

DECEMBER 2025



mission

Kansas

**THE STORY OF
JERUSALEM CAFE**

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THE PRIMROSE**

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DEAR MISSION RESIDENTS AND FRIENDS,

Welcome to this special Food and Community edition of the Mission Magazine. In this issue we celebrate the flavors, traditions, and shared experiences that make Mission such a warm and connected place. From beloved restaurants to school gardens and community service, the stories show how food can strengthen our sense of belonging.

We begin with the journey of Jerusalem Cafe, a family-run restaurant whose history spans more than 30 years. Founded by Farid Azzeh, and now carried on by his son Adam, the cafe brings authentic Mediterranean cuisine and genuine hospitality to Mission. Their story honors a father's legacy and shows how food brings us together. It's exciting to read how our community has embraced their flavors and culture, making the restaurant a welcome new addition to our city. It's also a reminder that the meals we share often reflect the memories and family traditions behind them.

A different kind of nourishment is highlighted in our feature on the Mission Community Food Pantry, who is celebrating their fifth anniversary in the community. What started as a pandemic response has grown into an invaluable resource supporting up to 180 families each distribution day. Entirely volunteer-powered, the pantry is rooted in dignity and human connection. Monthly theme days, book giveaways, and thoughtful touches ensure families feel seen and welcomed. It's a powerful example of Mission at its best, with neighbors lifting one another up all backed by a network of local partners. I know our City appreciates Trinity Lutheran Church's support in housing the pantry and the support of several businesses, like Hy-Vee.

On the west end of town, Mud Pie Bakery is a colorful vegan bakery that blends a focus on sustainability with scratch-made baking, providing treats that are friendly to a wide range of dietary needs. Their story explores how the team focuses on fresh ingredients, eco-friendly packaging, and creating a cozy space where guests feel welcome to linger over coffee and pastries. They are broadening what a neighborhood bakery can mean to a community.

For a taste of Mission's nightlife, this issue also highlights The Primrose, a local craft cocktail bar known for creativity and seasonal flair. The team collaborates closely on each menu, releasing inventive cocktails and equally thoughtful mocktails that keep regulars returning. Their story illustrates how creativity, teamwork, and community connections help small businesses thrive along Johnson Drive. I'm looking forward to checking out their holiday selections!



In this issue we also celebrate the next generation of Mission's food enthusiasts: the students of Rushton Elementary, who are learning through their flourishing school garden. With support from families, teachers, and community partners, students plant, tend, and harvest produce. The garden has become an outdoor classroom that teaches responsibility, curiosity, and healthy habits while strengthening school-community ties.

Lastly, we spotlight one of our Mission Market Vendors, Anjali Prasanth who made quite an impression on marketgoers this summer. Her business, Mittu's Kitchen has provided her with an opportunity to introduce others to the cuisine of Southern India, allowing her to share a piece of her home and her heart.

Together, these stories showcase the many ways food brings us together—as families, neighbors, volunteers, customers, and friends. They honor the people who feed our community, share their heritage, support those in need, and help Mission remain a place where everyone feels welcome.

I hope you enjoy this flavorful edition of Mission Magazine and feel as inspired as I am by the people who make Mission an exceptional place to call home. Yum!

-Sollie Flora, Mayor



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On the cover:
 The owner of Jerusalem Cafe, Adam Alazeh, with some examples of the great food from his restaurant.

Photo by
 Kathy Delorenzo

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Adam Alazeh shares his culture with food as the owner of Jerusalem Cafe.

FROM FATHER'S DREAM TO FAMILY LEGACY:

The Story of **Jerusalem Cafe**

Local eatery continues to share heritage of food and culture

By Kris Baker • Photos by Kathy Delorenzo

Even in times of conflict and strife, immigrant Farid Azzeh believed the one thing that could always bring people together was the warmth and comfort of good food. When Azzeh moved to Kansas City from Palestine, he had the dream of bringing the authentic flavors of his homeland with him. He founded the first Jerusalem Cafe location in Westport in 1989. What began as a small hole-in-the-wall space soon became a Kansas City landmark known for its house-made pita bread, creamy hummus and family-style hospitality.

"My father's philosophy was simple: serve good food consistently, treat people like family and stay true to your roots," said Azzeh's son Adam Alazze. "After his recent passing, continuing his legacy has become both my mission and our family's honor. Every meal we serve and every guest we greet carries forward his vision of community, authenticity and love for great food."

The family business has grown, now

"A passion for great food, community, and culture. Our goal is to keep building on what my father started, to serve Kansas City with heart, honor our heritage, and continue growing in ways that make him proud."

— Adam Alazeh, owner of Jerusalem Cafe

serving Independence and Mission in addition to the flagship Westport store. Each one represents a new way to share their family's food and story while keeping Azzeh's legacy alive.

"Our culture and family are at the very heart of Jerusalem Cafe," Alazze said. "Every dish we serve is inspired by generations of family recipes passed down from my father and our relatives back home. The way we season our meats, the way we make hummus by hand, or bake our pita fresh in the oven, it all comes from tradition."

While the core of Jerusalem Cafe's menu features the classics they are known for, each location has its own character.

The Mission restaurant has a slightly more modern feel, with a quick serve style counter and a self-ordering kiosk. They also feature seasonal specials or dishes that fit the local taste. Their goal is to listen to their guests and adapt without losing the authenticity that defines Jerusalem Cafe.

