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CITY OF WESTWOOD, KANSAS



Westwood Walking Tour Points

1. **Westwood City Hall** at 47th and Rainbow.

Incorporated in 1949, Westwood dedicated its City Hall, designed by PBNI Architects, on May 18, 1991. Prior to purchasing the land at 47th and Rainbow, the city had rented space in 4 different locations. A mortgage burning potluck party was held September 17, 2004 to celebrate outright ownership of the building that houses the city's administrative offices, police department, municipal court, council chambers, and community room. Both the building and police provide service to neighboring cities, Westwood Hills and Mission Woods. The green space around the city hall has been populated by many trees to provide residents with knowledge about the many varieties available for plantings. A map of the trees is in the process of being updated.

The city hall land had been the home of Pope's Phillips 66 Service Station, the last to close of 7 gas stations that once dotted the city.

2. **Rainbow Blvd/Hudson Road**

Until 1919, the major street in the city was named Hudson Road. After World War I, the name was changed to Rainbow Boulevard to honor the men from Rosedale (Kansas City, Kansas) who served in the Rainbow Division/also known as the 42nd Division of the U.S. Infantry.

3. West on 47th Street to **Public Works Building**, 2545 W. 27th Street

In 1988, the city acquired this building from Cities Service Gas Company. Before that time, Public Works had been located in 8 different places. The building is dated to 1917 or 1918 and was originally located in Olathe before being moved to Westwood. When incorporated, Westwood was still partially rural—streets without curbs and gutters and dairy farms in place until the early 1960s. Westwood's Public Works Department was not created until 1971. Prior to that, work was hired done, sometimes with the assistance of council members and the mayor. The first superintendent of Public Works was George Brown who served alone until 1978. Much planning and work has gone into creating and maintaining the infrastructure the city enjoys today.

4. Next to the Public Works Building, at the corner of 47th and Belinder is the **Metering and Distribution Station of Southern Star Central Pipeline Company**. Originally operated by Cities Service Gas Company, this is the point of sale of natural gas to Kansas Gas

Service Company and Squire Energy, Inc. of Missouri. This center has been in this location since 1917/1918, well before the city was a twinkle in anyone's eyes.

5. SW Corner of 47th and Belinder is **LuLu's Thai Noddle Shop**, 2701 W. 47th Street.

LuLu's Thai Noodle Shop has been in Westwood since 2014. Another restaurant is located in Kansas City, Missouri. The owner of the restaurant was born in Bangkok to a Thai father and American mother and is a Westwood resident. Her story and her love of cooking and serving food is well told on LuLu's website.

The restaurant is the former home of Charlie Williams Import Car Center. Charlie, who moved into the building in 1970, repaired cars but also built engines and designed specialized auto parts for amateur car racers. The building dates back to 1950.

6. South on Belinder, **Velvet Crème Popcorn**, 4710 Belinder.

Velvet Crème Popcorn, a company in business since 1937, has called Westwood home since 1969 when it moved to a small building at 2711 W. 47th Street before building its current facility on Belinder. All the popcorn is popped and packaged to be sold on site or shipped to 75% of its customers outside the Kansas City area. The company constantly researches new flavors and carries other snack items. Christmas is the company's busiest time.

7. **Belinder Road**—Frank Belinder, the street's namesake, was a hotel and tavern owner who built a house on "his" road between 49th Terrace and 50th Street. It has been told that it had a sweeping circular drive, and for many years, the only remaining remnant of the house was a stone pillar that had been positioned at the south end of that drive. That column is now gone. His descendants resided in the city until the 1980s.

8. 50th and Belinder. **Entercom Radio Station and towers.**

KMBC radio moved to 50th and Belinder Road in 1933 and began airing from the site on Nov. 25, 1933. Westwood was not yet a city. Towers erected on the site have toppled by wind twice—once in 1938 and again when the 544 foot tower crashed into a house on Booth during a severe thunderstorm on Aug. 25, 1941. The family on Booth was not injured, having sought shelter from the storm in their basement.

