



Murals and modern sculptures join traditional historical statues, like this one of Gen. Anthony Wayne in Freimann Square, adding a vibrant feel to public spaces.

FORT WAYNE GEMS

ENJOY FREE ART, PARKS AND HISTORY

You don't have to hunt for Fort Wayne's treasures. They are on display and available for all to enjoy – many for free. And that's intentional.

During the last five years, public art has brightened buildings, streets and sidewalks. City trails connect parks and destinations. Gardens blossom year-round and the largest public genealogy collection in the country helps visitors trace their own roots.

Public art renaissance

Fort Wayne is embracing public art in a big way – literally and figuratively. Sculptures of all sizes and shapes dot the city. Paintings are splashed across the sides of buildings, on crosswalks and even along a 300-foot railroad overpass.

Jerrod Tobias and his wife, Kara, painted two of the murals in 2016 – one wall of the shopping center that houses Firefly Coffee House (www.fireflyfw.coffee) at North Anthony Boulevard and another at The Brass Rail bar (www.brassrailfw.com) on Broadway. Tobias's interest in murals dates to his graduation from the Cleveland

Institute of Art in 2003, but he notes that opportunities were limited after moving back to Fort Wayne.

"Then four years ago, I reached out to (Fort Wayne) Parks and Rec about possibly doing a mural along the Rivergreenway and expressed I wanted to do a really large mural to make a big impact," he relates. "At the same time, they already had a location in mind. They wanted to beautify this corridor over on Columbia along the railroad overpass."

That was the start of a three-year project that culminated in the brightly colored geometric "Metaform" painting stretching 300 feet on



Community members helped paint the early stages of this mural by Jerrod and Kara Tobias along the North Anthony corridor. "Even if you aren't an artist, a lot of people are interested in learning about the process," Jerrod says. "It was an easy way to tap into that community engagement."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Each 2018 issue of BizVoice® will feature a Road Trip Treasure, highlighting Indiana destinations and activities.



East Columbia Street, near the Three Rivers Apartments. Completed in 2017, it brightens this gateway into downtown and the connecting section of a city trail.

More than 10 murals painted by several different artists now beautify public spaces, including crosswalks by the Fort Wayne Museum of Art and inside the Allen County Courthouse. The majority are clustered downtown, where three more should be finished this summer. (A list of locations is available from Visit Fort Wayne.)

Tobias enjoys painting murals “because they inspire me, and I think they inspire other people.” He adds: “It’s accessible to everyone, in comparison to a gallery. ... Public art has a way of reaching everyday people in their daily lives and enhancing the way we experience our town.”

Whimsical sculptures also pop up in unexpected spots – like street corners – with bicycles likely attached. It’s not a few, either. Try 50, in all shapes and sizes. Several incorporate a bicycle theme while others are more freeform. A pinwheel spins outside the Visitors Center, for example, and giant party toothpicks support bikes near Lutheran Health Network.

These Sculpture with a Purpose bike racks were installed in 2014 as part of the 50th anniversary celebration of Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne. (The new Purdue University Fort Wayne name becomes official on July 1.)

Dan Ross, vice president of community development for Arts United, notes, “By having those pieces be sculptural bike racks, it really spurred a connection between physical activity and artistic expression – and brought some partners together in an interesting way.”

The interest in public artworks is expected to continue. In March, the Fort Wayne City Council approved a public art commission and public art fund, which will be financed with a developer give-back program as well as private grants and donations.

Ross likens public art to “putting pieces of art on our living room walls, our outdoor spaces,” adding that it is a way for the community to express itself and for people to experience art for free. It also helps attract creative people, he comments.

Network of parks, trails and rivers

More than 100 miles of trails – paved, boardwalk and multi-use – and three rivers encourage exploration by bike or boat. The 25-mile Fort Wayne Rivergreenway connects or passes near several of the city’s 86 parks and other destinations. Keep an eye out for art benches – yet another example of the city’s embrace of public art.

Lakeside Park and its nationally recognized rose garden is tucked away off the Maumee section of the Rivergreenway. A half-mile path around the park and ponds is perfect for a short stroll. It’s also accessible by car through a charming historic residential neighborhood.

