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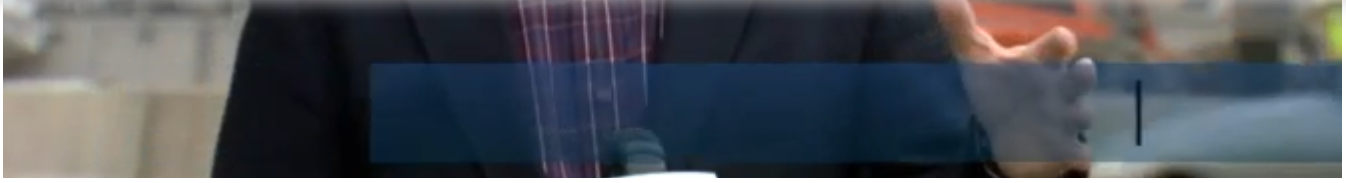
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# New investments, visitors flocking to Rock County community of Beloit

Wisconsin's 21st Largest City Enjoying Renaissance





Many Wisconsinites would be surprised to learn that Beloit is in the midst of a renaissance.



By: [Vince Vitrano](#)

*Posted at 5:14 AM, May 10, 2021 and last updated 7:01 AM, May 10, 2021*

BELOIT — “I kind of feel like it happened overnight because now people don't question Beloit like they did back then,” said Nikki Chadwick, a Beloit native and small business owner.

Back then? Not that far back. If we’re being honest, many Wisconsinites would be surprised to learn that Beloit is in the midst of a renaissance. It’s a revitalization that includes boutique hotels, high-end dining, downtown shopping, and attractions that draw visitors from around the region. And they’re just getting started.

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If you've driven in that part of Rock County recently, you'll note major improvements to the interchange where I-43 meets I-39/90 just outside of Beloit. The project is nearly finished, and it will make it even easier to drive on past, as so many have done over the decades. Little to see or do in this industrial city that lost a lot of its industry.



Vince Vitrano/TMJ4

That's changed. Even people born and raised in Beloit say it feels sudden, though they know it's been a sustained effort.

Beloit back then was that it wasn't a good place to work, or shop, or live."

Chadwick was born and raised in Beloit and three years ago opened Walnut Creek Apparel and Gifts in the heart of downtown. The shop is like something you'd expect in popular Wisconsin tourist spots like Door County, or Minocqua. It's filled with gifts and crafts, locally produced novelties, and wall hangings with quippy sayings about wine, and life in Wisconsin.

"I could see the downtown growing," she remembered. "The events that they have, just the community in general was starting to become more of a destination. So, I figured having a storefront downtown was going to be my best option to grow my business. It has been."

Just a short walk from downtown, the sound of construction equipment fills the air. The Beloit Snappers' new stadium just saved Minor League Baseball in this City.

"Really without this, Beloit would not have a team in 2021." That blunt statement from Jeff Jurgella, new to the Snappers as President of Gateway Professional Baseball. "There were 40 communities that lost their team. Major League Baseball and Minor League Baseball went from 160 teams to 120 no question, without the investment in this facility, Beloit would have been on the chopping block."





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The \$35 million ballpark, called ABC Supply Stadium, is set to open this summer. Jurgella, a Wisconsin native most recently from Madison, was himself surprised at everything happening in Beloit.

“Yeah. It's been a long time. I've been very transparent with the people I've met here, I hadn't been here in probably 15 years. To see the transformation, the destination this town has become. As I hang around here on weekends and see all the plates from Illinois. People driving up from Rockford or the outskirts of Chicago, there's a lot of momentum.”

There's so much momentum, even the convention and visitors bureau, Visit Beloit, is adding a \$2 million expansion, “...Beloit is a much different Beloit than what many people might remember from the seventies, eighties, and even nineties.” That's Celestino Ruffini, CEO of Visit Beloit.

THAT OVER THE YEARS DESCRIBE IT AS AN OVERNIGHT TRANSFORMATION, KRAMER DETAILS the decades-long effort starting with cleaning up the riverfront and revitalizing downtown. “The happening has been a long time in the making. Beloit’s story, maybe our notoriety or the awareness to Beloit is new to many, but the groundwork really started in the late 80’s.”



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It’s been a community effort, but the primary benefactor is billionaire Diane Hendricks. Co-founder of ABC Supply, Hendricks’ portfolio also includes hospitality and real estate companies. Her name is both figuratively, and literally on a lot of the development.

“Diane and her late husband Ken, their mark on this community will be known for generations to come,” Celestino said. “Their decision to make Beloit home



incredible. Not only for us as residents of this community but for us in the tourism industry.”

Those investments include a pair of boutique hotels that rent rooms north of \$200 per night. Buildings that house new restaurants, including a high-end steakhouse, are both renovated older structures and new construction the blends perfectly into the landscape.



Vince Vitrano/TMJ4

[Visit Beloit](#) is full of events and happenings this summer as COVID loosens its grip on Wisconsin. The farmers market on Saturdays is one of the largest in the state, and the Snappers hope to be in their new ballpark in July.

quarter of a billion dollars.

As she greets more and more new faces at her downtown shop, Nikki Chadwick believes things are just getting started. “I think it's just going to go up. More businesses are going to hear about Beloit and want to bring their businesses here. More people are going to want to come here to live, to shop, to visit, I can see it just growing bigger and bigger.”

The hope is the new freeway ramps will make Beloit an easier place to drive to... not just through.

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