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# Back to Business

Milwaukee reopens with new and resumed projects on tap. BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER

**A**s with myriad Midwestern cities, Wisconsin's largest suffered as COVID-19 closed businesses and canceled or postponed events and new ventures. Following a record-breaking year for tourism in 2019, visitor spending in Milwaukee County dropped nearly 40 percent in 2020.

The cancellation of last summer's Democratic National Convention was a major blow. It prompted "a big rush of disappointment. We didn't get a chance to shine on a national and global scale," said Lafayette Crump, Milwaukee's commissioner for development. But landing the first major political party convention in city history gave Milwaukee "a genuine sense of accomplishment. Businesses got themselves ready for the big stage," he said, and that readiness "will

continue to pay dividends for years ahead."

Milwaukee has been a meeting destination since its early history. At the confluence of three rivers and Lake Michigan, its name comes from *millioki*, meaning "gathering place at the waters" in the Potawatomi Native American language. German immigrants settled the city, bringing with them beer-making skills behind big-name breweries, including Miller and Pabst. City population hovers around 600,000, with about 1.5 million in the metro area.

Building on tourism developments launched before the pandemic, new and resumed projects are putting Milwaukee on the path to recovery in 2021, including a new home for the symphony, the resumption of a major music festival, the reopening of a Black history museum and the

launch of an innovative food hall in the heart of downtown. In the long view, a \$420 million expansion of the Wisconsin Center for meetings and conventions will break ground in early 2022.

Fiserv Forum, opened in 2018, was to host the DNC and continues as the home of the NBA Milwaukee Bucks as well as an arena for concerts, meetings, festivals and major events. The adjacent Deer District has become a dining and entertainment hub downtown. It's walking distance from the Wisconsin Center District comprising three venues: UW-Milwaukee Panther Arena, Miller High Life Theatre and Wisconsin Center. The center will expand to an anticipated 480,841 square feet of convention center space in 2024.

Saint Kate – The Arts Hotel transformed in 2019 from the former InterContinental as

**Convergence:**  
At the confluence of three rivers and Lake Michigan, Milwaukee has been a gathering spot since its early days.

PHOTO: ©KATHERINE RODEGHIER

the city's first arts-focused boutique hotel. Along with 219 art-filled guestrooms, it features multiple gallery and exhibition spaces and a 90-seat black box theater. In another pre-pandemic development, Potawatomi Hotel & Casino opened a second 19-story hotel tower in 2019, bringing the room count to 500 and adding a spa.

Among new developments in 2021, 3rd Street Market Hall opens in September in a shuttered shopping mall as a 24-vendor food hall with a twist. Unlike the well-established Milwaukee Public Market in the city's Historic Third Ward, this downtown foodie destination will be experiential with shuffleboard courts; golf simulators; old-school video games; snookball; and an indoor turf area rotating between yoga, cornhole games and lounge seating next to a 50-person central bar. A selfie museum will offer 27 areas designed by students of the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design for sessions of social media engagement.

"Nobody else has the gaming we have," said 3rd Street Market Hall partner Josh Krsnak, president and CEO, Hempel Companies, developing four city blocks around the market as residential, office and retail space. "We want to be the living room of downtown," said project partner and restaurateur Omar Shaikh, noting the market lies 1.5 blocks from Wisconsin Center. Shaikh and Krsnak visited 70 food halls around the United States to cherry-pick the best elements. In addition to gaming and lounge areas, the market will

have four radio station studios where visitors can watch live programming. Singapore-style hawker stalls will function as incubators for up-and-coming chefs.

A half-block from the market, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra will open its 2021–2022 season in Bradley Symphony Center, a renovation of the historic Warner Grand Theater with a two-story addition housing a new entrance and reception space. The project ranks as the largest arts investment downtown since the Santiago Calatrava-designed expansion of the Milwaukee Art Museum in 2001.

America's Black Holocaust Museum will relaunch in 2021 in Milwaukee's Bronzeville neighborhood. Founded by a lynching survivor in 1984, exhibits in new galleries will address the harmful legacy of slavery on a chronological journey through Black history from 1619 to the present.

One of Milwaukee's biggest annual events, Summerfest postponed its return until September 2021. The world's largest music festival, with 11 stages on its 75-acre lakefront grounds, will play out Sept. 2–4, 9–11 and 16–18. Its American Family Insurance Amphitheater recently underwent a \$51.3 million renovation with a new seating bowl configuration and raised stage.

Sixty-three miles north on the lakefront, golfers will train their eyes on the Ryder Cup. Canceled by COVID-19 in 2020, it's been rescheduled for Sept. 24–26 on Whistling Straits, a Pete Dye-designed course near Kohler, Wisconsin.



## SCENIC DRIVES

Kettle Moraine Scenic Drive runs north-south for 115 miles from Elkhart Lake to Whitewater Lake, passing through small towns and state forests. Named for pot-shaped depressions, or kettles, formed by receding Ice Age glaciers, access the drive near Delafield, Wisconsin, about 25 minutes west of Milwaukee. Go south to Old World Wisconsin outdoor living history museum with 60 restored buildings and costumed interpreters. Go north to the basilica at wooded Holy Hill, with an observation tower atop the highest point in southeast Wisconsin, and Wade House Historic Site, a 19th-century stagecoach hotel and carriage museum (due to reopen this month).

The Lakefront Drive from the Milwaukee Art Museum north to Doctors Park covers about 11 miles via Lincoln Memorial Drive, then Lake Drive past mansions in tony north shore suburbs. Drink in the view of Lake Michigan at Veterans Park, where you can ride a swan-shaped paddleboat on the lagoon. Stretch out on the sand at Bradford Beach and tour North Point Lighthouse Museum housed in an 1888 lighthouse. Stop for locally roasted Colectivo coffee at a café in the 19th-century Milwaukee River Flushing Station. At MooSa's North Point snack bar find out why Milwaukee is the unofficial "Frozen Custard Capital of the World."

### Transformations:

Omar Shaikh, left, and Josh Krsnak, partners in 3rd Street Market Hall (above); and sculptures at the arts-focused Saint Kate – The Arts Hotel (left)

PHOTOS: © KATHERINE RODEGHIER