Because the station preceded the city's incorporation, the city's single family residence zoning and the radio station co-existed by means of a Special Use Permit throughout the years that included new owners and call letters, including KMBZ. Entercom became the owner in 1997. In 2004 the station moved to Mission, Kansas, but continued to use the broadcast towers here.

In 2014 the Shawnee Mission School District purchased 6.5 acres of the property, and in 2018 the towers that had become landmarks were dismantled and removed. A more complete history is on the city's website. The city awaits the next chapter.

9. **Westwood View School**, 2511 West 50th Street.

Education has been central to the residents of this area since before the city was formed. The earliest area school was a small building on the grounds of the Shawnee Indian Mission. As more families moved into the area east of the Mission, a new school district was created in 1912. Hudson School was built on 48th Street just west of Hudson Road (Rainbow Blvd.). It served the community until 1928 when the school was moved to the current site on 50th Street and renamed Westwood View. Westwood View was District 93, which was governed by local citizens who held well-attended board meetings.

The new school was a two-storied, red brick building that included kindergarten through eighth grades until 1955 when the 7th and 8th grades were moved to junior high schools. Westwood View has always enjoyed a reputation of excellence and innovation. A bond issue in 1965 for a new school building failed but in 1967 another election was held, after a campaign focused on issues such as the possible effects of impending unification of school districts. It passed.

The old red brick building was demolished, but not until the new school was built. Students in the old building were asked to carry their chairs into their new classrooms. The new building, designed by Neville, Sharp and Simon was built to its east to allow classes to continue. On May 4, 1969, just months after a state law passed that would dissolve School District Number 93, the building was dedicated, and Westwood View became Building Number 101 of the Shawnee Mission School District. Westwood View School serves all or parts of 6 cities in Northeast Johnson County. In 1980 consultants to the Shawnee Mission School District recommended closing Westwood View. A collective gasp came from the area while school patrons rallied to mount a massive campaign to keep the school open. Happily, the effort was successful.

Since that time, a number of updates have been made to the building and the School District has purchased the Entercom property with the prospect of a new building.

10. Westwood “Mini” Park/Joe D. Dennis Park

Originally known as the Mini Park, the park opened on October 6, 1973. The park land and house on site were purchased by the city through the efforts of Mayor Joe D. Dennis. Designed by Shaughnessy Associates, the park included the fountain, wooden playground equipment, a child’s tunnel, picnic area, a tennis court and one basketball goal. Original plans to freeze the surface of the tennis court for ice skating and maintain the basketball goal on the east side of the tennis court didn’t work and were abandoned. The circular fire pit next to the tennis court remains although the pit is filled with concrete. The park was rededicated with its current name in 2002.

11. South on Rainbow, **Westwood Christian Church**, 5050 Rainbow Blvd. The Church was built in 1951 when many of the congregants lived in the city. It thrived for many years before succumbing to a sparse and aging membership. The membership decided to sell the building. The city purchased the building. The lot between the church and the Joe D. Dennis Park is also owned by the city. Together the two parcels contain almost 2 acres. The church’s kitchen and dining area has hosted many city-sponsored events when the city lacked a community gathering space, and the empty lot has been the site of many egg hunts.

12. **University of Kansas Cancer Center**. Rainbow at Shawnee Mission Parkway.
This story is easier told from early days to the present.

Hallmark Cards owned a small building on Shawnee Mission Parkway near Rainbow Blvd. until 1966 when it moved and sold the building to **United Utilities**, a small company involved in telephone, natural gas and water.

In 1972 United Utilities became United Telecommunications, known as **United Telecom**, with its focus now only on communications. As the company grew, the facility was enlarged on land previously occupied by smaller businesses. The company’s growth greatly benefitted the city. At the time, a state law imposed an intangibles tax, levied on corporate stock dividends and interest that allowed Westwood’s coffers to grow—so much so, in fact, Westwood received what Mayor Dennis characterized as its “15 minutes of national fame” when NBC broadcast a story that the city had returned its revenue-sharing check of \$37,000 it had received from the federal government because the city did not need it. A letter from President Nixon on December 29, 1972 thanked the “good people of Westwood;” However, the federal government did not accept the money, which was finally used to buy the County’s first ambulance.

