

# A Love Letter to Kankakee

For this month's blog, the ECDA's team wrote about all the things they LOVE about Kankakee. The prompt was, "If you had a friend visiting, how would you describe the awesome things to do in Kankakee in order to make plans?"

## Restaurants by Leo Jaramillo

Hello friend,

You ready to come down for a weekend & visit me in Kankakee? My invitation is still open. I'll be your tour around the City. I know you're a drive away, so we can meet up for lunch. Tell me what you're craving, though, because Kankakee has plenty of food options to choose from! It's so hard to decide! Sometimes it's so hard for me to decide that I just go off my moods & let my emotions decide what I am craving.

If you're craving an authentic dish of Quesabirria tacos and the consomé, then I am taking you to Taqueria Y Paleteria "La Michoacana." I just love how this restaurant allows me to order two different kinds of meat on my torta. Chorizo and al pastor all the way! Plus, they have dessert options readily available if you're looking for something to seal the deal.

If you're craving something fast, then I would prefer to take you to a local staple known as Poor Boys. I'm a huge Texas-travel fan and this place gives me Texas vibes with a Midwestern twist. The perfect way of describing this restaurant to my down-south folks is by calling it our local "Whataburger." Throw in a fruit punch & an order of their BBQ fries and I'm sold. If you're like me, then I know you'll appreciate their scratch-made BBQ sauce! Oh, how I love Kankakee!

Now, if you're craving a burger, but want a chance to soak it all in; then I recommend Burgers & Beer. This place is perfect for when we are HUNGRY. The burger options offered here are truly unique and yes; the giant pretzel really is GIANT. The giant pretzel, alone, is a must-try experience. Scratch that, this whole place is a must-try experience, even if it is only carry-out!

Now, if you're really not hungry and just want some snacks, then we are taking a trip to La Delicia. This place offers authenticity and variety. Who knew you could order a mangonada with either a tamarind, strawberry, or lime base; or even with two different flavors at the same time? You want some hot Cheetos with cheese? No problem. You want some chicharrones con limón y Valentina? No problem!

Well, I threw a couple of options at you, but sadly these are just a taste of what is truly out here in Kankakee. I haven't even talked about local pizza options, nor the best places to get a famous Chicago-style hot dog. Instead, I will end by saying if you magically decide to get up early for the drive down to Kankakee, then we are going to Lori's for breakfast. This place is located in the Downtown District of Kankakee, so even though parking is really terrible when the place is packed; the food makes walking to the restaurant more enjoyable. I recommend ordering the pancakes here. Oh, how I love Kankakee!



## Activities for Kids by Yorelly Villagomez

Before having my daughter, I never really gave any attention to all the kids activities Kankakee has. With the warm weather approaching one of our favorite things to do as a family while still being able to entertain my daughter is the Merchant Street Music Fest. The music fest has a kids area where kids are able to enjoy different activities to play with while the we are able to enjoy as well. It's something to look forward to especially since its something everyone can enjoy. Another great event is Halloween Downtown, this is practically a whole day event, with tons of games for the kids and then being able to go Trunk-o-Treating. This is definitely one we look forward each year. A third family favorite is the Farmers Market, which starts in May. There are usually different organizations and businesses that have something for kids to do. The City of Kankakee organizations do a good job at getting kids involved with many local events. Make sure to check them out!





## Shopping by Miya Petitgoue

Kankakee has seen so much growth over my adult life and I am so excited to be a part of this community! One of the incredible ways that the city has seen growth is in our options for shopping locally. While there are items that I still go to big-box stores for like groceries and toiletries, I love our local shop options for gifts, home décor, and wardrobe upgrading! While I have typically found something at every store I visit in Kankakee, there are a few that have become “go-to’s” for me. Moon Cookie Gallery at 187 S Schuyler Ave Suite 150 is an absolutely favorite for self-care items such as soaps, essential oils and candles, as well as, home décor with so many beautiful options from a variety of local artisans. Still in the downtown area, Rubber Rose Books & Prints has become a new favorite! This is a locally owned independent bookstore offering gently used books, handmade gifts, and printing services! The space is beautiful and relaxing – you can truly “escape” into a book walking into the store. Outside of the downtown center, I love shopping and having consignment at Embrace Consignment in the Meadowview Shopping Center. My intentions are always to leave with cash in hand from my consignment sales but I always find something cute while I am there! A nice weather favorite is the Kankakee Farmer’s Market. Our local market is full of incredible food, farm, and homemade craft vendors every Saturday from May through October! It is an event in itself but a great spot for fresh groceries and supporting local small businesses. I have only listed a few stores and there are so many other shopping spots in Kankakee – you will just have to shop around and see for yourself!

