

## Wentzville, Missouri: The Crossroads Of The Nation



Perdue Valley Park

*Wentzville offers a unique quality of life, with convenient proximity to the St. Louis metropolitan area and the benefits of a family-oriented community. Exceptional city services and safety forces, paired with an excellent school system, scenic parks and recreation facilities all ensure that Wentzville is a great place to live, work and explore.*

Wentzville was founded in 1855 when the great movement of pioneers across the country, coupled with the expansion of the railroad, was reaching its peak. This movement prompted William M. Allen, a prominent landowner in western St. Charles County, to donate a tract of land along the railroad right of way to establish a train station to serve the community. The railroad construction pushed through Wentzville in 1856 and the first train arrived in 1857. The construction and building of the line was supervised by Erasmus Wentz. Wentz and Allen worked together to survey the town's lots and streets. Later, Allen honored his good friend Mr. Wentz by naming the town after him. As the City expanded, the growth centered around the new railroad tracks that are still ever-present in historic downtown Wentzville. Wentzville was incorporated as a fourth-class city in 1872. Its present-day government is composed of an elected mayor and six aldermen, with an appointed city administrator.

In the heart of downtown, along the railroad tracks, is the City's oldest standing residential building called the Dula House. The house, built in the mid-1800s, sits on the last lot

of the original 1855 platted Village of Wentzville. Outside the Dula house, two wood carvings pay tribute to Wentzville's rich history. The pipe carving honors Wentzville residents Robert and Caleb Dula, who operated two tobacco factories in Wentzville in the mid-to-late 1800s. The second carving honors Wentzville resident and six-term mayor J.C. Brown. Brown also once occupied the Dula house.

Another point of pride in Wentzville's history is that it is home to the nation's very first Vietnam War Memorial. The memorial was dedicated in December 1967 and is a fixture of the community. 2017 marks the memorial's 50th anniversary and the site will receive an extensive makeover. The memorial expansion will provide the site with the recognition it deserves and denotes it as a place to honor and remember those who served.

In the past 25 years, the population has grown from 4,700 to almost 40,000 residents. This super-charged residential growth has also meant a surge in businesses – including restaurants, hotels, retail establishments and more.

“Population growth has been met with a conscious

effort on the part of the City to invest in infrastructure, transportation needs, and the expansion of programs and services,” says City Administrator David Gipson. Adding new residents, in turn, has also spurred growth for the Wentzville Fire Protection District, the Wentzville School District and the St. Charles County Ambulance District.

While growth is certainly a key feature in present-day Wentzville, it is not the only thing that makes this community stand out. In fact, Wentzville residents rated several top-notch things about Wentzville in a 2016 Citizen Satisfaction survey. As part of Wentzville’s ongoing effort to involve residents in its long-range planning process, the City retained ETC Institute of Olathe, Kansas, to administer the survey and gather input from residents about the quality of city services.

Eighty-two percent of the residents surveyed rated the overall quality of services provided by the City as “excellent” or “good.” This is significantly higher than the regional average of 54 percent and the national average of 56 percent. Additionally, 85 percent of the residents surveyed also rated the overall quality of life in Wentzville as “excellent” or “good.” Furthermore, residents rated safety in Wentzville very high. Overall, 99 percent of residents feel “very safe” or “safe” walking alone in their neighborhoods during the day, and 98 percent feel safe walking alone in business areas during the day or in their neighborhoods in general. Perhaps the most telling, when asked about the most important reasons they chose to live in Wentzville, residents indicated these top-three choices: quality of public schools, safety and security, and quality of housing.

“We’re the fastest-growing city in the state right now for a number of reasons, and we also have the lowest unemployment rate,” notes Wentzville Mayor Nickolas Guccione. “Wentzville’s continued growth,” the Mayor says, “can be attributed to a dedicated and visionary city government and staff, coupled with involved community members and vibrant businesses who are working together

to prepare Wentzville for the future.” New businesses around town have visually marked this continued growth, as well as a new City Hall site, new medical buildings, new parks, new schools, new fire stations and much more.