When in the mid 1970s rumors circulated that United Telecom was contemplating a move across the state line because of the intangibles tax, alarmed city officials worked with state legislators to pass legislation allowing cities and counties to adjust the intangibles tax rate. Westwood lowered its rate and United Telecom stayed in Kansas.

In 1987 United Telecom changed its name to **Sprint Corporation**. The corporation's home on Shawnee Mission Parkway proudly proclaimed the site as The World Headquarters of Sprint. But Sprint's growth would outpace the accommodations of the facility, causing them to sell to KU Hospital.

The University of Kansas Hospital Cancer Center opened in June 2007 with a ribbon cutting by KU officials and the mayors of 3 cities. The west parking lot of the Center is in Fairway; the land across Rainbow on Shawnee Mission Parkway also purchased by the Hospital is in Mission Woods, and the buildings are all in Westwood. The former Sprint World Headquarters would now be a place that treats cancer patients and home to an Urgent Care Center, a suite for Internal Medicine Physicians, and Hospital administration offices.

13. Shawnee Mission Parkway to Belinder—Many businesses

The old Hallmark building shared the Shawnee Mission Parkway land with a number of other businesses that included:

A service station on the corner of Rainbow, and the following to the west on what was then called Johnson Drive:

A strip of offices	A&P Grocery Store
Beauty Shop	Allen's Drive-In Restaurant, later King's Food Host
Barber Shop	Regan's Restaurant
Robert's Liquor Store	Cousin's /Payne's Furniture Store
Robowash Car Wash, thought to be the first in KC and Dr. Patrick, DDS	

And immediately behind Cousin's/Payne's Furniture Store was a hardware store. These businesses remained there during much of or all of the 1960s and part of the 1970s.

14. Shawnee Mission Parkway and Belinder is the boundary between Westwood and Fairway. Across Belinder to the West is now the home of Fairway City Hall in a building on the alleyway that was once Guaranteed Foods and Lucy Lynn Bakery, among other businesses. Even though it is in Fairway, it deserves a mention because of the involvement of Westwood's early Chief of Police Al Wrinkle, who started a club called the Westwood Rangers. The club survived for only 3 years and disbanded due to lack of adult help. In its place came the Boys Club with Wrinkle its President. Roy Kahn, the owner of Guaranteed Foods, gave the building to the Club for \$1.00. The Club, supported by patrons in both cities, opened in 1967.

15. Walking north on Belinder to the corner of 51st Street then west to Mission Road to another city boundary, this time with Roeland Park. On the west side of Mission Road is St. Agnes Church and School. Although located in Roeland Park, this church and school has played and continues to play a role in the lives of many in Westwood. The land that the church and school sit on today was once the Old Mission Golf Course and further west is the historical Shawnee Indian Mission, established in 1838 by Rev. Thomas Johnson.
16. Continuing north on Mission Road to **50th Terrace**. Until the late 1950s, this street was only a cul-de-sac from Mission Road. Between the street's end and Belinder Road was the Wild Rose Farm, a dairy farm operated by the Brink family. Legend has it that the Brinks herded their cattle to the site of the radio transmitter towers at 50th and Belinder to graze on the grass there. Imagine, if you can, a cattle drive down Belinder. If you walk the length of 50th Terrace today, you can tell where the original street ended by the change in the style of the houses.
17. At 4901 Mission Road is the **Olivet Baptist Church** and **Westwood Christian School**. Olivet Academy began in 1975 for Kindergarten through 5th Grade and became the Shawnee Mission Christian School in 1978, graduating its first group of seniors in 1983. Their mission can be found on their website.
18. At 4711 Mission Road, stands a one-story building that today is home to **Westwood Chiropractic** and has been a continuous chiropractic clinic since the **7-11 Convenience Store** sold the building in the mid to late 1980s after being in Westwood since the mid 1960s.
19. At the corner of 47th Street and Mission Road a **small plaza with a fountain** and plantings marks the entrance to Westwood. The plaza was installed in 1977. It is at this corner that Westwood meets its neighbors, Roeland Park and Kansas City, Kansas. It is also near this corner that Westwood occupied a small building owned by the Logan-Moore Lumber Company as its first city hall.
20. East on 47th Street **Walmart Neighborhood Market**, 4701 Mission Road. Walmart purchased the building that had most recently housed Apple Market in 2012 and closed the store for remodeling. Since the 1970s this land has housed a grocery store. Prior to that it was the property of the **Logan-Moore Lumber Company**, a company that dates back at least to 1912, and which had headquarters in Kansas City, Missouri. The property was used as storage. The city purchased the land, and ultimately sold it to Associated Wholesale Grocers which built a coupon redemption center and a grocery store. The grocery store opened as **Westwood United Super** and operated for many years before selling to **IGA** then being acquired by **Apple Market**. Both stores were generous in their support of the