When the opportunity arose to start a location in Mission, Alazze said it just felt right. They were drawn to Mission's strong support for local businesses. The community here felt like a natural extension of their family.

"There's something special about the Mission customers. They're loyal, curious about our culture, and always ready to



Jerusalem Cafe offers authentic Mediterranean food and brings new flavors to Mission.

share a good meal," Allazzeh said. "It's been rewarding to see how quickly our restaurant became a part of their daily lives."

Allazzeh believes Mission's energy, diversity, and sense of community make it the perfect home for this next chapter. Though his new journey will have to be made without his father, he knows family is still the ingredient that will keep Jerusalem Cafe moving forward.

Jerusalem Cafe offers authentic Greek and Mediterranean dishes; their most ordered items include the gyros and shawarma sandwiches.

FAMILY HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

While many families in the area prepare turkeys and cranberries for the holiday table, Allazzeh and his family add their own kind of spice to the festivities. For them, the traditional dishes they prepare include lamb and rice, stuffed grape leaves and rich desserts like baklava. Though the food is different, the focus on food and family is one that people of all backgrounds can relate to.

"Even though my father isn't physically with us anymore, his presence is felt most during those times through the food he taught us to make and the stories that come with every meal," Allazzeh said. "For us, the holidays are about gratitude, family, and honoring where we came from."

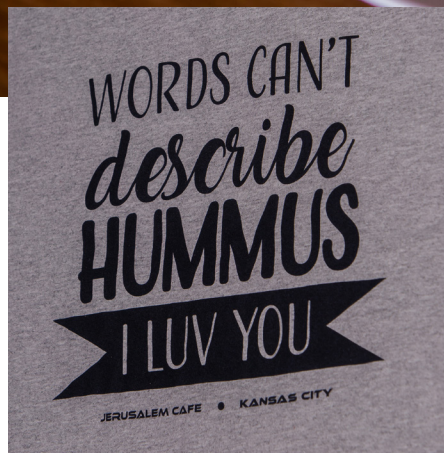
During this holiday season in between the stuffing and sweet potatoes, Allazzeh invites people to try baba ganoush and falafel, noting that it's not just about the food but about connection and culture.

"My father believed that every meal was a chance to share a piece of our heritage with others, to build community through warmth and hospitality," Allazzeh said. "That philosophy still guides us today. When guests walk through our doors, we want them to feel like they're not just visiting a restaurant, they're being welcomed into our family."

SHARING THEIR STORY

In addition to the restaurant, Jerusalem Cafe also operates several food trucks. It remains an important part of who they are and represents their goal of sharing their food and their culture across the metro. This past year they have been able to meet and interact with people all over the Kansas City area at events including festivals, concerts and private gatherings.

Diners can come to Jerusalem Cafe's location on Metcalf or visit one of their food trucks to try their signature plates.



"It's like a traveling extension of our restaurant, carrying the same spirit and quality wherever we go," Allazzeh said. "While each venture has its own style, the foundation remains the same,"

Jerusalem Cafe in Mission is located at 6029 Metcalf Ave. and is open 11:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. seven days a week. To see their menu or to book their food truck visit their website at jerusalmcafekc.com.

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Prime time at

Where creative spirit meets handcrafted cocktails

By Kris Baker • Photos by Kathy Delorenzo

Take two parts outside the box thinking, three parts close-knit staff, squeeze in some seasonal merry-making, shake it all up, and you end up with The Primrose, an upscale craft cocktail bar in Mission specializing in unique and creative drinks.

The Primrose is part of a family-run ecosystem of food and fun shops on Johnson Drive, owned by Abby Hans and her family. Together they also operate Urban Prairie Coffee, Mission Board Games, and the Common Tiger, a speakeasy concept that operates on weekend evenings. Her brother Mason manages the board game shop, mom Julie handles art and design, and dad Jason takes care of the legal and accounting side of the businesses.

"It's truly a family operation, and everything complements each other," Abby said "You can grab a coffee in the morning, cocktails at night, and play board games in between. It's a really fun, full-circle experience."

Abby's focus is on giving The Primrose, which opened in September 2022, its own clear identity in the increasingly crowded world of cocktail bars. They do not have a mixologist per se; rather their creations come from the collaborative efforts of the team. The creative directors, Kiera Hartl and Mad Hunt, take inspiration from a wide range of sources and work closely with their bartenders to discover which trends and flavors are landing with people.

"Everyone behind the bar has a say, and that's something we're proud of," Abby said. "The best drinks usually come from bouncing ideas off each other."

The Primrose's menus are built around the seasons. They look for what's fresh, what flavors people seem to be craving, and what ideas team members have. Sometimes drinks are inspired by seasonal ingredients; other times, it's a new theme that gets them excited. Then comes the fun part: they embark on the tasting process, experiment with recipes, and consider how to balance each new concoction to make it unique and flavorful.

Both The Primrose and Common Tiger have undergone festive holiday transformations this holiday season, similar to year's past. Beyond the décor, each location offers signature holiday drinks like The Poinsettia at The Primrose and the Ski Lodge cocktail at Common Tiger.

"With our over-the-top décor, themed cocktails and the cozy, festive feeling we love creating, we



"Mission has such a strong sense of community. It's small, but it's full of life and personality. We love being surrounded by other local businesses and familiar faces. Plus, everything's walkable, and you can feel the energy on the block when all the spots are buzzing. It feels like home, and not just because I'm a Mission resident."

