



PERFECT GAME: Kings upscale bowling alley features private rooms for corporate groups.

PHOTO: © KINGS ROSEMONT

Rosemont in Bloom

A new downtown flourishes outside Chicago city limits.

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER

The bright red rose rises from a nest of intersecting interstate highways next to Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. Painted on the globe of a water tower, it's the symbol of the tiny suburb of Rosemont, a village that would remain in obscurity if not for its proximity to one of the world's busiest gateways.

But with more hotel rooms (6,000) than residents (4,200), plus a convention center with nearly a million square feet of exhibit and meeting space and an arena drawing crowds to rival Madison Square Garden's, Rosemont emerged as a major player in meetings and conventions. And it continues to blossom with a new entertainment district and a luxury shopping mall catering to business and leisure travelers.

"Dad saw the potential that would bring people here," says Mayor Brad Stephens, son of Donald Stephens, the first mayor after Rosemont incorporated in 1956. During his 14 terms in office he persuaded most major hotel chains to build in the village and turned an old warehouse into an exposition center to compete with McCormick Place 19 miles

away in Chicago. The younger Stephens filled his late father's shoes in 2007 and continues his vision by steering a half-billion dollars in commercial development into the village.

Rosemont invested \$50 million in MB Financial Park, with nine dining and entertainment venues surrounding a football field-sized setting that provides green space for festivals and concerts in warm weather and an ice-skating rink in winter. "We wanted a common area in the middle to be a gathering place," says Mayor Stephens. Opened in 2012, it provides a de facto downtown within walking distance of hotels and the convention center.

Its diverse tenants include Zanies Comedy Club, booking national stand-up acts; Muvico cinema with 18 screens and a full-service restaurant and cocktail lounge; Five Roses Irish Pub; and Toby Keith's two-story bar and grill with a stage flanked by skyboxes. Hofbräuhaus, a 550-seat recreation of the famous Munich beer hall, serves Bavarian food and beer brewed on site using a 400-year-old recipe and ingredients shipped from Germany. IFly uses a vertical wind tunnel to simulate skydiving for individuals, corporate groups and team-building exercises. Kings, an upscale bowling alley in a retro setting straight out of *Mad Men*, features bars serving signature cocktails and an executive chef working from a scratch kitchen. Kings' party rooms are popular with corporate groups and celebrities such as Drew Carey and Trisha Yearwood.

Fashion Outlets of Chicago opened next to the entertainment district in 2013. The \$250 million luxury shopping center is a far cry from the typical outdoor strip mall of factory stores. The 130-store indoor mall

features granite and marble touches and curated artwork. Stores range from upscale (Prada, Barney's, Gucci, Theory, Michael Kors) to mid-range (Gap, Nike, Banana Republic) with the outlet versions of Saks Fifth Avenue, Neiman Marcus, Bloomingdale's and Forever 21 serving as anchors. Air travelers can check their bags and get boarding passes right in the mall and book a shuttle to O'Hare.

"When people go out at conventions they want action," says Chris Stephens, executive director, Donald E. Stephens Convention Center. "You've got to provide additional forms of entertainment." Rosemont polled meeting attendees about what they wanted in a convention site, he says, and the answers came back: shopping, bowling, a movie theater, close-in parking, tiered-pricing restaurants and nightlife. The new entertainment district and mall fulfill each of these desires. To keep up with clients' demands, the convention center is spending \$6.5 million this year on refurbishing its conference space.

Rosemont's development plan included a casino, but the Illinois Gaming Board awarded the license instead to the city of Des Plaines next door. Rivers Casino opened across the street from Rosemont's village hall in 2011 and quickly became the highest revenue-producing casino in the state. A free shuttle connects it to the Rosemont stop on the Blue "L" line linking Chicago and O'Hare. A paid shuttle serves area hotels.

Rosemont's older venues continue to offer entertainment options to business travelers. The 4,300-seat Rosemont Theater recently booked performances by Gabriel Iglesias and Jerry Seinfeld. At the Allstate Arena, attendance consistently places in the top five in the nation; in 2013 it was second only to that

SCENIC DRIVES

The Chicago area is blessed with views of Lake Michigan, enjoyed on a spin down city and suburban roads. The Baha'i House of Worship in Wilmette makes a good starting point for a journey south along Sheridan Road through Northwestern University with its Block Museum of Art. The road joins Lake Shore Drive, hugging lakefront parks and beaches as it passes between the Chicago skyline to the west and Navy Pier and the Museum Campus to the east. Promontory Point in Burnham Park merits a stop to enjoy another view of lake and skyline before ending the drive 22 miles from the start, at the Museum of Science and Industry.

Enjoy water views of another sort cruising along both sides of the Fox River snaking through Chicago's far western suburbs. Illinois Route 25, just east of the river in St. Charles, runs south, skirting riverfront parks, the Fox River Bike Trail and a 19th-century Dutch windmill at Fabyan Forest Preserve. Aurora makes a good place to cross the river, perhaps making a stop at Hollywood Casino before heading north on Illinois Route 31. Shoppers will want to detour through downtown Geneva's 100-plus specialty shops, including The Little Traveler's 36 rooms of merchandise. Route 31 continues north past Mount St. Mary Park in St. Charles for a roundtrip of about 26 miles.

of Madison Square Garden. Home of the American Hockey League's Chicago Wolves, the arena also draws acts such as Garth Brooks, Pink and Elton John. Visitors frequent the Donald E. Stephens Hummel Museum, the world's largest display of the German figurines with 2,500 pieces from the former mayor's private collection.

Rosemont continues to develop office space suitable for corporate headquarters and has its eye on a 26-acre site across I-294 from the entertainment district. Mayor Stephens says this year he will announce plans for the site, with a completion date in 2016. The development will focus on entertainment for families and complement the village's newest entertainment venues.

Block Museum of Art
blockmuseum.northwestern.edu

Donald E. Stephens Convention Center
rosemont.com/desconvention

Donald E. Stephens Hummel Museum
rosemont.com/places-to-go/des-hummel-museum

Fabyan Forest Preserve
kaneforest.com

Fashion Outlets of Chicago
fashionoutletsofchicago.com

Hollywood Casino Aurora
hollywoodcasinoaurora.com

MB Financial Park at Rosemont
rosemont.com/mbfinancialpark

Museum of Science and Industry
msichicago.org

Navy Pier
navypier.com

Rivers Casino
riverscasino.com

Village of Rosemont
rosemont.com

BAVARIAN BREW: Hofbräuhaus, a replica of the famous Munich beer hall
PHOTO: © HOFBRÄUHAUS