city, often donating items for city events. Before the grocery store was built, a group of parents, led by Council Member Nancy Jefferies , an avid baseball fan and involved in Scouts, built a baseball field there for the Cub Scout Baseball League. The team played there in 1973 and 1974.

On August 15, 2003, the murder of sixty-eight- year- old David “Ray” Ninemire, an employee of the Apple Market, dealt a blow to his family, to all those who knew Mr. Ninemire, to the city, and to Apple Market. The killer attempted a hold up of the grocery store when Mr. Ninemire rushed to the aid of the cashier and was shot. To add to the tragedy, the murderer has never been found even though the city and others offered rewards that were renewed for many years. Today, a permanent marker can be found near the north side of the building, but for all those in Westwood, Mr. Ninemire has not been forgotten. On August 27, 2020, Johnson County District Attorney Steve Howe announced the arrest of a man already in prison who was charged with first-degree murder in Mr. Ninemire’s death.

Notice that on 47th Street there is a marker indicating the crossing of the **Santa Fe Trail**. There were branches of the trail and one of those branches nicked out city on its way west to the Shawnee Indian Mission.

21. East on 47th Street to Rainbow Blvd. **Westwood crosses Rainbow Boulevard** where there is a **Complex of Retail Stores and Woodside Village Apartments**, constructed in 2015-2016.

Land on the east side of Rainbow that is now Westwood was not a part of the city at its incorporation. On May30, 1960, the City of Westwood annexed the area between State Line Road and Rainbow Boulevard from 47th Street to the rear lot lines of homes on the north side of 48th Terrace, subdivisions known as Westport View and Westport Annex.

On September 17, 1966, the 1,600 seat auditorium in Westwood on Rainbow at 47th Place was dedicated. **The Youth for Christ Building** was the site of gatherings of hundreds of youth from all over Kansas City. On December 15, 1978, TV 50 with studios in the Westwood building went on the air. The TV station aired with Youth for Christ programs until it was sold in 1997. In 1999 the organization transitioned to its new name, **Yourthfront**, to become a church assisting ministry. The Youthfront building was sold and demolished in 2014 to make way for the current retail and apartment construction. Youthfront moved to a smaller building north on Rainbow.

22. East on 47th Place is **Woodside**, 2000 W. 47th Place, a club, featuring swimming, tennis and workout equipment. The history of the club originally called Westwood Racquet Club is a tale of twists and turns and is tied to the **Westwood Foundation**.

In 1970-1971, the City of Westwood purchased 16 undeveloped acres along 47th Place, excluding the Youth for Christ Building, then leased the land to two developers who planned to build two office buildings and the club. To do so, they secured a loan, and the city pledged the land as collateral.

Woodside was opened in 1973, the city retaining title to the land. In 1974, the Westwood Foundation was incorporated. This unique public entity tied to the city was authorized by a state statute allowing it to purchase land and make long-term investments.

