

WALKIN' WICHITA: Getting

BY XANDE ANDERER

Wichita, Kansas, encircles hallowed ground. The tiny arrowhead of land where the Little Arkansas flows into the Arkansas (pronounced “ar-KAN-sas”) River was sacred to the Native Americans who first lived there. In Wichita’s infancy as a railhead for Texas ranchers driving cattle north up the Chisholm Trail, the point was regarded as neutral territory in an otherwise lawless and violent time and place—a sanctum for cowboys, hunters, farmers, and Native Americans to meet, trade, and interact without fear of violence.

DELANO

As Wichita grew from outpost into a booming cowtown, the river served as the informal boundary between the seedy village of Delano and the more “civil” Wichita to the east. These days the short walk from the Hyatt Regency (site of VVA’s Leadership & Education Conference) across the river into Delano no longer leads you to a lawless strip of saloons and brothels, but rather to the Delano Historic District—an ongoing neighborhood revitalization featuring pedestrian-friendly shopping and dining.

For those who’ve always considered themselves cowboys at heart but have stopped just short of buying the hat, now is your chance. Pay a visit to local celebrity/historian/folklorist Jack Kellogg at Hatman Jack’s Wichita Hat Works ❶ (601 W. Douglas Ave., 316-264-4881, www.hatmanjacks.com). Hatman Jack will help you choose the perfect style from more than a hundred brands. Or go all out and have Hatman Jack make you a custom hat from scratch. He’s been practicing the lost art of fitting a hat to a person’s particular features for celebrities and regular folk alike since 1976.

Hungry? Swing by Picasso’s Pizzeria ❷ (621 W. Douglas Ave., 316-26-SLICE, www.picassospizzerias.com) for New York-style thin-crust pizza that’s a favorite with the locals. Order by the slice, or attempt to tackle one of their aptly named “Ginormous” 26-inch pies. I recommend the “Hot Island,” a Hawaiian pizza souped-up with jalapenos and pepperoncini.

But if all the talk of cattle drives and frontier life leaves you craving barbeque, hit the Delano Barbeque Company ❸ (710 W. Douglas Ave., 316-260-4950, www.delanobbq.com). You’ll smell their smoked brisket,



MUSEUM OF WORLD TREASURES

pulled pork, barbeque chicken, and sausage everywhere you go in Delano. Sample some of their hand-cut fries, fried okra, or baked beans, but definitely don’t skip their unique potato salad.

MUSEUMS ON THE RIVER

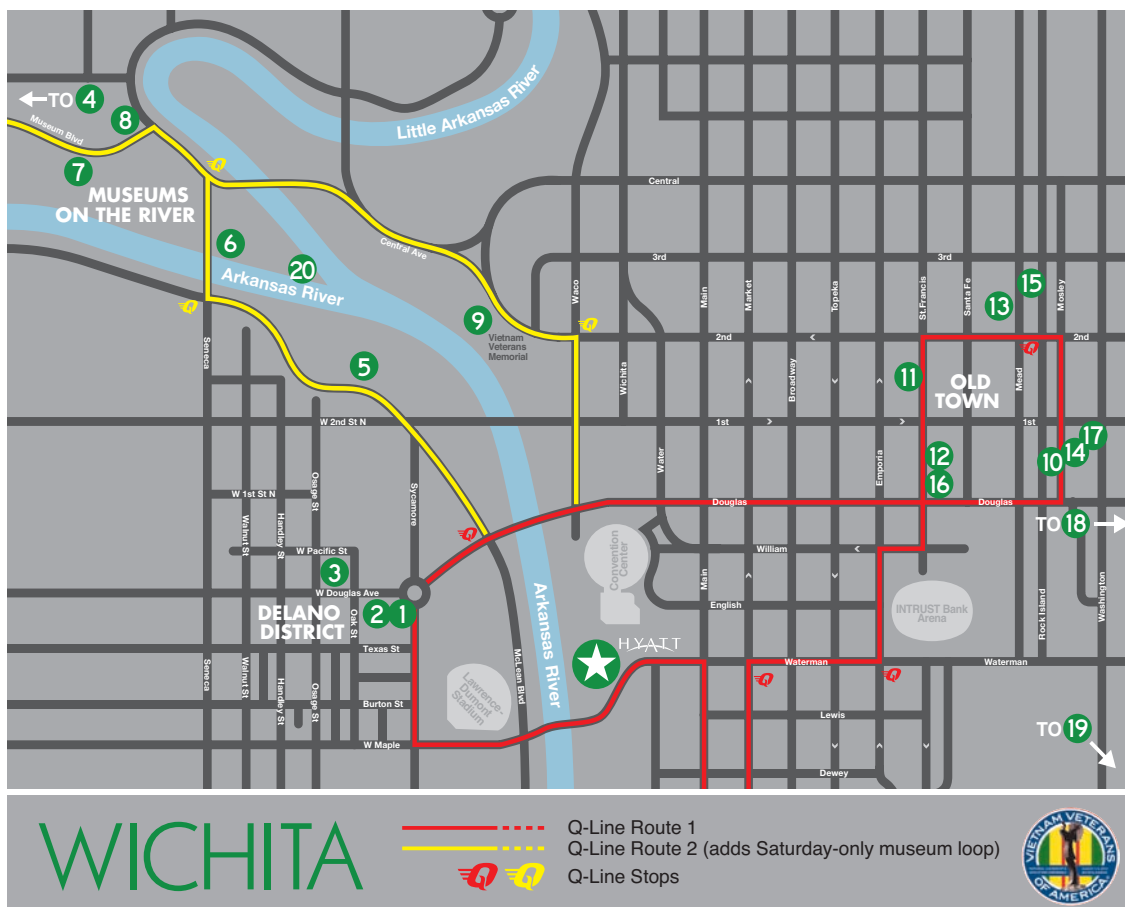
Follow the green space north along the banks of the river, and you’ll find Wichita’s five Museums on the River:

