

May 27, 2013

News Release

For Immediate Release

Hammons' impact on economic development spans half-century

In a biography about the life of John Q. Hammons, it was reported that he would meet with city administrators and bankers and introduce himself as "John Q." His real name? James Quentin Hammons.

"He didn't want anyone to know who he was, because he felt he maintained an edge. So everyone began calling him 'John Q.,' Frank James told author Susan Drake.

It may be somewhat indicative of the relationship Hammons had over the years with city leaders and other business professionals. No one can deny, however, the immeasurable impact the legendary builder had on the city he continue to call home throughout a storied 52-year career.

"We sometimes speak of people as 'changing the landscape.' I can think of no single person who has literally changed the landscape of Springfield more than Mr. Hammons," said City Manager Greg Burris. "He left Springfield better than he found it."

Following his service in the U.S. military, where he achieved the rank of Lieutenant, Hammons recognized that G.I.s returning from World War II would need quality housing in which to raise their families. He began building the first suburban housing in southeast Springfield in the late 1940s. He went on to be successful in a number of real estate ventures, including housing tracts – most notably Southern Hills where he and his wife, Juanita, (they never had children) lived for decades.

He also built apartment complexes and shopping centers, including, but not limited to, Parkcrest, Plaza Towers, Southern Hills and Wedgewood. When Hammons was developing new residential areas in the southern part of the city, it is said that he named 86 streets in Springfield. He entered the hotel industry in 1958.

[Projects with the City](#)

The City of Springfield collaborated with Hammons on the University Plaza project (originally the hotel, Hammons office building One Parkway Place, and subsequent phases - Hammons Tower, the federal courthouse, and John Q Hammons Enterprise Center, which houses offices for the Springfield-Area Chamber of Commerce.

"We assisted with land acquisition and relocation, compliance with historic regulations (salvaging historic artifacts, pursuing a historic district for the remainder of Walnut Street), property tax abatement and public infrastructure," explained Mary Lilly Smith, the City's

economic development director. "We continued that collaboration in Jordan Valley Park with the baseball stadium, parking garage, Expo Center and the Holiday Inn Express."

Seeing a need for additional exhibit and convention space, Hammons purchased the former Sears Department Store and partnered with the City on the Expo Center. He stepped in when other efforts to bring minor league baseball failed and built the crown jewel of the Jordan Valley Park development.

"Everyone sees these results but there are other significant, more subtle impacts of his development," Smith said. "It's doubtful that Jordan Valley Park would be in its current location had it not been for the significant investment made in the University Plaza area."

The University Plaza investment created a level of confidence in the area and brought attention to the fact that the Trafficway and St. Louis land uses could be refreshed and a link built between University Plaza and downtown. Smith says University Plaza changed Springfield in many ways.

"Mr. Hammons' vision for a mixed-use development near Missouri State University and downtown, was unprecedented at the time. There were no quality hotels in downtown Springfield in the early 1980's." There was a need for more premium office space and he speculated that there were residents who would find high-rise condominium living desirable. The City's final project with Hammons was the BKD National Headquarters and Jordan Valley Car Park.

Mr. Hammons was a fierce negotiator and he wanted to "win" - but isn't that the case with most successful developers? You could tell that he gave a lot of thought to how communities develop organically and where there might be opportunities for a successful development," Smith said.

History of Giving

Mr. Hammons and Juanita were active in the Springfield community, where they had a passion for sports, love of the arts, and provided support for education and healthcare projects. It is estimated that Hammons has donated hundreds of millions of dollars to projects in Springfield and other organizations over the last five decades.

"Mr. Hammons was an iconic figure in both the residential and commercial development of Springfield. He was also one of the first developers to take a look at the downtown areas of Springfield and decide it was time for a Springfield renaissance. He single-handedly changed the skyline of downtown Springfield east of Park Central Square. His drive, energy, and imagination will live on through other developers and the continual rebirth of our downtown area," says Mayor Bob Stephens.

Some of his most notable philanthropic efforts include:

- \$30 million to Missouri State University to build the JQH Arena, which opened in 2008.
- Funding for Hammons Student Center, Hammons Fountains, and Juanita K. Hammons Hall for the Performing Arts at Missouri State University

- Hammons School of Architecture at Drury University
- Hammons Field, 10,000-seat Double-A Minor League baseball stadium, which is home to the St. Louis Cardinals' Double-A Minor League team, the Springfield Cardinals.
- Mercy Hammons Heart Institute and Mercy Hammons Life Line
- Missouri Sports Hall of Fame
- Nationwide Tournament sponsorship in Springfield at Highland Springs Country Club.

For more information, contact: Cora Scott, Director of Public Information & Civic Engagement, 417-864-1009 (office) | 417-380-3352 (cell), cscott@springfieldmo.gov