
BOWLING GREEN: OFFERING THE BEST OF SMALL TOWN MID-AMERICA

by Dan R. Lang

The city of Bowling Green is a fourth-class city with 5,300 residents located in northeastern Missouri. Incorporated in 1823, the community has a city administrator form of government with a mayor, six-member board of aldermen and professional staff. The government has its own police and fire departments, public works, building, parks and recreation, library and municipal airport.

THE BEGINNING

Bowling Green is located in Pike County in northeastern Missouri. A United States Land Patent was issued to John W. Basye on December 23, 1818, a mere nine days after Pike County was established. Bowling Green was located "at the top of the hill" 400 feet above the surface of the Mississippi River, located 12 miles to the east. The principal interest in this location was the presence of a large spring, the only steady source of water in the immediate area.

As one might suspect, the name Bowling Green was given to the town by settlers that arrived from Bowling Green, Kentucky. The two communities were laid-out alike. The original town was 2,640 feet long and 1,237 feet wide. In 1823, Bowling Green was incorporated as a city. For many years agriculture was the chief enterprise, and is still a vibrant segment of the local economy to this day.

COUNTY SEAT

The city of Bowling Green serves as the county seat for Pike County. The cornerstone for the present courthouse was laid on Sept. 13, 1917. It is the sixth courthouse erected in the County. Fire destroyed the fifth courthouse in October 1915.

After fire destroyed the fifth courthouse, the possibility of having two courthouses was considered, one in Bowling Green and the other in Louisiana. Voters supported this proposal during an election in 1915. However, the Missouri Supreme Court



declared the election to be invalid. When resubmitted to the voters, the present location in Bowling Green was chosen. Henry H. Hohenschild was selected as the architect for the new courthouse. The 85-foot square building was constructed of Bedford stone and gray Georgia granite. The building cost \$100,000 to construct and is located on "The Square" in Bowling Green.

TWO GOVERNORS AND A STATESMAN

The city of Bowling Green is no stranger to politics. Past residents of the community have included two governors and a statesman.

Gov. Robert Alexander Campbell was a Confederate Civil War veteran. He was elected to the Missouri Legislature in 1868, was lieutenant governor in 1880 and served as governor for a very brief period of time.

Gov. Elliott W. Major was the governor from 1913 to 1917. He was born in 1864 and was elected to both the state senate and as attorney general. In 1899, he was chosen as a member of the

commission appointed to revise the Missouri Statutes. He was elected governor in 1912 by the largest plurality ever given to a candidate for that office.

Perhaps the most famous citizen of Bowling Green is Champ Clark. Champ Clark was born March 7, 1850. He served as a member of congress for many years. Champ Clark presided as speaker of the house of representatives from 1911 to 1919. Most notably, at the Democratic National Convention in 1912, Clark led on 27 ballots for the nomination as their candidate for president. He had a clear

majority on nine ballots prior to the final naming of Woodrow Wilson. The two-thirds rule of the convention in place at the time prevented Clark's nomination. Champ Clark died in March 1921 and is buried in the Bowling Green Cemetery.

In American political history, Martin Van Buren was the only other person who failed in the Democratic nomination for the presidency after having received a majority of the votes at the national convention. His home in Bowling Green has been preserved as a designated National Historic Landmark. The house is open for tours during the summer months at a minimal cost to the public.

EARLY COMMERCE

As previously mentioned, the early commerce in the area was primarily agricultural. To get agricultural products to market, a shortline railroad was constructed in 1882. The railroad extended for about 30 miles from

Bowling Green to near the city of Wentzville in St. Charles County. The rail connected Pike County to the St. Louis and Keokuk Railroad. Although the rail line is no longer present, the original depot still remains.

TRANSPORTATION

The city of Bowling Green is located at the intersection of US Highway 54 and US Highway 61. Highway 61, known as the Avenue of Saints, connects St. Louis with St. Paul, Minn. This major transportation route provides direct access to and from Bowling Green to other transportation routes located throughout the region.

The Bowling Green Municipal Airport is located 85 miles north of downtown St. Louis. The airport has one asphalt runway, Runway 13-31, which is 3,204 feet in length. Common activities at the airport include corporate flying, emergency medical evacuation, and recreational flying. Life Flight Eagle, an emergency medical transportation provider, utilizes the airport to transport critically ill patients to necessary medical facilities. Total economic output for the airport has been estimated at \$1.2 million.

WATER/SEWER SYSTEM

The city of Bowling Green has a potable water system that consists of two raw-water reservoirs, eight wells, two raw water pumps and transmission mains, a treatment plant, three high-service pumps, three elevated storage tanks, a ground storage tank and a distribution system that consists of a combination of older cast iron mains and newer PVC mains.