Botanica, The Wichita Gardens ❹ (701 N. Amidon St., 316-264-0448, www.botanica.org) is more than nine acres of beauty and serenity showcasing some four thousand species of native and exotic plants. Twenty-five themed gardens, including a Butterfly Garden, Shakespearean Garden, Sensory Garden, and Wildflower Meadow, are combined with sculptures and fountains. Admission for Adults is \$7, Seniors \$6.

Exploration Place ❺ (300 N. McLean Blvd., 316-660-0600, www.exploration.org) is a hands-on science center designed with children in mind. Investigate the wonders of flight, engineering, and nanoscience through a multitude of interactive, imaginative spaces. Adults and children \$9.50.

The **Mid-America All-Indian Center** ❻ (650 N. Seneca St., 316-350-3340, www.theindiancenter.org) is a museum dedicated to preserving the heritage of the American Indian, with an emphasis on tribes native to Kansas. Exhibits of traditional and contemporary artifacts depict Native American cultures, past and present. Adults \$7, Seniors \$5.

The **Old Cowtown Museum** ❼ (1865 W. Museum Blvd., 316-219-1871, www.oldcowtown.org) will host VVA’s Thursday night dinner event. There you will experience life in Wichita, circa 1870. The museum’s sprawling grounds are home to forty-three meticulously recreated structures filled with period furnishings and artifacts, and even livestock. All are staffed with costumed reenactors for an authentic taste of life in the Wild West. Visitors can take a wagon ride, observe a working blacksmith shop, have their picture taken in period costume, or enjoy a sarsaparilla in the saloon. But beware: Occasional gunfights have been known to break out in the street. Adults \$7.75, Seniors \$6.50.



XANDE ANDERER



Around in Cowtown

The crown jewel of the five Museums on the River is the Wichita Art Museum **8** (1400 W. Museum Blvd., 316-268-4921, www.wichitaartmuseum.org). From the moment you crest the entry staircase and see the spectacular Dale Chihuly chandelier, you know the collection is going to exceed your expectations. And exceed it does. The museum's permanent collection of more than six thousand works includes paintings by Winslow Homer, Mary Cassatt, John Singleton Copley, John Singer Sargent, and Edward Hopper. Of course you'll also find the requisite western art on display, but I was surprised to discover a contrasting collection of works by contemporary Native American artists in the adjoining room. Adults \$7, Seniors \$5; \$2 off admission for conference attendees

Veterans Memorial Park **9** winds along the eastern bank of the river. It contains monuments commemorating each American war and conflict along its various paths.



OLD TOWN

East of the Hyatt, just on the edge of walking distance, lies Old Town. Once home to the warehouses and factories that served Wichita's bustling railroad trade in the early 1900s, Old Town is now an entertainment district of eight blocks of restaurants, theaters, and shops. Walk the dozen or so blocks from the Hyatt, or hop the free Q-Line Trolley (www.downtownwichita.org/get_around-maps.php), which will take you straight there.

The centerpiece of Old Town Wichita is the Museum of World Treasures **10** (835 E. 1st Street N., 316-263-1311, www.worldtreasures.org). Browse three floors of treasures of all sorts: from dinosaur bones—including Ivan, one of the most complete *Tyrannosaurus Rex* specimens in the world—to Egyptian mummies, a four-and-a-half-ton section of the Berlin Wall, a collection of Buddhist statuary, presidential memorabilia, and artifacts from each of America's wars. Adults \$8.95, Seniors \$7.95. Present your conference badge for an admission discount.

