

Happy birthday, St. Louis

As the city celebrates its 250th year, a look at what's old and new again

By Katherine Rodeghier
Daily Herald Correspondent

Bicentinquagenary.

Yes, it's a mouthful. So are sestercentennial and semiquincentennial, but they all have the same meaning: an anniversary of 250 years.

Skip the Latin tongue-twisters and just say happy birthday to St. Louis, Missouri, a city with a colorful history — and one constantly reinventing itself.

In 1764, Frenchman Pierre Laclede traveled the Mississippi River looking for a spot to establish a fur trading post. When he came to a bluff with a good view of river traffic and high enough to withstand spring floods, he staked his claim, naming his settlement St. Louis in honor of the canonized French king.

To celebrate the passing of two and a half centuries, the city has embarked on a somewhat silly, somewhat serious public art display. Cakeway to the West charged local artists with decorating 250 fiberglass birthday cakes, standing 4 feet tall in two tiers. You'll stumble upon them at noteworthy locations on both the Missouri and Illinois sides of the river. If you check in on the free app, STL250, you'll learn about the site and earn points making you eligible for prizes. Think of it as part history lesson, part scavenger hunt.

Among the 250 you'll find



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

To mark the 250th anniversary of the founding of St. Louis, 250 fiberglass cakes have been placed in noteworthy locations around the region.

these four locations with something new to offer:

Arch grounds get a makeover

Soaring 630 feet on the banks of the Mississippi, the Gateway Arch became a St. Louis icon when it was completed in 1965 and many a visitor has taken the tram ride to the observation level at the top for the view. The shiny, stainless-steel structure designed by Finnish-American architect Eero Saarinen is the nation's tallest man-made monument. While it remains in good shape nearly 50 years later, the grounds around it are undergoing some

much-needed work.

Officially known as the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial and operated by the National Park Service, the Arch symbolizes the role St. Louis played as a portal to the American West. When President Thomas Jefferson signed the Louisiana Purchase with France in 1803, effectively doubling the size of the country, pioneers poured through St. Louis on their way to settle the newly acquired land west of the Mississippi River. In the Arch's underground museum you'll see exhibits about this migration and the Native Americans living in the new U.S. territories.

The museum is getting a new entrance and exhibits are being updated in the makeover, but the most significant improvements are being made to the grounds. Interstate 70, which cuts off the Arch from downtown St. Louis, is being covered by a broad landscaped park with walking paths and Blue-bike trails. When it is completed next year you'll be able to walk from the Arch and the Old Cathedral to the Old St. Louis County Courthouse and downtown. In the meantime, the Arch is open and you can take the popular tram ride up its legs to the top.

Troubled neighborhood trendy again

Delmar Loop, the six-block

stretch of Delmar Boulevard near Washington University, ranks among the 10 best streets in America, according to the American Planning Association.

But it wasn't always this way.

Back in the 1930s, it was a high-fashion neighborhood built around a trolley line called The Loop that made its turnaround here. Then came the 1960s, when the neighborhood deteriorated into urban blight. The revival began in 1972 when St. Louis native Joe Edwards borrowed \$10,000 from friends and opened Blueberry Hill, a restaurant and live music club. Edwards says he almost went out of business three times because he threw out two-thirds of his customers — drug dealers, pimps, rowdies and the like. "I realized I wasn't going to make it until I got involved in revitalizing the whole area," he says.

Edwards restored the neighborhood's 1929 Tivoli movie theater, turned the elegant theater into a nightclub,

opened the Pin-Up Bowl bowling alley and martini lounge and the Moonrise Hotel, a quirky boutique property filled with Space Age toys and memorabilia, including a huge replica of the moon that rotates on the hotel's rooftop terrace and lounge.

Stroll down Delmar now and you'll find a flourishing arts and entertainment district with 55 restaurants, 10 galleries and nearly 200 shops. Are you into world crafts, vintage clothing, vinyl records or graphic novels? Head to Delmar Loop.

Ten stages make The Loop a place you'll want to be for live music. Rock 'n' roll legend Chuck Berry still performs once a month in the Duck Room at Blueberry Hill. At age 87, he's frail so his appearances are more a tribute to the man than a rock concert. A statue of the rocker who sang "Maybellene" and "Johnny B Goode" stands across the street along Delmar Loop's Walk of Fame. Look for brass stars set in the sidewalk honoring St. Louis notables.

You'll find Tina Turner, Miles Davis, Maya Angelou, Betty Grable, Nelly, T.S. Eliot, Charles Lindbergh, Bob Costas and more than 120 others.

Next year a trolley returns to The Loop. Ten stops linking it with Forest Park will include two MetroLink light rail stations connecting The Loop with downtown St. Louis and the airport.

Reimagining a railway station

In its heyday St. Louis Union Station was the largest and busiest railway station in the world. Travelers packed the platforms during the 1904 World's Fair. Doughboys kissed their sweethearts goodbye and headed off to World War I, as did soldiers in World War II. On a stopover here during his 1948 presidential election, Harry Truman held aloft the infamous front page of the Chicago Tribune proclaiming "Dewey Defeats Truman."