## Parks And Recreation

New single-family home construction permits issued in 2016 totaled 663. Coupled with Wentzville’s median age of 35.2, this equates to many young families who make up this vibrant community. Wentzville has made a concerted effort to embrace these young families and residents of all ages, through its parks and recreation programs and events.

One of the City’s newest parks is Heartland Park, featuring several synthetic and non-synthetic soccer/football fields, two miles of trail, and the newly added Storybook Walk. This new amenity is a partnership between the City, the Friends of the Wentzville Parks, and the St. Charles County Library District that brings a storybook to life along the trail.

The City is currently working with Unlimited Play to design an all-inclusive playground at Heartland Park. The design, a miniature replica of Busch Stadium in St. Louis, was approved earlier this year, with construction expected in 2018.

2017 will mark the official opening of a new park in Wentzville – Peruque Valley Park. This scenic park, along the banks of Peruque Creek, features a baseball and softball complex and a two-mile trail.

A feasibility study for a multi-generational recreation facility has been approved and will be conducted later this year. Additionally, the parks and recreation department recently finalized its master plan. The plan will serve as a blueprint as the City strives to meet the needs and wishes of Wentzville residents over the next 10 years. The recommendations outlined in this master plan include both immediate needs of the City and long-term visionary actions.



A train heads through Wentzville at sunrise.



Wood carvings near the Dula house in downtown Wentzville pay tribute to the City's rich history.



**Top left: Jakes Field of Dreams, Unlimited Play all-inclusive playground.** Photo courtesy Unlimited Play.

**Bottom left: A new City Hall building is under construction.**



to benefit the community. The City is strategically located at the intersection of Interstate 70 and Highway 61 for companies desiring optimum access to rail, roadways and air transportation.

The mayor and board of aldermen have made downtown revitalization a strategic priority. There is a major effort to improve the infrastructure in the City's historic downtown. These infrastructure improvements have included new water and sewer lines, roadway improvements and lighting. The area has also received new landscaping, and a mural program is actively underway. The City has implemented a façade-improvement grant program that provides matching funds to help improve the building exterior of historic structures. The business community has responded with several new businesses locating recently within the downtown corridor.

## Comprehensive Planning

A long-range outlook is also a key strategy in the City's growth plan. The community development department is updating to the City's comprehensive plan, last updated in 2013. The comprehensive plan is a long-range plan to help the City prepare and manage expected population and employment growth, as well as plan for and coordinate major public investments. It accomplishes these goals by providing direction for City decisions on land use, transportation, parks, sewer and water systems, economic development, and other topics. Periodic updates to the plan are needed to ensure it effectively represents the City's goals and vision. Community development staff expects to complete this update by November 2017.

Wentzville is a vibrant city whose charm is exceeded only by the remarkable people who call it home. While times have changed, the friendliness and hospitality that recall a simpler era have not. In Wentzville, residents enjoy a way of life that contains not only the charming characteristics of a small town, but all of the amenities of a dynamic suburban environment. 🌿

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## High Quality Development

City parks are not the only place changing in Wentzville. Additional growth includes the opening of the second-largest building in St. Charles County, the Wentzville Logistics Center, that will add 400 net new jobs to the community. Wentzville already houses the largest building in St. Charles County, the General Motors Wentzville Assembly Center, that is also the City's largest employer, with approximately 5,000 employees.

"We're not just developing to be developing," said Economic Development Director Dan Lang. "I think it's important to recognize that the City is on track to produce high-quality development in the coming years."

Quality development is paramount as the City continues to expand with new homes and businesses, additional infrastructure and transportation improvements, and new parks and recreation facilities. The City has plans in place to make sure it will continue to be a great place to live.

In addition to the parks master plan, the City has recently finalized an economic development strategic plan. This plan is a targeted approach to economic development efforts in the city of Wentzville. The approach is designed to attract and retain specific businesses and industries, and promote strategies to optimize economic development opportunities