When developers of the 16 acre land ran into financial difficulties, the mortgage holder began foreclosure proceedings in 1975, threatening the loss of the city's investment of land that now included Woodside and one office building that was home to the Westwood City Hall. A complicated financial package was agreed upon, allowing the city a 5 year lease and option to repurchase the land and dismissing the lawsuits. The 5 years would allow the Westwood Foundation time to secure long-term financing.

At the council meeting in 1976 when this package was approved, the council also approved the reduction of the intangibles tax after reaching an agreement with United Telecom that the company would remain in the city and provide a one-time payment to the Westwood Foundation. The option to purchase was accomplished, the office building sold, but Woodside remains the property of the City of Westwood with an agreement that provides for residents to use the outdoor pool during the summer. Woodside is still under a long-term lease.

23. East on 47th Place is **Westwood Plaza Towers**, 1900 W. 47th Place.

This office building on State Line Road, built in 1972, once housed Westwood's City Hall and was owned briefly by Westwood, but is now owned by **Midwest Transplant Network, Inc.**, whose offices are in Suite 400. The Network is a federally certified not-for-profit Organ Procurement Organization (OPO). It works with donors, donor families and hospitals with the goal of accomplishing life-saving transplants. They also work to increase awareness of need of organ, tissue and eye donations. For information and to register as a donor, you can go to their website, *mwn.org*.

24. East side of Rainbow at 47th Terrace. **FMA Animal Hospital**, 4755 Rainbow Boulevard.

Westwood, with two animal hospitals, is a good place to be a pet owner. FMA Animal Hospital is the older of two, occupying its building on the corner since 1960. The hospital is named for the three founding veterinarians, Drs. Fowler, Meininger and Alberti. Dr. Gunter Alberti became the sole owner in his later years. Known for his advice about the commitment of becoming a pet owner, Dr. Alberti's story is an interesting one. Noted in his obituary, Dr. Alberti was a pilot in the German Air Force during World War II. He became a prisoner of war in Russia for 4 years before returning to Germany weighing 65 pounds. He completed his education in veterinary medicine, and came to the U.S. under the guidance of an

American veterinarian, becoming a citizen in the late 1950s. “He believed strongly in the greatness of the USA and felt blessed for the unique opportunity to live here and rebuild his life.”

The east side of Rainbow between 47th Place and halfway to 48th Terrace has been home to other businesses that have come and gone over the years. They have included a cleaners, a tailor shop, Miller Image Group, a frame shop, beauty salons, a doctor’s office, and an antique business.

25. Back to Rainbow’s west side is the **University of Kansas Dialysis Center**, 4720 Rainbow.

The Center, which treats dialysis out-patients, moved to Westwood from the KU hospital at 39th and Rainbow in 1999. The Dialysis Center provides hemodialysis for patients who come to the Center 3 days per week for a four-hour stay, accommodating 28 patients per shift. This is a world you are glad to have available but one which you hope you never have to enter as a patient. In the basement of this building is also a sleep center.

The building occupied by the Dialysis Center was built for **the Hudson Oil Company** in 1960. The uniqueness of the Curtain-Metal with Glass building was matched by the founder of the Hudson Oil Company, Mary Hudson Vandegrift. Left a 21 year-old widow with a small child in 1933, Mary Hudson borrowed \$200 from her father to open the first Hudson Oil station in Kansas City, the first of more than 300 gas stations and convenience stores to come across many states. She was one of the first to introduce self-service. She ran a refinery in Cushing, Oklahoma, and became a multi-millionaire. Upon her death in 1999, her career was described as one that “soared, plummeted, and rebounded.” In 1993, at age 80, she oversaw an operation that included cattle ranches, farms, convenience store and a petroleum consulting firm in Russia. She was the only member in the Twenty-Five Year Club, an organization of top oil executives and she was on the Forbes 400 list. The building at one time included consular offices for Colombia and Ecuador, and Westwood’s City Hall was once in its basement.