Wichita is home to a surprising number of well-known companies—perhaps the best known being Coleman. The camping supply giant was founded in Wichita more than one hundred years ago, and you can view artifacts from the company's history at the Coleman Factory Outlet and Museum **11** (235 St. Francis N., 316-264-0836).

In the modest in-store museum visitors can see firsthand the evolution of the gas lantern synonymous with the name

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CELEBS AT WA'S CONFERENCE

BY MARC LEEPSON

"We're honoring an eclectic and impressive group of individuals in the arts in Wichita," said VVA National President John Rowan. "I personally am looking forward to meeting and hearing from Kimo Williams, Tucker Smallwood, Jim Northrup, and Terrie Frankel. And I know the other attendees will as well."

Musician and composer **Kimo Williams**, best known for his work with the actor Gary Sinese in the Lt. Dan Band, will receive the VVA Excellence in the Arts Award at the Saturday Night Awards Banquet. Williams enlisted in the Army in 1969. He served in Vietnam with the 20th Combat Engineer Brigade. During his tour Williams formed a band called The Soul Coordinators. After getting out of the Army in 1970, he graduated from the Berklee College of Music, taught there for a year, then joined the U.S. Army Band program. He left the military in 1987 and has been a full-time musician since.



Kimo Williams

Williams produced the Vietnam War-themed symphonic-rock/big-band album *War Stories* in 1991. He also has written six string quartets and six symphonies. In 1998 he created the United States Vietnam Arts Program to produce collaborative works of music and art with American and Vietnamese artists. From 2004-12 he managed and performed with the Lt. Dan Band, including performances at USO shows worldwide.

The poet, novelist, storyteller, and columnist **Jim Northrup** also will receive the Excellence in the Arts Award. Northrup is a member of the Anishinaabe in northern Minnesota who lives the traditional life with his family on the Fond du Lac reservation. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1962 and served in Vietnam in 1965-66 with the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines in the 3rd Marine Division.



Jim Northrup

Northrup's first book, *Walking the Rez Road*, received the Midwest Book Achievement Award, the Minnesota Book Award, and the Northeastern Minnesota Book Award. His latest book is *Dirty Copper*. Both novels feature Luke Warmwater, a Vietnam veteran with PTSD who becomes the first Native American deputy sheriff in Carlton County, Minnesota. For the last twenty-five years Northrup has written "Fond du Lac Follies," a column syndicated in several American Indian newspapers. His columns have been compiled in two books, *Rez Salute* and *Anishinaabe Syndicated*.

The third Vietnam veteran Arts Award winner is the character actor **Tucker Smallwood**, who is best known for his roles in such science fiction TV series as *Star Trek: Enterprise*, *Space: Above and Beyond*, and *The X-Files*. He was drafted into the Army after graduating from the University of Maryland in 1967. Smallwood volunteered for OCS. In Vietnam, he commanded a five-man advisory team with the Vietnamese Regional Force troops in the Mekong Delta, where he was severely wounded.

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WICHITA

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Coleman. You can also view Olympic torches designed and manufactured by Coleman for the 2002 Winter Games, and the G.I. Pocket Stove, considered by some to be “second only to the Jeep among the most important pieces of non-combat equipment of World War II.” While there, shop the store’s two thousand camping and outdoor products at factory outlet prices. Present your conference badge for an additional 20 percent discount on your purchases.

There is spirited debate among the locals as to who serves up Wichita’s signature barbeque, but Bite Me BBQ **12** (132 St. Francis N., 316-729-2904, www.biteme-bbq.com) in Old Town comes up in every conversation. Service at this veteran-owned establishment is uber-friendly, attentive, and energetic. Forget the mundane sides so you can save as much room as possible for the healthy portions of fall-off-the-bone spare ribs, tender hickory pulled pork, heavenly smoked turkey, and two types of succulent brisket. You’ll have the chance to judge for yourself at VVA’s Thursday night event at the Old Cowtown Museum: Bite Me will be catering.

More in the mood for, say, upscale Latin fare? Make reservations for mojitos and parilla for two at Sabor **13** (309 N. Mead, 316-201-4880, www.saborgrillwi-

chita.com). Or maybe you crave microbrews and one of four varieties of mac-and-cheese at River City Brewing Co. **14** (150 N. Mosley St., 316-263-2739, www.rivercitybrewingco.com). Or perhaps you’re interested in lighter eats while sipping your way through selections from a menu of more than three hundred wines. In that case, Oeno Wine Bar **15** (330 N. Mead, 316-440-5000, www.oenowichita.com) is what you’re looking for. You can even relive the soda fountain experiences of your youth at Old Mill Tasty Shop **16** (604 E. Douglas Ave., 316-264-6500) where open-faced sandwiches, blue plate specials, homemade desserts, and other typical diner fare is served at their original 25-foot marble soda fountain.