In addition to producing its own water, the City also receives water from the Clarence Cannon Wholesale Water

Commission. The Commission extracts its raw water from Mark Twain Lake. A combination of these two water sources allows adequate water production capacity for future growth. Alliance Water Resources, Inc. operates and manages the City's water system.

The sanitary sewer system consists of gravity collection mains and manholes, seven lift stations and related force mains, and a wastewater treatment facility with a capacity to treat 0.85 million gallons per day.

The wastewater treatment plant was built around 1998. The plant is an extended air plant with two aeration basins, two clarifiers and two sludge

basins. Currently, the wastewater treatment plant treats an average of 0.50 million gallons per day.

MAJOR EMPLOYERS

The largest employers in the community are the Northeast Correctional Center and True Manufacturing. The Northeast Correctional Center is a minimum/medium security institution. The facility was constructed in 1998 and includes 11 housing units. The institution contains around 2,100 offenders and employs almost 600 personnel.

For more than 65 years, True Manufacturing has been an industry

leader in refrigeration products. These products are used in commercial and residential applications, and by beverage distributors and bottlers. The products include traditional reach-ins, food-prep tables, milk coolers, glass door merchandisers, horizontal freezers and display cases. True Manufacturing ships its products around the world. The Bowling Green facility was expanded in 2011 to 400,000 square feet. The plant employs more than 300 persons.

NOTABLE BUSINESSES

Two of the most notable businesses in Bowling Green are Bankhead's Chocolates and Woods Smoked Meats.

Bowling Green is home to its very own chocolate factory! Visitors come from near and far to taste-test the confections made at Bankhead's Chocolates. The chocolate factory is family-owned with four generations helping to hand-dip each piece of chocolate.

Woods Smoked Meats has been in the smoked meat business for more than 60 years. Their "Sweet Betsy From Pike" brand of smoked meats has won more than 500 state, national and international awards. The log-cabin store allows you to see and smell the smoked meats in their meat display case and see first hand their quality meats, barbeque sauces and spices.

AMISH COMMUNITY

One of the more unique features of the Bowling Green area is the presence of an Amish community. The local Amish are comprised of approximately 60 families. There are a number of local Amish businesses that make and sell various products. These products include custom woodworking, furniture, rugs, horse-drawn farm equipment, fabric and various food items.

It is not unusual to see Amish buggies around the community. A number of businesses provide hitching posts. The local Walmart features a shed specifically designed for the Amish to park their buggies. It is the only Walmart Amish horse shed in the country!

CULTURE

One of the cultural assets accessible to community residents is the Saint Louis University Lay Center for Education and the Arts, and Henry Lay Sculpture Park. This facility is



Above: Bowling Green has four parks totaling more than 600 acres.



Right: The local Walmart features a shed specifically designed for the Amish in the community to park their buggies.

a 350-acre property located between Bowling Green and the neighboring community of Louisiana.

The Henry Lay Sculpture Park consists of 20 acres with a path that takes guests on a 40-minute walk through a working Maple Grove, past the historic McElwee Cemetery and through a variety of sculpture pieces. This free facility features a separate walking trail through the woods, open fields and along two lakes highlighted with signage identifying various flora and fauna.

PARKS AND RECREATION

A parks and recreation department was recently established to expand the parks and recreational opportunities for local residents. The City has four parks totaling more than 600 acres. The parks include the Bowling Green Conservation Area, City Park, 15th Street Park and the Cancer Memorial Park.

Another park, Tourism Park, is owned and maintained by the Bowling Green Convention and Visitors Bureau.

A "System Wide Parks and Recreation Master Plan" was completed in 2012. The Master Plan provided a comprehensive analysis

and recommendations for future development.

Future park projects during 2014 include the addition of primitive camp sites, a sand volleyball court, fitness stations and walking path lighting. Each of the parks offer specific recreational elements to enhance the experience of community patrons.

THE FUTURE

Guided by its adopted comprehensive plan, the future of the city of Bowling Green holds much promise. A combination of direct access to major transportation routes, coupled with a hard-working labor pool with small-town values suggest a bright future for the community. These factors, and others, combine to truly make Bowling Green one of the best examples of small town Mid-America. □

Dan Lang has spent the last 37 years involved with local government, both as a public city staff employee and as a private consultant. He has worked as a city staff employee for the cities of Lake Saint Louis, St. Peters and St. Charles. He is presently city administrator for the city of Bowling Green. Lang has received seven Excellence in Planning awards for various projects and served for five years as chapter president for the Missouri Chapter of the American Planning Association.