do," Nalbandian said. "And once he is convinced this is the right thing to do, he has a strong mind."

Although he disagrees with the Sunflower decision, Morris said he thinks that Bremby has done a good job overall as secretary. Still, Morris said, he wants to look at how long it takes for the Department of Health and Environment to process permits.

Since the Sunflower decision, Bremby, who is an introvert, has shied away from the media and any discussion of coal-fired plants. He even videotaped the initial announcement and didn't hold a news conference.

Bremby, who was named secretary of health and environment after Sebelius took office in January 2003, previously had worked in city government and as a professor and researcher at the University of Kansas.

Former Lawrence City Manager Mike Wildgen, who considers Bremby one of his best hires during his 16-year tenure, said that when Bremby faced angry crowds, he wasn't flustered.

"I always felt I could send him out to just about any overwhelmed citizen or group that had concerns or issues and he could deal with them unemotionally, matter of fact, give them straight answers," Wildgen said.

Some people point to the 1993 flood as a defining moment for Bremby.

He said it taught him the importance of communicating
frequently, honestly and directly during a crisis.

Bremby eventually became a management analyst for the city. Lawrence City Manager Dave Corliss credits Bremby with setting up a public safety plan that is still being used. The plan spelled out staffing levels and facility upgrades.

After working at City Hall, Bremby went to the University of Kansas, where he was assistant director of the Work Group for Community Health and Development.

In his three years at the university, Bremby worked on initiatives to match children with caring adults and bring young people and health programs to neighborhoods in Kansas City.

Bremby, who went to high school in Leavenworth and graduated from the University of Kansas in 1982, was born in the small town of Eufaula, Ala. He became one of the first black students to integrate into the city's public school system and counts Willie Mays among his role models.

"Personally experiencing segregation in public accommodations and the process of integration helped me develop a resilience that has proven more valuable the older I get," Bremby wrote to the Journal-World. "These experiences, taken together, helped shape my view of what is possible in a civil society."
Democrats pin hopes of keeping office on Six

By JOHN HANNA
AP Political Writer

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Democrats have put their hopes of keeping the attorney general’s office in Stephen Six, even though they acknowledge he hasn’t developed the political skills he needs.

Six, a Douglas County district judge, has never run for elected office, but Gov. Kathleen Sebelius appointed him attorney general last week. He’ll take over Jan. 31 for Paul Morrison, who’s stepping down because of a sex scandal.

Six will serve the remaining three years of Morrison’s four-year term, and some Republicans expect the 2010 attorney general’s race to be competitive because of Morrison’s downfall.

Morrison spent $2.65 million on his successful 2006 campaign.

A top Republican Party official and a former adviser to Sebelius questioned Monday whether Six is ready to run a statewide campaign. Democrats assume Sebelius would appoint a candidate only if he promised to run, but Six hasn’t publicly committed.

“Judge Six is focused on getting up to speed on the cases and issues important to the attorney general’s office,” spokeswoman Ashley Anstaett said Monday. “It’s too early to talk about politics or campaigns.”

Still, Sebelius and other prominent Democrats believe Six has enough time to build a solid record as attorney general and pick up the campaigning, public speaking and fundraising skills he’ll need.

“She had no concerns about that at all,” said Sebelius spokeswoman Nicole Corcoran. “First and foremost, she wanted to get the right person in the job.”

Burdett Loomis, a University of Kansas political scientist who once served as a Sebelius adviser, said the governor appears comfortable with someone who’s “pretty raw material” as a potential candidate because he appears “squeaky clean” and is willing to run in 2010.

But Loomis and Christian Morgan, the state GOP’s executive director, said Six seemed unprepared for a question about abortion during the Friday news conference in which Sebelius announced his appointment.

Abortion was a key issue during Morrison’s 2006 campaign. An abortion-rights Democrat, he unseated incumbent Phill Kline, an anti-abortion Republican. Abortion opponents repeatedly criticized Morrison afterward over how he handled investigations of abortion providers.

“The Democratic Party has a lot of work to do to get this guy ready for the kind of scrutiny that the people of Kansas are going to put on this guy,” Morgan said. “The office of attorney general is going to turn out to be one of the more hotly contested races in 2010, and it remains to be seen whether Steve Six is up to the task.”

Attorneys, Democrats and at least a few Republicans, have praised the appointment, describing Six as intelligent, thoughtful, hardworking and possessing strong legal skills. In accepting an appointment from Sebelius to the Douglas County court in January 2005, he showed he could tackle new challenges, said state Democratic Party Chairman Larry Gates.

“What he really is not is a politician,” Gates acknowledged. “He’ll get to that eventually. He made it pretty clear to me that he doesn’t want to be too bothered with that right now. He’s got the office to take care of.”

But Gates said politics will intrude soon: He plans to ask Six to speak to the Democrats’ annual Washington Days convention, Feb. 29 and March 1 in Topeka.
Gates argued that Six, as a former civil trial lawyer, already has speaking skills that will help him in politics.

And Bob Beatty, a Washburn University political scientist, said it's a mistake to view Six as a complete newcomer to politics. Beatty noted that Six's father, Fred, served as a Kansas Supreme Court justice.

"I'm sure his father taught him some things about being in the public eye," Beatty said. "People who have parents like that who are in the public eye have a natural advantage even if they've never run for office."

