

Destination McKinney: Features



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Walking in the Steps of History

McKinney's rich background dates back to the early settlers in North Texas when Collin McKinney, a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence from Mexico, brought pioneers from the Eastern states to live in Texas's Prairies and Lakes region. Incorporated in 1848, the city quickly became the center of commerce in the region, from the merchantiles that opened on the square to the old **Cotton Mill** where farmers' wagons would line up to weigh their crops.

The people, business owners and city officials of McKinney continue to embrace this rich past through renovation projects throughout the historic district. The **historic downtown square** underwent a nine-month renovation in 2008 to widen the sidewalks to be more shopper-friendly and allow for more room for sidewalk dining. New landscaping, additional parking space and new light fixtures and traffic lights were also installed to beautify the home of more than 100 retail shops and a variety of restaurants.

The historic **Collin County Courthouse** is the centerpiece of the downtown square. Built in 1875 and remodeled in 1927, it closed in 1979 and sat unused until the city's major renovation project in 2003 transforming the building into the **McKinney Performing Arts Center (MPAC)** in 2006. The building is an historic landmark and property of the county, so the stage in the 425-seat Courtroom Theater can be broken down should the county wish to use the courtroom for a trial. The theater also houses a *silent movie Wurlitzer pipe organ* that's used when MPAC shows silent movies. The building's old vault is now an art gallery regularly exhibiting local works of art.

Chestnut Square Historic Village is comprised of the city and county's oldest existing buildings. The village is the site of activities like the weekly Farmers Market (from April to November), Living History Days, Ghost Walks, school field trips, summer Pioneer Adventure Camps, the Killis Melton Ice Cream Crank-Off and occasional concerts. It is also a popular place for weddings and family celebrations.

Built by the Heard family in 1900, the majestic 7,000-square-foot **Heard-Craig House** served as the center for McKinney's social, business, art and literary activities. The home was left via a trust to the people of McKinney and restored with original furnishings, heirlooms and art produced by the home's owner, Kathryn Heard-Craig, and many historic Texas artists.

The **Collin County History Museum** is housed in McKinney's former post office, built in 1911. Visitors can see exhibits here portraying Collin County history and containing artifacts from both the early pioneer era to the Civil War and beyond. Special exhibits are launched regularly and are integrated with modern technology, making them more accessible to all ages.

Pecan Grove Cemetery, sitting a couple miles south of the historic district on property originally granted by the Republic of Texas in 1845, is the final resting place for many Texas pioneers including Governors, gunslingers and heroes of the Texas Revolution, Mexican War, Civil War, and every war thereafter.

Taking in the Arts

Whether it's a concert, a play or musical, a dance recital or an art exhibit, there are plenty of opportunities to experience culture in McKinney.

The **McKinney Performing Arts Center** in the historic courthouse holds concerts, comedy nights, touring stage plays and community theater productions as well as music or dance performances. The basement also features a unique art gallery where local artists' work is regularly showcased.

Community theater and youth productions also take the stage at the **Performance Hall** (now owned by the First Methodist Church, but available for outside rentals) that sits across the street from the **Heard-Craig House** where historic Texas artwork is hanging on the walls throughout the home.

Concerts are also held at city parks in McKinney on a **portable stage** that is fully equipped with lights and sound, and large enough to accommodate a full band set-up.

The downtown square is home to art galleries where a variety of local and guest artists' work is on display –**The LAST Gallery** and **The Cove**. Many artists work in studios located in the historic district as well. More small galleries are starting to open up around the square and several of the restaurants now display local art.

Other art is on display throughout the city as well, in parks and at office buildings, in the form of **bronze sculptures, fountains** and **murals**. McKinney's first public mural, painted by artist Misty Oliver-Foster is located on the south wall of the Cadillac Pizza Pub, located at 112 S. Kentucky just south of the historic downtown square.

Shopping 'Til You Drop

McKinney offers an eclectic mix of shopping choices from nostalgic mom-and-pop type shops to upscale designer boutiques. On the east side of town, McKinney's **historic downtown square** is well-known in the region for its antique stores, but shoppers can also find upscale, one-of-a-kind clothing and home décor boutiques, Texas décor and one-of-a-kind nostalgic-themed shops including a popcorn store that carries nostalgic candy, a magic and fun shop, a quilt store, a doll shop and a soda fountain. People can also shop for produce and other offerings like meat, honey and herbs from local growers at **Chestnut Square Historic Village's Farmers Market** from March to October. A **general store** is also on-site at the village where souvenirs and historic-themed items are available.