Built in 1894, Union Station

became a National Historic Landmark, but when the last train departed in 1978 it fell into disrepair. Redeveloped in 1985 as a mixed-use project of shops, restaurants and a hotel, it received a needed shot in the arm in 2012 when new owners began restoring it to its early glory.

The centerpiece of its revival is the St. Louis Union Station Hotel where floors are named for the railroads that once ran out of the station. The Station Grille recalls the days when Harvey Girls waited tables in the station's Fred Harvey restaurant. In the lobby, located in the Grand Hall, you'll be wowed by soaring Romanesque archways, frescos, gold-leaf detailing, mosaics and art-glass windows. New this year is a 70-foot-long bar where you can sip a cocktail in 1920s style. In May, a 3-D light show began projecting vignettes onto the hall's 65-foot ceiling. St. Louis natives Jon Hamm and John Goodman did some of the narration.

Outside under the train shed, rigging has been set up this summer for the new Flying Trapeze Center operated by Circus Harmony, a social enterprise offering classes in the circus arts to underprivileged kids. You can stop by to watch trapeze artists fly above the nets or strap on a safety harness and climb up to a 25-foot platform to take a swing yourself.

Revelry on the Card's hallowed grounds

If you head down to St. Louis to catch a Cardinals game, you'll wind up at Busch Stadium. Actually, it's the third Busch Stadium, affectionately known as Busch III.

The first Busch Stadium, originally Sportsman's Park, was the home of the Cardinals as well as the St. Louis Browns before they became the Baltimore Orioles. Stan "The Man" Musial was in his glory here. Busch II, where Mark McGwire set home-run records, opened in downtown St. Louis in 1966.

travel



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

The opening of Blueberry Hill restaurant and music club sparked a revival of the Delmar Loop neighborhood.

But the ballclub's new owners wanted a more modern stadium, so they tore it down and built the current Cardinals home right next door in time for the 2006 season. Take a tour of the stadium and you'll sit in the dugout, the broadcast booth and see World Series trophies in the Champions Club.

What became of the grounds where Busch II once stood? Not much until this year when the Cardinals partnered with a real estate developer to open Ballpark Village. With rooftop seats overlooking Busch III and a bevy of bars, restaurants and nightclubs, you might say it's a modern version of the Wrigley Field neighborhood, but with a \$100 million price tag.

Part of the complex is a grassy park on the original footprint of the infield of Busch II. Families picnic and play in the grass around the pitcher's mound. Inside Ballpark Village, you can see baseball memorabilia at the Cardinals Hall of Fame and Museum at Cardinals Nation, a two-level restaurant topped with rooftop seats overlooking the outfield across the street. Budweiser Brew House also has a view of the ballpark along with multiple bars, restaurants and a beer garden.

You can catch the game on a giant video screen in a two-level atrium under a retractable glass roof. More restaurants and night spots ring the atrium, including Howl at the Moon dueling piano bar and PBR St. Louis where you can play professional bull rider and climb on a mechanical bull.

St. Louis

Getting there: St. Louis is about 300 miles from Chicago and is served by Amtrak and Megabus. United and American airlines fly nonstop from O'Hare, and Southwest flies nonstop from Midway.

Where to stay:

Moonrise Hotel, 6177 Delmar Blvd., (314) 721-1111, moonrisehotel.com; summer weekends from \$179 to \$329.

St. Louis Union Station Hotel, a Doubletree by Hilton, 1820 Market St., (314) 621-5262, stlunionstationhotel.com; summer weekends from \$169 to \$354.

Where to eat:

Blueberry Hill, 6504 Delmar Blvd. Memorabilia-filled restaurant and music club with jukebox, dart board, booth games, known for its burgers and extensive beer selection, (314) 727-4444, blueberryhill.com.

Three Kings Pub, 6307 Delmar Blvd. Casual pub known for sliders, burgers and an appetizer of shrimp breaded in Cap'n Crunch cereal, (314) 721-3355, threekingspub.com.

Cunetto House of Pasta, 5453 Magnolia Ave. Popular restaurant in The Hill, the city's Italian neighborhood, known for traditional Italian cuisine, including St. Louis signature toasted ravioli, (314) 781-1135, cunetto.com.

Gateway Arch: 100 Washington Ave., tram rides to the top cost \$10 adults, \$5 children, and often sell out, (877) 982-1410, gatewayarch.com, nps.gov/jeff/planyourvisit/gateway-arch.htm

Circus Harmony Flying Trapeze Center: Union Station, 1820 Market St., (314) 504-4298, trapezestl.com; daily through October, \$20 per swing.

Busch Stadium Tour: \$12 adults, \$10 seniors and military, \$8 children, stlouis.cardinals.mlb.com/stlballpark/tours.

Ballpark Village: stlballparkvillage.com

Anniversary events and cake locations: stl250.org

For more information: St. Louis Convention & Visitors Commission, (800) 916-0092, explorestlouis.com

• Information for this article was gathered during a writers' conference sponsored by the St. Louis Convention & Visitors Commission.