— Abby Hans, co-owner of The Primrose

The Primrose



The bartenders at The Primrose (left to right) Mad Hunt, Abby Hans, and Kiera Hartl serve up unique cocktails and lots of fun.



The Primrose, Mission's craft cocktail bar, gets its name from the Primrose drink, which comes in a smoked rosemary glass with Tom's Town Gin, vermouth, Campari, rosemary simple syrup, lemon, orange and egg whites.

really go all out for the holidays," Abby said. "It's one of our favorite times of the year to get creative."

Their best-selling drink is the Urban Prairie Cold Brew martini. A balance of approachable and elevated, this one is a favorite for their customers. And it's a nice, familial nod to their sister spot down the block, Urban Prairie Coffee.

The Primrose also encourages inclusive drinking with a selection of mocktails featured on every seasonal menu.

"We think it's really important to have something special for everyone," Abby said. "There are so many reasons someone might not drink, and we still want them to have a great experience. Our mocktails get as much creativity

and care as our cocktails; and yes, we've definitely seen more people ordering them lately."

ANOTHER ROUND

With rising prices and tariffs in the news, Abby says they're always monitoring the cost of spirits and imports and looking for ways to keep those increases from affecting guests. They take it as a challenge; when prices shift, they get creative. That includes highlighting local distillers, adjusting portions and building drinks that make sense with what is accessible.

"The goal is to adapt without losing the quality or character that people expect from us," Abby said.

Visitors to The Primrose represent a good mix of locals, out-of-towners and even a few famous Kansas City names. However, what is truly intoxicating for Abby and her staff is seeing all the regulars who have made The Primrose a part of their routine.

"When people bring friends or family in for the first time and say, 'You have to try this place,' that's the best kind of compliment," Abby shared.

The Primrose is located at 5622 Johnson Drive, Mission, Kansas and is open Tuesday through Thursday, 4 to 11 p.m., Friday and Saturday 4 p.m. to midnight. Last call is 30 minutes before closing. To see their spirits list, book a private event or to learn more about them visit theprimrosemission.square.site.



"The best drinks usually come from bouncing ideas off each other."

– Abby Hans, The Primrose

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Mission Continues Holiday Giving Traditions

Once again, Mission residents, businesses, and friends came together to brighten the holidays for 70 local families through the City’s Holiday Adoption Program. For more than 20 years, the City has partnered with local schools to identify families in need and ensure they receive support during the season.

Each year, participating groups provide a traditional Thanksgiving meal, followed by gifts and grocery gift cards in December. The generosity shown by our community never fails to inspire us. In 2025, nearly 20 groups, businesses, families, and individuals adopted entire families, making a meaningful difference for our neighbors.

Thanks to your support, this tradition remains strong, and we’re already looking forward to finding ways to expand our impact next year.



In addition to the Holiday Adoption Program, 2025 was another great year in the City of Mission! Our residents and businesses make this a great place to live, work and play.

Please take a few minutes to visit our website at www.missionks.org to check out the highlights and accomplishments.

Mayor Flora and the City Council look forward to continuing to serve you in the year ahead. Please feel free to contact them at any time throughout the year with questions, concerns or to learn more about what is happening in Mission.

Celebrating Council Transitions: A Warm Welcome and a Thank You

November brought about municipal elections in Mission, and a change in the makeup of our Ward II Councilmembers. Councilmember Lea Loudon has transitioned off of the City Council after serving one term beginning in 2021. Councilmember Loudon's thoughtful approach to serving her constituents and the entire City of Mission, and her deep empathy to anyone experiencing mental, emotional, and physical challenges allowed her to show leadership and kindness at every turn. We thank Councilmember Loudon for her time, energy, and problem solving abilities and her deep commitment to the City of Mission during her time on the Council.



Ward II Councilmember Lea Loudon

Parks, Recreation + Tree Commissioner Sam Komosa will step into the Ward II Council seat after winning the November election. Councilmember Komosa is a fourth generation Johnson County resident and has lived in Mission since 2021.

He and his wife Alyson chose Mission after falling in love with the parks, walkable streets, and the small town feel along Johnson Drive. Sam enjoys walking around Mission with Alyson, his daughter Lucille, and family dog Luna. He is a zealous sports fan who takes his role as commissioner of his fantasy football league very seriously. Sam is also an avid reader, setting alarms early on the weekends to sneak in some reading time.



Ward II Councilmember Sam Komosa in downtown Mission

Sam was sworn onto the Council at the December 17, 2025 City Council meeting along with Mayor Sollie Flora, Councilmember Josepha Haden Chomphosy (Ward I), Councilmember Debbie Kring (Ward III), and Councilmember Ben Chociejski (Ward IV) who were all re-elected to four year terms.

Platinum Award for The Lanes at Mission Bowl

The City of Mission's Sustainability Commission recently recognized The Lanes at Mission Bowl with a Platinum Rating on the City's Sustainability Scorecard.

The Sustainability Scorecard looks at how new projects in our community approach things like land use, transportation, energy and water conservation, materials, and overall environmental quality. It's a collaborative way to make sure Mission continues to grow responsibly and sustainably.