A somewhat quirky park along the St. Joseph



More than 1,500 roses are on display at Lakeside Park, where reflecting pools complement the colorful blossoms. Fifty sculptures that function as bike racks dot the city, including “Heart and Soul” at the Arts Campus. Look up from the atrium of the Auer Center for Arts and Culture for a chance to see the Fort Wayne Ballet practice – and to admire the “Solar Constellation” sculpture.

section claims the gravesite of John Chapman, better known in folklore as Johnny Appleseed. An annual two-day festival in September commemorates Appleseed's life and attracts roughly 300,000 people, according to Kathy Pargmann, marketing manager for Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation. An area for recreational vehicles and tent camping even makes it possible to spend the night outdoors right near downtown and the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum.

Bike rentals to explore the trails and parks can be found at downtown Bike Share locations (bike.zagster.com/fortwayne) and Fort Wayne Outfitters (www.fwoutfitters.com), where kayaks, canoes and stand-up paddleboards are available seasonally. Or sign up for a guided paddle, canal boat tour or pontoon boat tour through Fort Wayne Outfitters or the city parks and recreation department.

The outfitter is next to the large Riverfront Fort Wayne redevelopment construction project that currently affects a short section of the Rivergreenway trail, but rentals and tours will not be interrupted, assures manager Tyler Smith. A temporary boat launch will be ready for warmer weather and a trail detour is available. (Check www.fortwayneparks.org, Trails and Trail

Closures, for updated information.)

This first phase of the Riverfront Fort Wayne development will create Promenade Park, adding a large pavilion, elevated boardwalk, kids' play area and other enhancements to the river and adjacent area. It is expected to open in the summer of 2019.

"The Riverfront will definitely be the biggest feature in Fort Wayne a year from now," offers Visit Fort Wayne Marketing Director Kristen Guthrie.

"(It) represents a massive place-making project," adds Megan Butler, program and events manager for Riverfront Fort Wayne.

In the meantime, many free and low-cost parks and recreation programs will continue to be offered downtown and along the river, including summer movie nights, weekend bird-watching, guided river tours and major events like the Dragon Boat Races at Headwaters Park (June 23 this year).

"There is always something going on during summer weekends at Headwaters Park," Guthrie shares.

Downtown oasis

Regardless of the season or weather, the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory (small admission fee) in the heart of

downtown promises a beautiful respite. With seven different gardens – three indoors – plus a children's Discovery Center, waterfall, gift shop and café, it's easy to enjoy hours of fun.

Butterflies land for the spring seasonal exhibit, through July 8, in the Showcase Garden, which changes displays four times a year. Check out the chrysalises and exotic butterflies, released twice a day in the tented area.

This year's butterfly exhibit is titled "Bugs!" Live, but the creepy crawlies won't get under your skin. A three-sided area with cutouts make them easy to view.

In mid-July, the rotating exhibit area will change to feature horticulture and art in "Art of the Garden," designed with local artist Daniel Dienelt.

"We will have three huge pieces of art specifically for the exhibit," offers manager Chad Shaw.

The towering indoor playground equipment from the "Fairy Tales" winter exhibit will move to Johnny Appleseed Park, adding to that area's attraction.

The conservatory's Tropical Garden features a waterfall along with palms and coffee, orange, pomegranate, guava, cinnamon and cocoa trees. "You don't get to see those every day," Shaw asserts. Orchid fans will