26. 4730 Rainbow, between 47th Terrace and 48th Street are the **Westwood Village Shops**. This small shopping center was built in 1978 and has housed an extraordinary variety of businesses since that time. Some of its original occupants included a savings and loan, a hardware store, a bait shop, a deli, beauty salons, and a convenience store with the name U Totem. Since that beginning other varieties of shops have made their appearances, including an antique store, a consignment shop, financial services, fitness centers, restaurants, and a coffee shop.

Before the Village Shops were built, another storied business sold its products on this site. **Rainbow Nursery**, owned and operated by George Keller had its beginning in December 1944 when he first sold Christmas trees. In the spring he began a full-blown nursery that

continued into the 1970s. Keller went on to serve as a councilman from 1957 to 1971. Behind the nursery location was the site of the old **Hudson School**.

27. 4800 Rainbow, **The Colonial Building**.

Across the street from the Village Shops is this two-storied building that provides office space for a number of individuals and companies. Built in 1966, it is mentioned here because Westwood's City Hall was once located on its second floor.

28. 4812 Rainbow Boulevard. **Ambiance Furs**.

Located in one of the older buildings in Westwood, built in 1930, Ambiance Furs moved here in 1999 from Prairie Village where they had been for 15 years. Men's coats and women's fur hats, silk scarves and purses are included in their inventory. Mink teddy bears can be made out of old coats. The original occupant of this building was Monteil's Grocery Store. It was the grocery store's need for reinforced floors that attracted the fur store. Meant to store heavy cans of groceries, the upper floor of the building is now storage space for a heavy collection of furs in a climatically controlled vault.

After Monteil's Grocery Store, at least two other businesses occupied the building. Marshall's of Kansas City, a furniture store, and the Smith Company, a gift store.

29. 4820 Rainbow Boulevard. **Westwood Animal Hospital**.

The second animal hospital in the city, Westwood Animal Hospital, has been open since 1985. Dr. Wayne Hunthausen, the owner of the hospital, has been a pet behavior consultant since 1982. Besides a full range of medical care for pets, the hospital also offers behavior consultations, puppy training classes, and obedience training. Dr. Hunthausen has gained an international reputation as a pet behavior specialist, authoring numerous articles, giving lecture, and being interviewed locally. Prior to becoming the animal hospital, this building was a Skelly Service Station. The building was built in 1950.

30. 4924 Rainbow Boulevard. **Asiatica**.

With an exotic name, Asiatica, with its entrance of red pillars flanking a short wooden walkway, lives up to expectations. A student of Chinese art history, the founder, Elizabeth Wilson, started her business in 1977 on Westport Road selling Chinese and Japanese antiques and other items. When she merged her interests with those of a now-retired colleague whose interest was in textiles, the business changed. In 1981, the two produced their first clothing, making women's blouses and jackets from antique kimonos the two purchased at flea markets in Japan. Production of this clothing continues since moving to

Westwood in 1993. Ninety percent of sales come from trunk shows in hotel suites in New York, San Francisco, Chicago and other large cities. Many of their customers do not realize there is a shop. “When they find out we are located in Westwood, Kansas, on Rainbow, they think I made that up,” said the owner.

The building, built in 1952 was originally the Norelco Shaver Building.

31. On the corner of 50th and Rainbow, stands **The Swatzell House**, 4958 Rainbow, where this community had its beginnings. The Swatzells are direct descendants of Joseph Parks, of the Shawnee Indian Tribe, who selected certain land that became Westwood as his own, pursuant to the Treaty of May 10, 1854, between the United States and the Shawnee Tribe. Joseph Parks built this house in 1897. He had a granddaughter, Catherine, who married John Swatzell. It is the descendants of Catherine and John Swatzell who live in the house built with stone gathered from Brush Creek. The family operated dairy farms in Westwood and Westwood Hills. The Swatzell land was extensive, encompassing much, if not all of Westwood. It was sold off in parcels over the years. Joseph Parks is buried in Shawnee, Kansas. Three additions within Westwood contain the name Swatzell.

Compiled by Karen I. Johnson

Please add to the intro: John Sullivan and David Nielsen contributed to these Tour Points.