The Lanes at Mission Bowl earned the highest possible rating thanks in part to its LEED Silver Certification, a national recognition for sustainable building practices, and one of the requirements for the project to receive public incentives. The developer even got creative by repurposing some of the old bowling lanes from Mission Bowl into shelving in select apartment units.

Along with its environmental focus, the project also designates 20% of its units as attainable housing for households earning up to 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Congratulations to The Lanes at Mission Bowl for setting such a great example of sustainability and community commitment right here in Mission!



Members of the Sustainability Commission recently presented an award to the developer and staff of The Lanes at Mission Bowl



Holiday Light Recycling Returns to Mission

Please join Mission's Sustainability Commission in helping the winter holiday season be just a little more green! Have some burnt out bulbs or outdated strands of holiday lights that need to go? Don't send them to the landfill, recycle them!

The annual Holiday Light Recycling Program is back again in 2025. Drop-off bins for recycling will be located at the Powell Community Center and Mack Hardware on Johnson Drive until after the first of the year.

Sidewalk Snow Removal—What You Need to Know

Walkability is a core community value in Mission, and many residents rely on safe, accessible sidewalks year-round. During the winter months, uncleared sidewalks can create hazards and limit access, and the City regularly receives complaints from residents and visitors about areas that have not been maintained after snowfall.

City code requires property owners to clear adjacent sidewalks within 48 hours of a snow event. This expectation helps ensure that pedestrians can safely reach work, school, local businesses, and other destinations throughout the winter season.

Each year, property owners may receive one courtesy notice if their sidewalks are not cleared. This notice carries no fee or assessment. If snow removal is not completed after the courtesy notice is issued, the City may remove the snow (abatement) and assess the associated costs back to the property.

For questions about Mission's sidewalk snow removal ordinance, please contact the Neighborhood Services Department at 913.676.8390.



Winter Snow Season Reminders

In the winter months, Mission's Public Works Department turns its attention from street repair to snow plowing operations. Snow crews operate on two 12-hour shifts with 4-5 crew members each to ensure roadways are safe for travel.

- Crews run two routes focused on the main thorough-fares and two routes focused on neighborhoods.
- Streets are prioritized by terrain, visibility, and traffic volume.
- Crews also remove snow from parking areas along Johnson Drive (between Lamar and Nall), along sidewalks near schools and along trails once the streets have been cleared.
- All vehicles parked on streets must be removed when snow has accumulated to a depth of four inches or more, or any other time a Snow Emergency is declared, and kept off until all snow has been removed.



For additional information on Mission's Snow Plan please visit www.missionks.org or contact Mission Public Works at 913.676.8375

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Customer favorites at Mud Pie Bakery include traditional and filled croissants, mocha sweet rolls, mini cheesecakes and pop tarts. Savory fans love the kolaches, BBQ Brisket on a pretzel bun and breakfast biscuit sandwiches - all plant based.

From humble beginnings, locally owned Mud Pie Bakery brings unique treats to Mission

By Kris Baker • Photos by Kathy Delorenzo

Ashley Valverde and her family have built Mud Pie Bakery with intention. Since opening in 2011, they've faced their share of challenges, but a commitment to sustainability and accessible, healthy food has guided every step.

Mud Pie Bakery is a small, family-run bakery and coffee shop that's 100 percent vegan. Ashley, along with husband Michael, father John Hughes and business partner William Sims, has created a cozy Mission eatery where everything is baked fresh daily. Whether you're fully plant-based or just vegan-curious, there's something to satisfy every craving and it's all served with a side of sustainability and a splash of color.

A MISSION BEYOND MUFFINS

Sustainability is just part of their purpose. Valverde and her team wanted to make food everyone could enjoy, including those with allergies or intolerances.

"We figured as a coffee shop, we'd need treats for customers," Valverde said. "But the bakery side started to take over, and we quickly got requests for cakes and other allergen-friendly items."

It was a bold move, especially here in barbecue country.

A PIE-IN-THE-SKY IDEA

In the land of brisket and burnt ends, a vegan bakery raised a few eyebrows.

"In the beginning, people were a little leery of vegan baked goods, but we've overcome that," Valverde said. "Being



Self-trained as chefs, Ashley Valverde and her family are on hand to oversee all the baking at Mud Pie.



Mud Pie's space is cozy and welcoming and stocked with books for customers to enjoy.

vegan ourselves, we wanted to have options for people with dietary restrictions and allergies. Our biggest challenge now is sourcing vegan ingredients that aren't vastly more expensive than their non-vegan counterparts."

Hughes added, "We've always offered a range of gluten-free options, which I'd say taste better than any I've had elsewhere."

Not bad for two self-taught bakers. With a mix of passion and purpose, Mud Pie has risen to the occasion, always dairy-free, cruelty-free, and seasonally inspired. In fall, you'll find chai spice apple pecan muffins and pumpkin sweet rolls; for the holidays, themed treats and special menus take center stage. The daily lineup is posted online at mudpiebakery.com.

FINDING A PLACE TO CALL HOME

The bakery's original 39th Street spot had a tiny kitchen and little room to grow. A second shop on 95th Street helped for a while, but when the pandemic hit, the owners consolidated operations into one larger site. Still, it wasn't quite the right fit.

In 2024, the team began searching again and found their perfect match in Mission.

"We love colorful and vibrant atmospheres and wanted to capture the cozy feel of our old yellow house on 39th Street," Valverde said. The new space reflects that charm, complete with bookshelves stocked for customers to borrow and return.