The elder Six may help in another way: He was appointed to the Supreme Court by Republican Gov. Mike Hayden in 1988.

"I think he'll do fine," said Lee Kinch, a Derby attorney who serves on the Democratic National Committee, said of the younger Six. "I think he'll have appeal across party lines and, no doubt, to the unaffiliated."

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"As much as you can say you'll do it, sitting there, facing call time and calling person after person after person, day after day, after day, that's incredibly hard work and absolutely no fun," Loomis said.

Still, Loomis said between Sebelius and Gates, the Democratic Party has built an efficient operation for raising campaign funds. He said Six also should have help from the Kansas Trial Lawyers Association, who have been strong backers of Sebelius and the party in the past.

"If he performs up to speed, there's no question that, I think, the trial lawyers would support him," Loomis said. "They're willing to write checks."

Kinch said Six's job performance will be a key factor, and he's confident Six will build a strong record that makes him an attractive candidate. Sebelius has the same faith, Corcoran said.

"We figured everything else would just fall into place as time goes on," Corcoran said.
Sebelius Names Judge Stephen N. Six Kansas Attorney General

Citing his experience as an attorney and district judge, Governor Kathleen Sebelius has named Judge Stephen N. Six as Kansas' new Attorney General.

"A respected legal professional with more than ten years' experience in litigation and trial work, Steve is an independent-minded judge who has served the people of Kansas well," Sebelius said. "He has answered the call of public service again, and is ready to lead the people's law firm effectively, responsibly, with character and integrity."

Six, Lawrence, was a partner in the law firm, Shamberg, Johnson & Bergman before being named to the seventh judicial district bench by Governor Sebelius in 2005. In his ten years of private practice, Six specialized in complex litigation and trial work. Between 1993 and 1994, he served as a Judicial Clerk for The Honorable Deanell R. Tacha, United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit, assisting in researching and writing appellate opinions.

Six received his undergraduate degree in 1988 from Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. He graduated with his juris doctorate from the University of Kansas School of Law, in 1993, where he was a Note and Comment Editor on the Kansas Law Review, a member of the Order of the Coif honors society and a Rice Foundation Scholarship recipient.
Education is sound investment

Education funding plays critical role in the state’s future prosperity

It is understandable if the state’s public universities feel pinched in a vise. On one side are members of the schools’ governing body, the Board of Regents, who are discussing whether to cap tuition fees.

On the other side is the Kansas Legislature, which does not adequately fund the universities. Schools could be left with increasing expenses and no way to cover them.

The regents are correct in considering a cap on tuition increases. As reported by Chris Green of the Harris News Service, tuition and fees at state universities have more than doubled at the University of Kansas and Kansas State University since 2002. Increases at the state’s other schools have averaged at least 8 percent a year.

Students often borrow to meet these higher costs. Reports show that debt carried by 2006 graduates is 5 percent to 21 percent higher than 2004 graduates.

If this trend continues, the costs of a Kansas college education will grow beyond the reach of most potential students. On average, graduates are nearly $20,000 in the hole before they get their first job, including tuition, books, fees and money borrowed for other expenses.

On the other end of the spectrum, Kansas lawmakers face ever-growing demands for money. Public support programs and K-12 education require new millions each year. Earlier this month Gov. Kathleen Sebelius introduced a budget that would draw down state cash reserves by $218 million — meaning her spending requests would outpace projected revenue by that amount.

Perhaps compromises will be found when all the parties get their heads together. Let’s hope students win in the end. Investing in our young people means a brighter future for them and our state.

— Tom Bell
Editor & Publisher
Democrats think Six will be ready for 2010

Some say attorney general’s election will be competitive

By JOHN HANNA
The Associated Press

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Stephen Six speaks during a news conference after his appointment as Kansas Attorney General in Topeka on Friday.
Democrats think new AG can become ready to run in 2010

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Gov. Kathleen Sebelius often portrays a shrewdness befitting a seasoned politician who knows that every decision and appointment made will undergo intense scrutiny by media and critics.

So some expected Sebelius to appoint Kansas Securities Commissioner Chris Biggs as a replacement for departing Attorney General Paul Morrison, and critics were ready to pounce once the governor did so.

Biggs has ties to an abortion rights political action committee, and anti-abortion groups were readying their ammo.

Instead, Sebelius wisely — shrewdly — chose Stephen Six, a 42-year-old Douglas County district court judge. He comes with little baggage; Six never has sought an elected office. So the partisan critics who often try to derail such appointments will need to sort through the judge's court decisions before issuing a public assessment.

In choosing Six, Sebelius clearly signaled a housecleaning for the Kansas attorney general's office, muddied by its previous two occupants, Phill Kline and Morrison.

Kline's single-minded anti-abortion crusade while in office lasted just one term. Morrison's tenure came to an abrupt end last month when a former lover went public with their dirty laundry.

If the adage is true, that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, then Six ought to be an outstanding attorney general. His father, Fred Six, served on the Kansas Supreme Court from 1988 to 2003 and was a respected jurist and attorney. University of Kansas law school professors described Six as intelligent and organized. ... Kansans likely aren't looking for a hero in the AG's office; they simply want the state's top cop to enforce the law fairly and provide guidance for county attorney and district attorney offices.

The state needs a true public servant who doesn't use the AG's office for personal gain or to pursue a personal agenda. Sebelius might have found such a person with her appointment of Six. — The Hutchinson News