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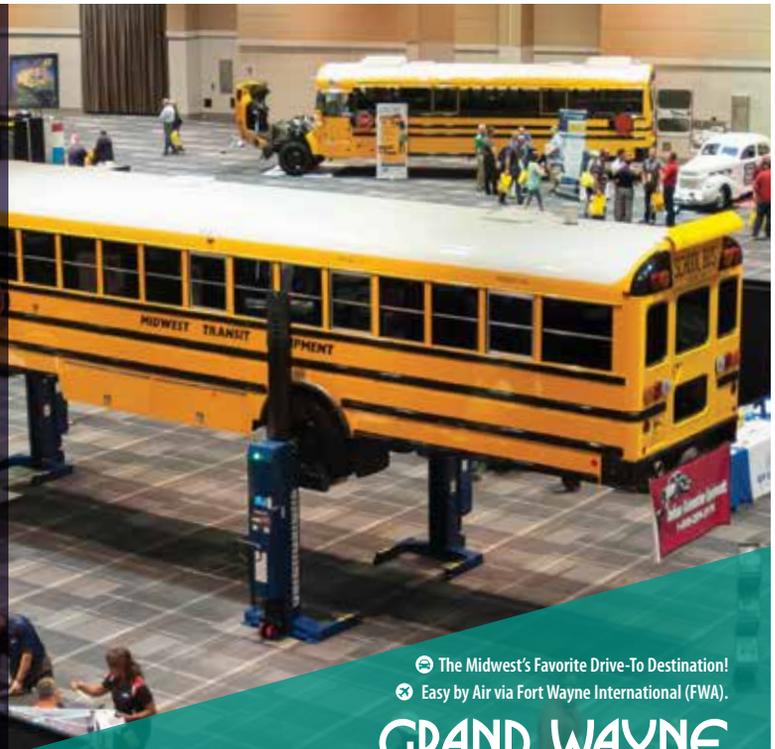
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The Showcase Garden (top) at the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory changes four times a year. The fairy-themed playground equipment from the winter exhibit was expected to move to Johnny Appleseed Park after the “Bugs!” Live butterfly exhibit opened in April. Go from the lush tropics (bottom left) to the arid desert without leaving downtown at the Botanical Conservatory.



appreciate the collection that rotates in as they bloom.

The crown jewel of the Desert Garden is a Saguaro cactus that towers above the other plants and cacti. This arid section largely features plants from the Sonoran Desert and southwest U.S., such as succulents, aloes and non-Sonoran agave. Notice an unusual odor? It’s likely the creosote bush.

Outside seasonal flowers bloom alongside shrubs and trees in the Exploration Garden, a park-like area. The Terrace Garden stages special events, including Botanical Roots, the Friday summer concert series from July through September.

The Beverforden Garden is always open to the public with non-native rhododendrons, azaleas and other acid-loving plants. No admission is necessary to visit the gift shop, atrium and Empyrean Café.

Tracing personal roots

If you’ve been bitten by the family history bug, The Genealogy Center at the Allen County Public Library is well worth your time. It’s the biggest public genealogy collection in the U.S., attracting people from all over to dig deep into their roots. Even those who don’t think they are interested may decide to dabble in family history after getting a glimpse of what’s possible.

The Lincoln Collection

Historical treasures from one of America’s most important people and periods are tucked away inside the downtown Allen County Public Library. Letters to and from Abraham Lincoln, family photographs, newspapers from that era and books about or owned by Lincoln are stored in a vault accessible for research and reference by appointment.

An anteroom exhibits some of the items while three additional cases display a rotating selection. Several Lincoln family photographs were highlighted during a visit, including that of a young boy with hand-drawn modifications.

“We believe Tad (youngest son of Abe Lincoln) doodled the sword belt, mustache and goatee on himself,” notes Lincoln librarian Emily Rapoza during an overview of the displays. She shares stories about various items, pointing out letters to General Sherman during the Civil War, a note Lincoln sent the Cabinet after the Gettysburg Address and a photograph of his wife, Mary, with a ghostly image of the former President behind her.

The treasures are from the private collection previously owned by Lincoln National Insurance and displayed at the former Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne. The state of Indiana was gifted the collection after a competitive process when the museum closed in 2008. Three-dimensional artifacts are curated at the Indiana State Museum in Indianapolis, while two-dimensional items are being digitized and reside at the downtown Allen County Public Library.



Photographs are among the Abraham Lincoln treasures available at the Allen County Public Library.

"I haven't met a person yet who would say, 'I don't really care about my family story. I don't want to know about my people or where they come from,'" observes Curt Witcher, manager of The Genealogy Center.

As to why people travel from across the U.S. and other countries to visit, "The Genealogy Center is the trifecta of resources for genealogists, for family historians," Witcher asserts. It stands out for the size of its collection, access to important genealogical databases and trained librarians available to help.

The physical collection alone includes approximately 1.2 million items covering North America, the British Isles and a good portion of Europe, Witcher notes. This includes microfilm, microfiche, magazines and books.