Inside, it feels like home for staff and regulars alike. Bakers work through the night, some starting at 8 p.m., others before dawn at 4 a.m., ensuring

"In the beginning, people were a little leery of vegan baked goods, but we've overcome that. Being vegan ourselves, we wanted to have options in our city for people with dietary restrictions and allergies."

— Ashley Valverde, owner of Mud Pie Bakery

everything is fresh for the morning rush.

SUSTAINING THE FUTURE

"The environmental impact of a business such as ours is something we consider," Valverde said. To reduce waste, drinks are served in reusable glass jars with a refundable deposit for the jar, lid, and koozie. "If someone can't bring it back, they can keep using it," she added. To-go boxes and bags are recyclable, too.

As Mud Pie settles into its Mission home, its goal remains the same: to prove that vegan food can be sustainable and delicious—no compromise required.

Each morning, the scent of freshly baked croissants and muffins fills the air, a testament to their dedication.

Mud Pie Bakery is open Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mornings are busiest, but weekend demand has sparked talk of extended Friday hours.

Find Mud Pie Bakery at 6850 Johnson Dr., Mission, KS.



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June 22-26	December 21-26



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GFL holidays observed:

- New Year's Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Day

Check website for how holidays impact collection dates.



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The Mission Police Department would like to remind you to always be on the lookout for scams - both online and over the phone. Scammers get more sophisticated all the time, and it's important never to give your personal information, information on your bank accounts or to send money to someone you don't know. It's okay to just "hang up" or "delete!"

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The Mission Community Pantry's core service team includes: top (l to r) Julie Ashie, Kerry Barker, Lynn Kring, Rhonda Synovec; bottom (l to r) Nancy Henry and Linda McConwell.

Five Years of Feeding Hope

By Leigh Ann Zerr • Photos by Kathy Delorenzo

Mission Community Food Pantry celebrates five years of compassion, connection, and community service

It began, as many community efforts do, with a phone call and a shared vision.

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when grocery shelves were bare, jobs were uncertain, and food insecurity was rising, three Mission residents were already working separately to help local families. None of them knew their paths were about to converge in a way that would reshape community support in Mission.

FROM IDEA TO ACTION

Suzie Gibbs and Lynn Kring had long partnered with Harvesters through the Holiday Family Adoption program

and the City of Mission's mobile food pantry. Meanwhile, Rhonda Synovec had spent more than a decade coordinating Harvesters' Kid's Café Meet & Eat summer lunch program, ensuring children had access to nutritious meals while school was out.

As the pandemic stretched on, all three faced the same challenges: increased need and limited resources. That's when Harvesters representative Justine Koontz connected Suzie and Rhonda.

"Suzie called me, and we realized right away we shared the same vision," Synovec recalls. "By that afternoon, she and Lynn were sitting in my office at

Trinity Lutheran Church, brainstorming what would become the Mission Community Food Pantry."

Trinity's senior pastor, Mark Schulz, immediately offered the church as the pantry's home and contributed \$5,000 in seed funding. Within two months, on October 22, 2020, the Mission Community Food Pantry officially opened.

"We started small, serving 45 or 50 families," Synovec says. "But it was clear from the beginning the need would only grow."

GROWING TO MEET DEMAND

Five years later, the pantry has become



Dedicated volunteers load cars with fresh and shelf-stable goods for local families.

a cornerstone of compassion in Mission, serving 160 to 180 families at each distribution—more than triple its original reach.

“It’s both humbling and motivating,” Synovec says. “The need continues to grow, but so does the generosity of this community.”

Volunteers gather twice a month at Trinity Lutheran Church to distribute groceries, produce, and household items. The atmosphere is intentionally welcoming, feeling more like a neighborhood gathering than service line.

“People often tell us how kind the volunteers are,” Synovec says. “That means a lot. The pantry isn’t just about food, it’s about connection.”

POWERED BY PARTNERSHIPS

Like many nonprofits, the pantry has faced its share of post-pandemic challenges: supply chain issues, fewer donations to Harvesters, and rising food costs.

“Even when the tables look full, there’s a lot of behind-the-scenes coordination happening,” Synovec says. “We’ve learned to be flexible and creative. The need doesn’t go away, so neither will we.”

The pantry’s success is dependent on a broad network of local partners. Alongside Harvesters and Trinity Lutheran Church, support comes from the City of Mission, Mission Hy-Vee, Countryside Christian Church, and Dollar General Mission, which participates in a grocery recovery program. Neighborhoods such as Milhaven and Countryside organize regular food drives to keep shelves stocked.

“These relationships have sustained us,” Synovec says. “Every donation, every volunteer, every box of food makes a difference. It’s truly a community-wide effort.”

SERVING WITH HEART AND A LITTLE FUN

One hallmark of the Mission Community Food Pantry is its emphasis on dignity and joy. Each month’s distribution features a theme or small celebration to make families feel welcome.

In February, volunteers hand out valentines. In March, the Barker family provides bubbles and kettle corn. Volunteers don superhero capes for National Superhero Day in April. And every May, they honor the late Suzie Gibbs, who passed away in 2022.

“Suzie was the heart of this effort,” Synovec says. “She believed in meeting people with love, and we try to carry that forward.”

Summer brings Fourth of July festivities



Abbie (l) and Makenzie (r) Barker are regular volunteers at the Mission Community Food Pantry.