The **historic district** is also home to several **salons and spas**, making it a perfect location for “**girlfriend getaways**” where small groups can shop, dine, relax in a spa and spend the night in one of the city's historic bed and breakfasts.

McKinney is also home to one of the largest flea markets in North Texas, **Third Monday Trade Days**, featuring more than 900 vendors and attracting roughly 25,000 shoppers each month. Third Monday Trade Days is held the weekend before the third Monday of each month. Also fairly new to McKinney is the **Old Red Lumberyard Vintage and Junk Market**, usually held the same weekend as Third Monday Trade Days.

Close to McKinney

Throughout McKinney and along its borders, popular chain stores and bargain (resale) shopping abound throughout the city's shopping centers. McKinney doesn't have a mall, but the **Allen Premium Outlets** are a mere 5 miles south on Central Expressway (Hwy. 75) and **Stonebriar Mall** is 15 miles southwest on Highway 121. And large shopping complexes in neighboring communities to our south (Allen and Fairview) feature well-known stores like JCPenney, Macy's, Whole Foods Market, Babies R Us, and Cabela's.

Communing with Nature

Nature enthusiasts or just those wanting to enjoy the outdoors have plenty of opportunities to commune with nature in McKinney.

The southeast corner of the city offers wildlife, lush wooded areas and wetlands at the 289-acre **Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary**. Nature trails wind through the different habitats, through an exotic animal exhibit and in the spring and summer, a butterfly house. The prairie and wetlands habitats are popular places for bird enthusiasts with scientists banding birds to track their travels and birdwatchers enjoying the many varieties that call the Heard home or visit there on their treks north or south. Starting in late Summer or early Fall into winter, life-size animatronic dinosaurs take up annually residence along the nature trails, delighting young and old alike as they move and roar in the popular visiting **Dinosaurs Live!** exhibit. Inside the museum, visitors will find educational exhibits, living specimens of amphibians and reptiles (primarily snakes), and display cases of animals from the region. Outdoor exhibits feature the Animals of the World and a butterfly garden featuring native flowering plants and a butterfly house (Spring to Fall).

Myers Park and Event Center in North McKinney features 165 acres of rolling hills, a lake, open spaces and a rustic wooded area where campers can hike in with their gear for reserved camping sessions. Myers Park also features a lake-side gazebo, outdoor pole barn, stage, indoor arena, and party barn, making it an ideal location for outdoor gathering such as company picnics, corporate retreats, outdoor weddings or family gatherings with plenty of room for outdoor activities and games.

Out near Myers Park, the city's **Erwin Park** features camping sites as well as challenging bike trails. Picnic spots and a playground also offer families and other groups a space to enjoy the outdoors together.

For fishing and bird enthusiasts and those who want to spend a day at the lake boating or swimming, **Lake Lavon** is a mere 15 to 20 minutes east of McKinney.

Many of the city's other parks, neighborhoods and golf courses feature small lakes, allowing residents and visitors to bird watch and fish without leaving the city.

Going 'Green'

Businesses, schools and the city government in McKinney are all embracing "green" initiatives and building materials in their facilities and operations. Three of the buildings in McKinney are "firsts" in the country in the environmentally-conscious movement.

Built in 2005, "**The McKinney Experiment**," a **Wal-Mart** test store for environmentally friendly processes and technologies, was the first of its kind and is one of only two such experimental Wal-Mart stores in the world. From the ventilation and lighting systems to the asphalt used in the parking lot and windmills that generate energy, this store tests various environmental and cost-saving methods of operation and building techniques. Those that prove cost-effective are then incorporated into other stores in the chain.

Pat Lobb Toyota is the first automobile dealership in the country to be certified as a LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) building with recycled materials used for flooring and walls, collection of rain water, recycled water for heating and car washing, and special lighting bulbs and fixtures, among other "green" practices. McKinney also is the home of West World Holding's **McKinney Green Office Building**, the country's first privately developed LEED platinum building.