## Community Organizations by Will Boykin

I love Kankakee because it is the perfect-sized town, with the perfect community dynamic for someone who wants to settle down, build a family, and contribute to the social infrastructure. One of the most spectacular aspects of this community is the way that neighbors tend to rally around a good cause. On any day of the year, you can find posters hanging in storefronts, or online, advertising a campaign, fundraiser, or call for volunteers for some local benefit. Once their attentions are engaged, people here love helping people here; love seeing local people helped and issues resolved; and love being able to say that they were part of the solution. I have personally been positively impacted by the Jaycees, the Y Service Club, HUG, Gotta Do Better, Kiwanis, Rotary, the Kankakee County Chamber of Commerce, Kankakee County Museum, Kankakee Public Library, several taverns, religious and self-help organizations, and a slew of other grassroots movements run by for- and non- profit associations alike that have chosen to show their unconditional love for Kankakee with their actions and not only their words.



## Places to Bring Visitors by Jan Gathing

Come explore with me the Kankakee County Museum, which is a quaint museum compound featuring a historic schoolhouse & exhibits full of local history. Not far from the Kankakee County Museum and located in central downtown at the north end of the historic Illinois Central Depot is the Kankakee Railroad Museum featuring a Pullman Coach complete with a dining car. If you are lucky you will catch a train going by that will make it feel like you are really taking a train ride. The museum is open Friday, Saturday and Sunday 11 A.M. – 4 P.M.

If you haven’t been home in a while or just visiting you might want to check out our newly renovated and fully restored movie theatres Classic Cinemas (Paramount Historic Theatre & Meadowview Theatre) with luxury heated and free refills on popcorn and drinks.



# Parks

by Marlena Temple-Kalafut

Outdoors is one of my favorite places to be, and as we inch closer to warm weather, I've been thinking about all of my favorite parks in the city. If you traveled around town with me to the parks I know best, these three would be the ones I'd talk about!

My favorite Kankakee park is Gov. Small Memorial Park. I had family that lived just down the road from this park, so my cousins and I spent a lot of time roaming the walking paths and trying out the exercise equipment and activities. The Column Garden nearby is an especially beautiful area that you can walk through. This park was also one of the locations that I chose to do engagement photos with my now-husband!

I spent a lot of time at McBroom Park as a kid, and it always felt like there was plenty to do! There's a jungle gym, with swings, slides, and monkey bars. There's also a lot of wide open space and a pavilion that's available to be rented. Basketball and tennis courts are available, and I spent many hours making terrible shots and practicing my tennis swing here.

I attended grade school in Kankakee, and each year, we would walk from our campus to Cobb Park to have our end-of-the-year celebration. It is another beautiful location. Since it's right on the river, it makes for picturesque and calming nature scenes. It was also another perfect location for engagement photos, especially at twilight. Like many of the other city parks, there are playgrounds, walking trails, and wide open spaces, as well as some more tennis courts. There are also restrooms and another rentable pavilion.

With over 30 parks in the City of Kankakee, there's definitely a park here for you somewhere! And if you are ever interested in renting any of Kankakee's parks and facilities, make sure to contact the Kankakee Valley Park District!



## Kid-free Activities by Devyn Forquer

Welcome to town, let me show you around... But seriously, find a babysitter and we are stepping out! Kankakee has a lot of hidden gems for those ready to check out of the family-friendly parts of town. I'm not anti-kid by any means, but I am admittedly enthusiastic about my lack thereof. Let me take you on a journey of a perfect kid-free weekend day...

Personally, I'd start at Paul's Place for brunch. Their biscuits and gravy are amazing, and you can pair it with a mimosa or Bloody Mary if you're feeling dangerous-though I really prefer to start my days with a few cups of coffee! Now, I understand this isn't kid-free, but bear with me, we're going around the corner to Splitting Targets.

Splitting Targets is what I'd compare to an arcade for adults. They have axe throwing, pool tables, bags, virtual golf, slot machines, and a full bar. You wouldn't give a kid an axe, would you? Exactly, we'll be hanging out here for awhile. You're guaranteed to see tons of friendly faces and making your way through this wide variety of activities will give you time to think about where you're going next! Don't think too hard, I've already decided for you.