"We collect anything that puts a person in a place at a time doing something," he explains. Examples include firefighter scrapbooks, school records and church documents. Books and directories are separated by type and region, with one room dedicated to family histories.

"Most library genealogy sections aren't as big as half of our Indiana section," Witcher points out.



Summer is festival season at Headwaters Park, with Germanfest June 3-10 and the Dragon Boat Races June 23 this year.

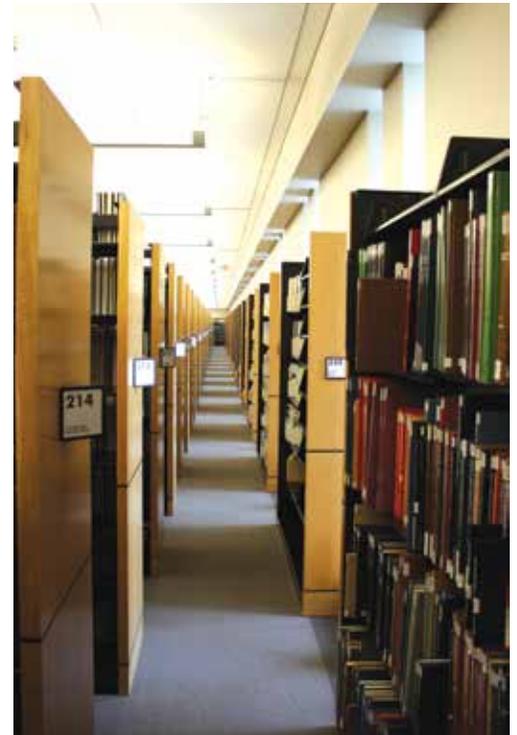
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There's plenty of space (left) for genealogy researchers and family historians to spread out in The Genealogy Center western reading room, where the family history collection lines the walls. Volumes covering states from the Atlantic Ocean to the Midwest stretch along a full city block on the east side of the facility.

Five More Things to Do Downtown

1. Spot bald eagles hunting along the rivers
2. Peek into the Fort Wayne Ballet's practice inside the Auer Center for Arts and Culture
3. Decorate the streets during Chalk Walk, part of the Three Rivers Festival
4. Enjoy lunch from a food truck in Freimann Square on Thursdays in the summer
5. Check out the beer brewing at The Hoppy Gnome



Head brewer Mike Flaherty checks on the Stapler IPA brewing at Gnometown Brewing Company, visible from The Hoppy Gnome gastropub.

“To complement what we have here physically, we subscribe to some of the best genealogical databases,” he adds, likely totaling more than 20 billion searchable records. If an individual subscribed to them directly, Witcher estimates it would cost more than \$1,200 a year.

While not equivalent to visiting in person, family historians and genealogists can access a selection of The Genealogy Center's collection via computer.

However, “probably 80% of our collection is not online because of copyright, because the information aggregators don't think it's important enough to be online, for all kinds of reasons,” Witcher reveals.

The Genealogy Center also offers personalized assistance and a wealth of knowledge and experience in its team of librarians, Witcher stresses. “There's over two centuries of genealogical experience among the seven of us ... a really wide range of talented staff.”

These genealogy librarians specialize in certain areas, including regions and time periods. With the heightened interest in family history brought on by DNA research, Witcher uses the example that, “We all know a little about it, but one of our colleagues has made it her priority. ... She does several consultations a week.”

An appointment isn't required, but if a visitor is looking for help in a specific area – such as DNA or a geographic region – it helps to contact the library in advance so the librarian who can best help is available.

“We really want you to enjoy yourself while you're here and be successful. We want you to find something,” he concludes, whether that's the next chapter in your story, an ancestor or a lost family member.

RESOURCES: Visit Fort Wayne at www.visitfortwayne.com, especially helpful for maps, links to other visitor resources and sample itineraries | Riverfront Fort Wayne at www.riverfrontfw.org | Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation at www.fortwayneparks.org | Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory at www.botanicalconservatory.org | The Genealogy Center at Allen County Public Library at www.genealogycenter.org | Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection at www.lincolncollection.org