Other organizations or businesses in McKinney that are implementing "green" initiatives include **El Dorado Motors** dealership and the **McKinney Independent School District** which boasts four environmentally-friendly elementary school campuses. The **City of McKinney** also has been working with Texas A&M to produce new drought-resistance plant materials for use in landscaping. A special garden is also open to teach the public about utilizing these plants to help cut back on watering and erosion. The city also has an active recycling program.

The **Chambersville Tree Farms** just 10 miles north of McKinney is an earth-friendly, all-organic operation. Rain water is collected off the barn and stored in tanks. Part of this water is then siphoned into tanks where it is mixed with organic compost elements for irrigation of all the trees and roses grown on the 10-acre farm. Small man-made lakes on the 260-plus acre property were also dug to collect and store rainwater. (The tree farm is also home to the **Chambersville Heritage Rose Garden**, one of only four such gardens in the U.S. and open by appointment only.)

McKinney also boasts a winery and vineyard as well as a brewery that both use Earth-friendly practices in their operations. **Wales Manor Vineyard and Winery** composts all grape matter not used in their wines to use in the vineyard. **Franconia Brewery** not only recycles all the hops matter remaining after filtering the beer by giving it to local dairy farmers, but also recycles or reuses all packing materials and cools the building through a system running through the concrete flooring which utilizes cold air from the refrigerators where the beer is stored.

Tours of most of these facilities can be arranged by calling ahead of time. The staff at the MCVB will also be happy to schedule one or more tours by calling them at 888-649-8499.

Playing Ball or Enjoying Recreation & Fitness

McKinney offers sports and fitness enthusiasts a wide variety of sporting options, becoming a popular sports destination in the metroplex. Thousands of people from youth sports to professional golfers and runners visit McKinney each year for events including baseball, soccer, softball, golf, running and cycling. McKinney also has martial arts academies that hold regional tournaments, cheerleading and gymnastics schools that compete in meets and gyms where young and old can stay healthy.

Baseball facilities like the **Ballfields at Craig Ranch** are home to youth sports including local leagues and Super Series tournaments as well as the college McKinney Marshals and a minor league professional team. The **City of McKinney** also has many fields (baseball, softball and soccer) throughout the city that bring youth teams to town as well as high school-aged teams competing in the annual **Mickey Mantle World Series** at Al Alford Field.

Thousands of youth soccer players visit each summer to compete in June's **Flamefest** tournament, while McKinney's **ProSpirit**, a competitive cheerleading academy, **Northstar Gymnastics** and **Vasquez Taekwondo** bring meets to the city during the year.

Craig Ranch's **Tournament Players Club (TPC)** course, a private/members only facility, hosted the **Nationwide Tour** in November 2008. Renowned golf coach Hank Haney opened a training academy at **Westridge Golf Course**, a public course on McKinney's west side. McKinney also has three member-only country club courses as well as public courses such as **Oak Hollow Golf Course** and adjacent driving ranges.

In 2007, Olympic track gold medalist Michael Johnson built the **Michael Johnson Performance Center** in Craig Ranch, a 24,000-square-foot indoor training facility that attracts both youth and professional athletes to train in its state-of-the-art facilities.

Runners and triathlon enthusiasts come to McKinney often throughout the year for events like the **Believe Run** on Thanksgiving weekend, the **Stonebridge Half-Marathon** in February, the **Kiwanis Historical Triathlon** in April, the **Melon Dash** in August, and many other races.

Adriatica at Stonebridge Ranch:

Visiting the Mediterranean without Leaving North Texas

Adriatica is a Croatian city-in-the-making, right in the heart of McKinney. The brainchild of developer Jeffery Blackard of the Blackard Group, Adriatica is based on the village of Supetar near the tip of the island of Brac in Croatia, by which Blackard was inspired on a trip to this region. Adriatica embraces the beauty and charm of this distinctly Mediterranean harbor town, with its stone streets, carvings, palm trees, and Croatian architecture. This unique McKinney attraction will be a popular destination in itself, featuring retail, dining, residential, healthcare and office space as well as a wedding chapel, a bell tower, and a floating amphitheater stage.

Some residential units are already complete with others planned as the harbor is completed. A harbor shopping district as well as residential units surround the parking garage.

