

## **Gilliland made university a key community member**

By Jan Kreamer Special to The Star

**A transformation has occurred at UMKC that will help Kansas City achieve its objectives in the future, and Martha Gilliland deserves a good deal of the thanks for that transformation.**

People in Kansas City understand that to have a truly great city you must have great universities. Kansas City must take steps to compete for jobs and provide quality of life, or residents will go elsewhere.

There are many great universities in our metropolitan area, but the University of Missouri-Kansas City plays a special role as our urban state university.

Martha Gilliland is no longer chancellor at UMKC, but UMKC is better for her efforts. For too long its importance in Kansas City was underappreciated. Martha Gilliland helped change that. Whoever takes over for Gilliland must continue to strengthen and build on her achievements.

Gilliland used an inclusive and extensive process in which all of the university's constituents were invited to lend their thoughts to help establish priorities. The result was a set of priorities aligned with those of the majority of the university's stakeholders. Gilliland deserves credit for this and for having the courage to implement the resulting plan. She committed the university to be "first tier" in each of these priority areas.

The priorities include a vibrant campus to attract undergraduate students; a partnership to support Kansas City's burgeoning life sciences community; reconnecting UMKC to the urban community it serves; and taking advantage of its nationally recognized excellence in the arts. Accomplishments in each of these areas will benefit our community in the future.

### **Vibrant undergraduate campus**

Gilliland oversaw implementation of a strategic enrollment plan that, in spite of record tuition increases by the university system at large, resulted in enrollment growing by more than 13 percent from fall 2000 to fall 2004, including making strides in minority student enrollment.

The number of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen increased more than 30 percent during this period, all while maintaining the academic quality of entering freshmen (average ACT of 24). And the UMKC Trustees (the university's private support organization) now fund a Trustees Scholarship Program to recruit and keep the best undergraduate students in Kansas City.

The first new residence hall in 50 years opened in fall 2004, and an important new student center is in design with money being assembled to build it. Plus, UMKC now has a unique program that allows undergraduate students to engage in research with faculty, participate in academic conferences and publish papers.

Seventy percent of UMKC graduates with bachelor's degrees stay in Kansas City. These bright, educated leaders contribute to our economy and enhance the quality of life.

### **Life and health sciences**

Gilliland engaged former Washington University Chancellor William Danforth to develop a plan for UMKC to be a significant partner in the Kansas City Life Sciences Institute by expanding research space and capacity, and more directly coordinating with the Stowers Institute for Medical Research.

Likewise, UMKC has significantly improved its relationships with other Kansas City health institutions including Children's Mercy Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital and Truman Medical Center.

Ground has been broken for a new UMKC Health and Life Sciences Building on Hospital Hill. Faculty positions for basic science in the schools of Medicine and Dentistry have been increased. And UMKC has developed a leading bioinformatics concentration for graduate students. Through these initiatives and others, Gilliland significantly strengthened UMKC's partnership with Kansas City's life and health sciences institutions.

### **UMKC in the urban community**

A state university serving primarily an urban community has special obligations to help address urban populations and their problems. Martha Gilliland realized this and took special initiatives toward that end.

UMKC's Center for the City was launched by Gilliland as the implementation mechanism of Kansas City's Urban Task Force. It provides for the exchange of expertise and problem-solving approaches with Kansas City officials, serves as a hands-on learning opportunity for students, and offers a repository for urban problem research.

In addition, she pursued, with the input of urban leaders, UMKC's Institute for Urban Education to support teachers working in kindergarten through 12th grade in urban public schools.

Likewise, at UMKC's Bloch School of Business and Public Administration, Gilliland led a commitment to move the undergraduate business degree to a top 50 ranking nationwide, to push the school's entrepreneurship program to a top 10 program, and to connect the school to Kansas City's business and industry leaders.

### **Nationally recognized arts program**

UMKC was already blessed with a nationally recognized arts education program, but she had the vision to realize that this was a true strength at UMKC that needed to be encouraged and given additional support. Toward that end, Gilliland worked to recognize these special programs and give them the support they deserved.

During her time as chancellor, Gilliland enhanced private giving to support the arts programs and increased the number of faculty positions for the Conservatory of Music and Department of Theater.

All of these accomplishments, and more, were made at a time of extreme financial distress in higher education in Missouri. Under Gilliland, strategic planning with specific accountability measures was approved by the university system.

A campus master plan for facilities on Hospital Hill and on the Volker Campus was thoroughly vetted and endorsed by UMKC's neighbors, as well as the university curators. And, a \$200 million capital campaign,

with \$133 million already pledged to date, is under way, led by some of Kansas City's most important civic leaders.

UMKC has integrated itself into our community and now enjoys the support of our community's leaders and other funding organizations. A transformation has occurred at UMKC that will help Kansas City achieve its objectives in the future, and Martha Gilliland deserves a good deal of the thanks for that transformation.

Jan Kreamer is president and chief executive officer of the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation. She lives in Kansas City.