Pantry by the Numbers:

- Families Served per Distribution: 160–180
- Individuals Served Through 2024: 46,511
- Families Served Through 2024: 13,107
- Annual Distributions: 24
- Core Volunteers: 60+
- Key Partners: Harvesters, Trinity Lutheran Church, City of Mission, Mission Hy-Vee, Countryside Christian Church, Dollar General Mission, Milhaven and Countryside HOAs

and back-to-school drives, while fall and winter distributions include Halloween treats, Thanksgiving meals, and holiday extras for Christmas.

“At every distribution, we set up a free library where families can take as many books as they like,” Synovec says. “One

month, some children brought back the books they’d finished so others could enjoy them too. That kind of generosity, from children who were there to receive help themselves, reminds us why we do this work.”

LOOKING AHEAD

As the pantry marks its fifth anniversary, organizers are already looking toward the future. They hope to expand refrigeration and freezer capacity to safely store more perishable items and dream of adding a delivery vehicle to create a mobile pantry for residents unable to reach the church.

“Our mission is to serve those in need, wherever they are,” Synovec says. “If we can take the pantry to people, that’s what we want to do.”

Five years after that first phone call, the Mission Community Food Pantry continues to thrive, proof that when neighbors care for one another, everyone benefits.

To learn more including a list of most needed items, visit tlcms.org/mission-community-food-pantry.

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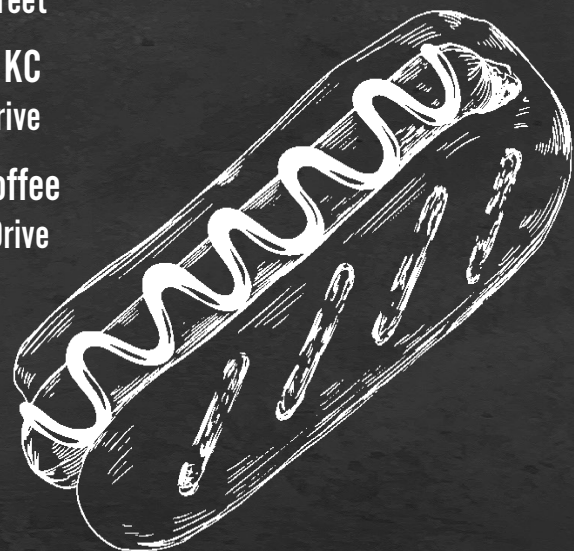
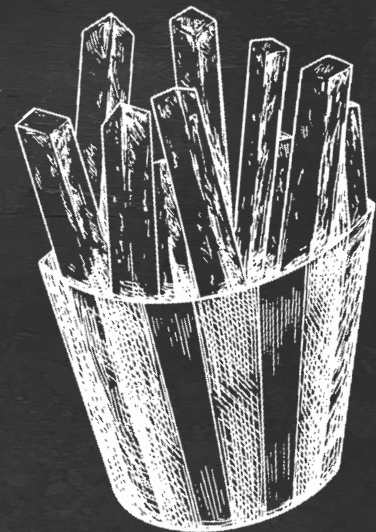
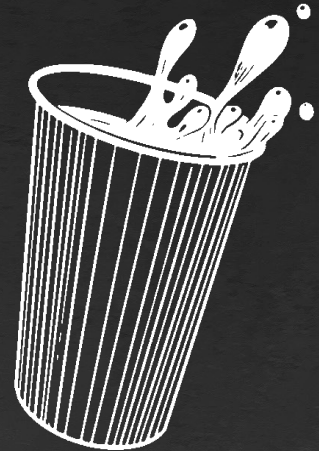
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Rushton Elementary students, teachers, and parent volunteers show off their new garden beds.



Students created a nutritious green salad using ingredients from their garden.

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Growing Together

Rushton Elementary's School Garden Takes Root

By Leigh Ann Zerr • Photos Courtesy of Rushton PTA and Molly Harris

At Rushton Elementary, learning doesn't just happen in the classroom, it's sprouting right outside the doors. Thanks to a PTA-funded garden bed project, students are getting their hands dirty, growing their own food, and even sharing it with their teachers.

The idea took root last year, when PTA parents Jessica Carlson and Nicole Chestnut teamed up with fifth-grade teacher Molly Harris. Together, they developed a proposal that tied directly into classroom learning objectives and Kansas state curriculum standards.

"The new building has so much open outdoor space, so we thought this would be a perfect way to provide an enriching experience for kids," Jessica said.

Research from Cornell University backs up what parents and teachers have already observed firsthand: school gardens produce countless benefits for students.

Since the first planting in June, those benefits have been easy to spot.

"Our main goal is to help kids see where their food comes from and to try new things," Jessica explained.

It's working, and Rushton's 5th grade students are living proof.

"When my class checks on the garden, they are so excited, Ms. Harris said. "If we don't have a week signed up to help, they'll still ask if we can walk by to check on it. Some even ask to skip recess so they can stay and water or help with chores."

The garden has become an extension of their classroom learning, sparking new curiosity and countless teachable moments.

"We've been able to tie so many of our classroom conversations back to the garden," Ms. Harris added. "Our windows overlook it, and students are always pointing out changes they notice."

The students' enthusiasm has carried over to lunchtime, too. Students who once swore off salads have been spotted munching happily on tomatoes, bell peppers, lettuce, and other vegetables

straight from the garden.