Due to an economic downturn in 2008 and 2009, development halted briefly and the bulk of Adriatica changed hands. Residential growth resumed in earnest as did the addition of more restaurants and retail stores.

Among the retail, dining and entertainment establishments are The Guitar Sanctuary & Event Center, a Starbucks, Zin Zen wine tasting room and bistro, Cavalli's Pizza Napoletana, Harry's on the Harbor, Gregory's Bistro, Starwood Café and an upscale florist.

The Blackard Group planned Adriatica with the environment in mind. Recycled building materials such as rock, sculptures and other building elements were brought in from other locations rather than buying new materials. Plants used in landscaping are drought-resistant to lessen the need for watering. The statue of Jesus that sits just over the door to the **wedding chapel** is a replica of a 300-year-old sculpture brought to McKinney from Europe. A bell for the chapel was also a gift from the Croatian government, unveiling in December 2010. One of the buildings in Adriatica, now home to the **Silk Road Thai Restaurant**, features tall columns in the front, brought to McKinney from Chicago's Morton Manor (of the **Morton Salt** family) when it was torn down in early 2008 following the death of Mr. Morton. The columns give the building a very stately formal appearance, making it a very identifiable landmark on the north end of the Adriatica development.

Education:

A Quickly Growing School District, Private Schools & Collin College

McKinney is known within the state for its educational opportunities, within the public school district (McKinney Independent School District), at its growing private schools (McKinney Christian Academy and Concordia Christian Academy) and the expanding Collin College.

McKinney Independent School District

McKinney ISD has more students enrolled in its schools (more than 27,000 in 2013-14) than the entire city had residents less than two decades ago (23,000 in 1994). The MISD opened its fifth middle school in 2008-09, its 20th elementary school in 2010, and the newly-constructed Herman Lawson Early Childhood Center for students in Pre-Head Start, Head Start, Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities (PPCD), and Pre-Kindergarten programs that also opened in 2010. This campus features a 90,000-square-foot, age-specific design, three outdoor playgrounds, and a group activity area. Known within Texas for its special education department, the MISD offers hands-on support and training to parents of students with a wide range of special learning needs including a top-rated autism program.

At the secondary level, the district offers a wide range of pre-AP coursework for high school students as well as covering the costs of all Advancement Placement testing for students in these higher-level classes. Also, a Health Occupational Services program prepares students for work within the healthcare field, including the awarding of a Certified Nursing Assistant classification to each student completing the program. **(Contact: Cody Cunningham, Assistant Superintendent of Communications, 469-742-4095, ccunningham@mckinneyisd.net, www.mckinneyisd.net)**

Private Christian Schools

Both the McKinney Christian Academy (MCA) and Concordia Christian Academy (CCA) offer specialized Christian educational programs for families seeking educational opportunities outside the public school framework. MCA offers a full educational range, from kindergarten through senior year of high school. CCA provides learning through elementary school grades.

(Contacts: MCA: 214-544-COLT, www.mckinneychristian.org); CCA: 972-562-9944, www.concordiachristian.org)

Collin College

Formerly Collin County Community College District, the recently renamed Collin College got a facelift for the 2009-2010 school year at its McKinney campus with the addition of a new library, parking garage and expanded classroom space. The upper education campus sits the junction at Highways 121 and 75 where students are able to complete higher-level college courses and degree programs in conjunction with several full-program four-year universities within the state. In 2015, the college opened a conference center just north of the Central Park campus at Hwy. 380/University and Community. **(Contact: 972-548-6790, www.collin.edu)**

Imagine International Academy of North Texas

In August 2012, this tuition-free magnet school opened in McKinney, offering school-aged children from elementary into middle school age a new option to public education. As the oldest class in this school (8th grade when the school opened) matures, the school will begin teaching a high school curriculum and eventually hold college-prep related programs and a graduation ceremony. Through the thoughtful crafting of a robust curriculum, the Imagine International Academy of North Texas offers a program of education for students in grades K-12 to prepare them for success in college and after. Academic rigor, a focus on critical thinking with a purpose, leadership training, and exposure to a variety of world viewpoints provide our students with the tools they need to become leaders in a global society. **(Contact: School Director, 214-491-1500, www.imagenorthtexas.org)**