We're going to get tattoos! Surprise, right? I'll at least let you decide where. Lucky Dragon Tattoo and Noble Tattoo are right around the corner! These shops are owned by extremely creative and talented individuals and are always putting out great work. Let's be honest, even a tiny tattoo won't kill you! This brings us closer to our next stop too.

I'm no expert, but I'd argue grabbing a slice at Johnny's Pizza and heading over to Grapes & Hops for a wine tasting is exactly how you start a fabulous night on the town. Grapes & Hops also features a craft beer brewery on draft if you're not a fan of wine; Sun King Brewery from Indiana is available right now!

How are we ending this action-packed day, you may ask? We're heading over to On The Rox to catch some live music on the deck. Nothing is better than relaxing with friends and enjoying some live local talent while overlooking the Kankakee River. Bonus: They have tons of mocktail options right now and the bartenders are well-versed in pouring a great drink, along with telling a great joke.

That pretty much wraps up the day. Thanks for hanging and drive home safely. I hope you have enough money left to pay the sitter!



## Art Scene by Samantha Rocknowski



I never tire of supporting the local arts, and Kankakee has it all. Looking for live music? We absolutely have that! Merchant Street Music Festival is something you don't want to miss each July, but there is live music year-round throughout the city. The Kankakee Municipal Band plays at the Don Palzer Bandshell each summer and the Estival Festival takes place each fall. You can also find live music at Rock Inn and On the Rox regularly. Occasionally, The Majestic even hosts bigger acts on national tours. There's also a high school garage band scene. My favorite is the 1.21 Gigawatts!

Whenever I travel to a new place, I make sure to do two things - seek out any murals and visit the independent bookstores. We have several wonderful murals in Kankakee and a FANTASTIC local bookstore. One of those murals right on Court Street is painted on the same building that houses Rubber Rose Books and Print, our bookstore that opened in May 2021. Many of our murals are on the main streets and easy to spot. We do have one that was recently finished, though, and shouldn't be missed. It's inside the Kankakee County Museum! Another BRAND NEW one that is being finished as I type these words is in the newly remodeled Teen Zone of the Kankakee Public Library. It is beautiful!

If you talk to me for more than 3 minutes and meet me at least twice, chances are you will learn that I have an extensive earring collection. Most of that collection has come from Kankakee artists, including those made by APalm Creations. Most of my finds have been discovered at the numerous opportunities throughout the last two years at events such as the Winter Wander the Kankakee Public Library hosts each year, the Kankakee Farmers Market, various pop-up events, and at our amazing local stores.

## Hidden Gems by Barbi Brewer-Watson

There are so many hidden gems in the City of Kankakee that make you fall in love with living here. Every Fourth of July my family would load up the van with coolers and chairs to spend the day at Kankakee Community College (KCC) to get a good seat for the Kankakee Valley Symphony concert and fireworks show. It has been and still is my favorite holiday tradition with my family. As I got older, I came to discover the greenspaces that KCC has invested in around their campus since the 1960's. There are walking trails, sculptures, a tree nursery, golf course, and beautiful views of the Kankakee river to experience on campus. When I need a quick break from the day to day challenges or a moment of reflection, I head on out to campus for a reminder of how beautiful our community is. Now, I don't wait until the Fourth of July to enjoy this hidden gem.

It wasn't until my late 20's when I kayaked on the Kankakee River, but it was an amazing experience not only physical but spiritually. The views are breathtaking and the sense of wonder is childlike when you're paddling down the river. I encourage people to take a kayak or canoe trip on the Kankakee River if they can. Once you see the view of the City of Kankakee from the River, you will realize just how much potential our City has and just how possible the impossible can be. Be safe and get out on the river and enjoy our greatest hidden gem.

Snickers is just like me and wants to be everyone's friend. When you have a social dog like I do, you need more dog friendly places to hang out at. The Kankakee Valley Park District (KVPD) opened a free dog park at their River Road complex and we could not be more ecstatic. There is a big dog area and a small dog area and did I mention it is FREE. Your furry friend can run around and get the "zoomies" out of their system while you help them make friends with their neighbors. Finding this hidden gem has been great for Snickers' friends list. Which means more play dates at the dog park for me!



Photo courtesy of Bill Yohnka