"What has surprised me the most is how willing the students are to try new vegetables," Ms. Harris said. "We grew lettuce, tomatoes, and several kinds of peppers, and the students were all excited to taste them. After our first big harvest, we had a 'Salad Party' and many kids even tried new salad dressings."

"There's a kind of ownership and novelty to growing your own food that makes kids branch out from their usual bagged chips and fruit snacks," Jessica observed.

The lessons extend far beyond healthy eating.

"The biggest benefit has been seeing the growth in cooperation and teamwork, as well as patience," Ms. Harris shared. "Students take turns with the hose, share the work of picking vegetables, and even choose to spend recess counting how many peppers or tomatoes we've harvested. Seeing them work together and share the joy of the garden has been so rewarding."

The fifth graders' shared efforts were on full display this fall, when the class harvested crops to create a fresh, colorful salad served to teachers and staff during parent-teacher conferences.

GROWING INTO THE FUTURE

So what's next for Rushton's new school garden?

"Our hope is that we can recruit a good number of community volunteers to help us maintain and expand the garden," Nicole explained. "We've talked about adding more beds and eventually some fruit trees."

Ms. Harris is equally hopeful about what's ahead.

"My biggest wish is that we'll have even more students and classes involved next year," she said. "We're already planning to start seedlings in the classroom, and my students have all kinds of ideas about what they want to grow. I can't wait to see the excitement continue."

Kansas City Community Gardens and the Shawnee Mission School



5th graders enjoy getting their hand dirty as they tend to the garden.

"The biggest benefit has been seeing the growth in cooperation and teamwork, as well as patience. Students take turns with the hose, share the work of picking vegetables, and even choose to spend recess counting how many peppers or tomatoes we've harvested."

— Ms. Molly Harris, Rushton 5th grade teacher

District's Sustainability Office were both instrumental in moving the garden project from concept to reality, and the PTA hopes Rushton's strong community spirit will keep it thriving for years to come.

If you're interested in helping with the gardens, please reach out to the Rushton PTA directly at rushton.family_engagement@gmail.com.



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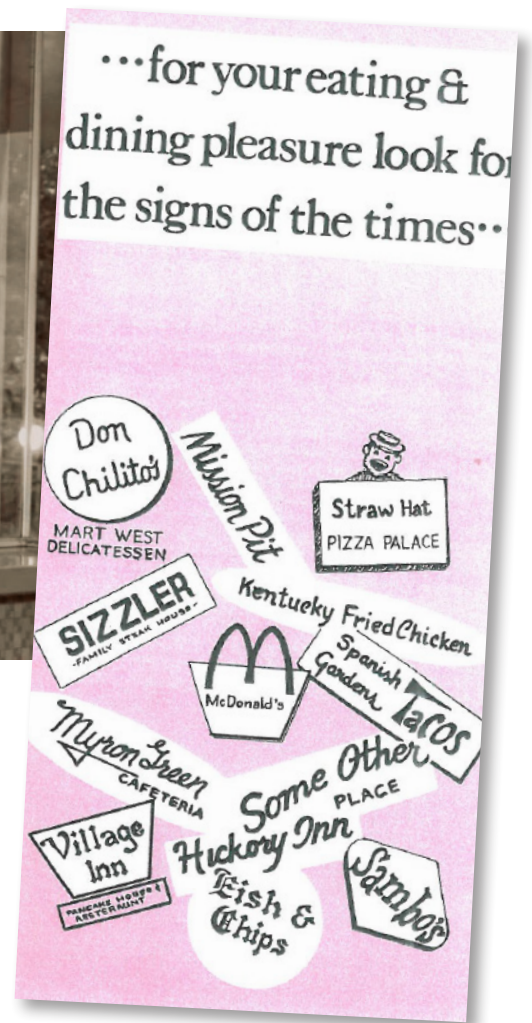
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Nostalgic Eats Around Mission

By Leigh Ann Zerr

Ask any longtime Mission resident where they used to eat, and you'll spark an instant flood of memories. From burger joints to bakeries, these were much more than restaurants; they were the backdrop for connection, celebration, and everyday life.

When we recently asked readers to share their favorite long-gone spots, the comments poured in.

TASTES WE STILL REMEMBER

The scent of Whopper Burger still lingers in many memories. "Our bike shop was right across from them,"



remembered Julia Puhr Nelson, whose family-owned Turner's Schwinn Cyclery for more than three decades. "We spent hours at the shop and ate everywhere along Johnson Drive. We'd have water fights with the dishwashers from Mission BBQ in the alley behind us."

Today, you can still catch a whiff of nostalgia inside the same Wichita-

built Valentine diner that once housed Whopper Burger and Town Topic. In 2022, the city granted the diner's decades-old sign historic designation, recognizing it as an "iconic wayfinder in Mission for decades." Snack Shack, which relocated from Overland Park, continues the tradition today with a full menu of 1950s-style burgers and retro vibes.



MOUTH-WATERING MEMORIES

Other longtime residents reminisced about Penny's Place, famous for Italian sandwiches, or Lucky Brewgrille, known for great steaks and bread pudding. Popo's Deli earned legendary status for its grinders. "Nobody makes one as good as theirs," someone wrote.

Others recalled the delicious flavors of Mexican restaurant Jalisco's, where legendary KC jazz musician Max Groove played before moving on to larger venues.