Fancy a stiff drink and a good cigar? Visit Mort’s Cigar and Martini Bar **17** (923 E. 1st St. N., 316-262-1785, www.mortwichita.com) with its menu of 160 martinis and a wide array of cigars from the \$4 Mini Mort to the \$17 Padron 1964 Exclusivo Maduro. Enjoy live music on the patio six nights a week.

I was told I couldn’t leave town without visiting Donut Whole **18** (1720 E. Douglas Ave., 316-262-3700, www.donutwhole.com), a bohemian coffee-house-slash-donut shoppe-slash-art gallery whose forty varieties of scratch-made donuts include quirky, unconventional flavors like root beer float, molasses and ginger, dirt and worms, and fluffernutter. I recommend the sunshine citrus crunch, an orange glaze rolled in Fruity



KANSAS AVIATION MUSEUM

Pebbles™ cereal. In addition to the excellent coffee ground on premises, the Donut Whole offers an array of teas, gourmet sodas, smoothies, slushies, and the always-fun boba tea. Free wi-fi, too.

AIR CAPITAL

Yet another boom hit Wichita in 1918 after vast fields of oil were discovered nearby. The mad infusion of oil money enabled local entrepreneurs to invest their new-found wealth in the up-and-coming industry of the day: aviation. Businessmen like Lloyd Stearman, Walter Beech, and Clyde Cessna established the aircraft companies that still bear their names. The population doubled practically overnight as many more aircraft companies were either founded in Wichita or relocated to the area. The huge demands of World War II brought yet more manufacturing to town, most notably the Boeing B-29 Superfortress. To this day Wichita remains the self-proclaimed “Air Capital of the World,” producing 70 percent of U.S. general aviation aircraft.

This rich aviation history is on display a short drive southeast of town at the Kansas Aviation Museum **19** (3350 S. George Washington Blvd., 316-683-9242, www.kansasaviationmuseum.org). Housed in the gorgeous original 1935 art deco Wichita Municipal Airport terminal, the museum chronicles the growth and development of aviation in Kansas. It features a burgeoning collection of forty aircraft, along with engines, artifacts, and a working restoration shop. You can climb the stairs into the old control tower (the highest point in Wichita) or hop in the \$5 flight simulator and pilot one of myriad aircraft, including the F-4 Phantom, F-105 Thunderchief, or B-52 Stratofortress. Adults \$8.95, Seniors \$7.95. Present your conference badge to receive a \$2 discount per ticket.

KEEPER

What has become of that sacred little dagger of land where the rivers meet? There sits perhaps the greatest must-see of all: Wichita’s symbol. Its mascot, if you will: A 44-foot-tall sculpture, entitled “The Keeper of the Plains.” **20** This massive Indian warrior sculpture by Native American artist Blackbear Bosin keeps a watchful eye on the city from his pedestal on the point. Suspended footbridges from both sides of the river allow visitors out onto the surrounding plaza where, at 9:00 every evening, The Keeper is illuminated for fifteen minutes by a ring of massive fire pots. It’s a spectacular and sublime sight. ■

CELEBS

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Tucker Smallwood

After getting out of the Army in 1970, Smallwood studied acting in New York and was a continuing character in the TV soap opera *Somerset*. He did TV and radio commercials, appeared in theater productions on and off Broadway, and had roles in several feature films, including *The Cotton Club* and *Presumed Innocent*. In 1991 he began working in prime-time television. In 2006, two years after he made a return trip to Vietnam, he published an anthology of essays, *Return To Eden*. Smallwood is a longtime VVA member.

Terrie Frankel, a multitalented musician and writer, will receive the President’s Award for Excellence in the Arts. In 1968, eighteen-year-old Terrie and her twin sister Jennie—who played guitar, clarinet, and accordion, and had appeared as the Doublemint



Terrie and Jennie Frankel

Twins—joined a USO tour to entertain the troops in Vietnam. The group put on shows in Da Nang, Pleiku, Da Lat, Cam Ranh Bay, Saigon, Tan Son Nhut, Phu Bai, Phu Loi, and on many firebases and camps in the boonies.

Terrie and Jennie Frankel went on to perform USO shows in Hawaii and elsewhere around the world. In Hollywood Terrie was a producer, screenwriter, and composer. She and her sister (who died in 2008) co-wrote the best-selling book *You’ll Never Make Love in This Town Again*. Terrie has helped organize events supporting veterans’ causes, and she produced the film *Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Tribute*. ■