And who could forget Annie's Santa Fe, Coyote Grill, or Salsa Grill Cantina, all names that drew nods of recognition and a little longing.

Further west, Missionites grabbed meals at Arthur Treacher's Fish & Chips, Rax Roast Beef, Sizzler, Straw Hat Pizza, and Godfather's.

"I loved the Rax salad bar," one reader said. Another added, "Arthur Treacher's is greatly missed."

Though many of these restaurants are long gone, the memories live on. From burgers to bread pudding, diners to delicatessens, Johnson Drive has always been more than a place to eat; it's been a place to gather, celebrate, and create lasting memories.

WHAT IS A VALENTINE DINER?

Born in Wichita, Kansas, during the



Great Depression, Valentine Diners offered a hopeful recipe for success in hard times. These compact, eight- to

ten-seat cafés could be run by just one or two people—serving up good food, fair prices, and friendly conversation. Though most diners were made back East, this Kansas creation found its way across the country, including right here in Mission. From bustling highways to quiet small towns, the little prefabricated Valentine became a warm and welcoming stop for travelers and locals alike. Source: KansasHistory.gov

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Taste of Home

Kerala Flavors Come to Mission Market

By Leigh Ann Zerr

For Mission resident Anjali Prasanth, cooking has always been more than a daily task. It's a way to connect, celebrate, and share culture with her community. This past summer, she turned her lifelong passion for cooking into a new endeavor: offering locals a taste of authentic South Indian cuisine as a first-time Mission Market vendor.

"Selling my food at the market has been a dream of mine," Anjali said. "It was such a wonderful experience."

Anjali and her family moved to Mission seven years ago when her husband accepted a job transfer to Kansas City. A native of Kerala, India, a region known for its lush landscapes and vibrant flavors, Anjali quickly found a welcoming community at Rushton Elementary, where her children attend school and she serves as PTA secretary.

Her business, Mittu's Kitchen, grew out of encouragement from friends and neighbors who simply couldn't get enough of her family recipes brought from nearly 9,000 miles away. Each time Anjali shares her native cuisine with someone new, she loves to see their enjoyment.

"In Kerala, food is an immersive experience. Each dish tells a story," she said. And for Anjali's customers, that story is both delicious and steeped in meaning.

At the Mission Market this summer, Anjali's chicken puffs, biriyani, fried rice, and chili chicken were customer favorites.

When asked about holiday traditions, Anjali described Onam Sadhya, a grand, multi-dish vegetarian feast served on banana leaves.

"It's similar to Thanksgiving for Americans. It's a time to mark celebration, togetherness, family, and connection."



The Prasanth family is proud to call Mission home.

Running a food business, Anjali admits, comes with challenges, from sourcing ingredients to managing the cooktop, but the joy of connection and culture outweighs it all.

For more information on Anjali's business and products or to contact her, please visit her website at www.mittusks.com.

"The positive feedback and support from the Mission community make it so worthwhile," she said. "Through food, I get to share a piece of my home and my heart."

— Anjali Prasanth

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LAGREE FITNESS

Similar to Pilates, but done on a Megaformer

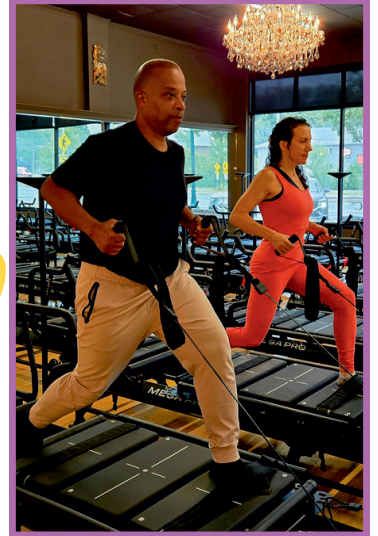
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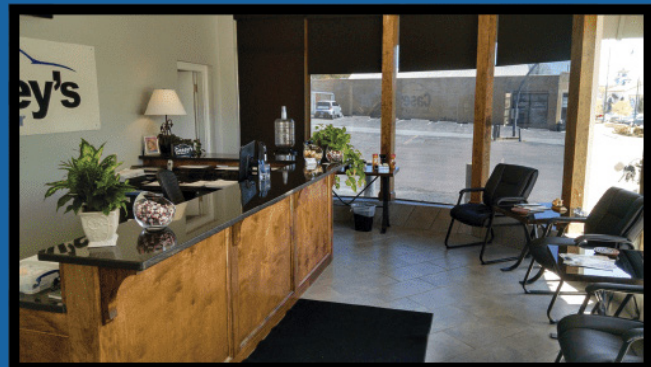
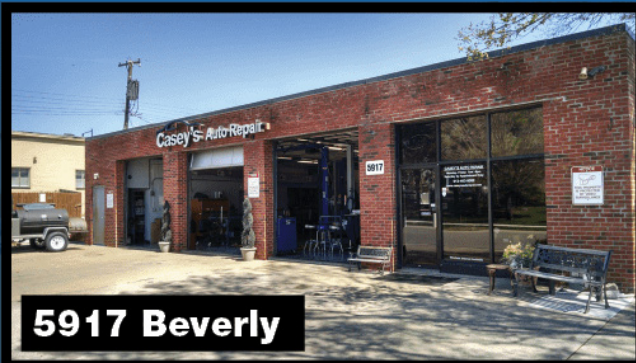
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