

Fairfield

This picturesque southeastern community stands out for its blend of cultures and appetite for the arts.

Text by
LAURA BOGUMIL,
photography by
MARK TADE



ourtowns

On a typical weekend in the southeast Iowa town of Fairfield, residents of all ages and cultural backgrounds gather to celebrate artwork, music, and food. With a population slightly under 10,000, the town embraces its distinct atmosphere and uses its art galleries, downtown square, and natural areas as gathering places for residents who call Fairfield home.



(Left) Bill Teeple contributes to Fairfield's rich art culture. (Below) Christopher Kufner (right) and wife Kim's travels to France and Italy offer inspiration for his artwork featured in Americus Gallery.



For much of its history, Fairfield was a typical rural community with an agricultural foundation that embraced the traditional values of hard work and leadership. In 1974, Maharishi University of Management (then known as Maharishi International University) purchased Parsons College, a financially unstable Fairfield school. "The move of the university to Fairfield was a real turning point for the community," explains Craig Pearson, MUM executive vice president.



(Above) The marching band adds musical flair to the Kiwanis Kids Day Parade.

Adding diversity and blending cultures, the school, which focuses on consciousness-based learning to foster intelligence, is a magnet for people who practice Transcendental Meditation — a form of meditation that focuses on reaching the brain's full potential. In addition to its emphasis on education, the institution strives to create an influence of harmony and peace in society through the use of meditation. After a 1979 world peace conference, 800 new residents moved to Fairfield at the urging of the university's founder, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Within the next two years, two large golden domes for meditation were built

on the campus, attracting thousands more from across the globe. Now serving about 700 students from 62 countries, the university continues to influence the culture of Fairfield while embracing the area's roots.

"Through the integration of new Iowans with old Iowans, the town gets a chance to reinvent itself with the new cultures that people bring," says Mayor Ed Malloy. "The by-products of those cultures are economy, art, and culture." In

The move of Maharishi University of Management to Fairfield brought change to the community. The institution and other similar establishments, such as the Raj Ayur Vedic Health Spa (below), have added diversity to Fairfield.

the past 25 years, Fairfield has undeniably reinvented itself into a creative, diverse community boasting more than 20 art galleries filled with work from local artists, a thriving live music and theater scene, and a tantalizing mix of cuisines. "The boundaries of who's who in Fairfield are fading away,"



The Sthapatya Veda Development (above), and the MUM Men's Meditation Dome (below), strive to create an influence of harmony and peace.





(Left) Locals and visitors alike gather in Howard Park for the farmers market. (Below) Ed Malloy, mayor, embraces the atmosphere and culture of Fairfield.

says resident Holly Moore, “and I just see this great group of people all moving forward together.”

Moore has lived in the community for 30 years and has recently been involved with Fairfield’s First Fridays Art Walk, a cultural celebration started several years ago by resident Stacey Hurlin.

During First Fridays hundreds of residents and visitors gather in the square to tour nearby galleries and take in creative exhibits from area theater and music organizations. Moore, who headed marketing and event coordination in 2005, says she encourages artists from all over to join in the fun. “The more the merrier,” she says. “We’re so excited to provide exhibit space for everyone.”

One local artist featured is Christopher Kufner, who displays his colorful Impressionistic oil paintings in Americus



Gallery. Kufner and his wife, Kim, travel each year to France and Italy, which provides inspiration for several paintings on display, such as Tuscan landscapes with rolling hills and cypress trees as well as a series of French poppy field paintings. Kufner has been working on a new series of paintings called “Gemscapes,” which are colorful oil paintings based on Australian opals. “There is something about forms and color organized by nature that makes something seemingly abstract become fluid and coherent,” he says.

The artistic emphasis has spilled over into government buildings — 18 local artists loan paintings to the City of Fairfield to display in City Hall, turning the building into its own gallery. “Anywhere you go [in Fairfield], you’re going to find artwork,” Malloy says.

Art can also be found tucked into Fairfield’s landscape. A piece of public art was completed in 2004. Tiles, created by Fairfield High School advanced art students, mirror design elements from Loudon barn catalogs and are placed along the length of a bridge that stretches over the Burlington Northern Railroad and connects Walton Lake to Chautauqua Park. Local artist Judy Bales designed a steel framework and coordinated the tiles, transforming the entire bridge into a piece of art.

If You Go

Fairfield Area Chamber of Commerce:
641/472-2111

Where to stay:

Best Western, Fairfield Inn
641/472-2200

Economy Inn
641/472-4161

Landmark Inn
641/472-4152

Polly’s Bed and Breakfast
641/472-2517

Super 8
641/ 469-2000

Favorite places to eat:

2nd Street Coffee House
51 North Second Street
641/472-7587

Azteca, Inc., Mexican Cuisine Restaurant
116 North Main
641/472-1416

Cafe Paradiso (coffeehouse)
607 West Broadway
641/472-0856

Ching Dow Restaurant
117 East Burlington
641/469-5858

Entree Cafe
203 West Broadway
641/472-4328

George’s Pizza
57 West Broadway
641/472-9119

Gupta Vegetarian Restaurant
51 South Court Street
641/472-0548

India Cafe
50 West Burlington
641/472-1792

Kokomo’s Kafe (in Best Western, Fairfield Inn)
2200 West Burlington
641/472-2200

Petit Paris
108 North Main Street
641/470-1624

(Right) Ron Blair (second from the left), chairman of the Jefferson County Trails Council, works with others to make Fairfield's trails system more comprehensive. (Below) Revelations is a gathering place offering used and new books and renowned for its authentic Italian wood-fired pizzas.

The project was part of the community's master trails plan, which calls for the completion of a 17-mile loop along with the connection of various paths to other trails and popular gathering sites. Ron Blair, chairman of the Jefferson County Trails Council, is working with other officials and five graduate students from the University of Iowa to make the system more comprehensive. At the project's completion, residents will be able to walk, run, and bike through prairie preserves, wetlands, and parks and reach common destinations within the town. "The trails get a lot of use," Malloy says. "Everyone has their favorite spot." In addition to the recreational trails, a heritage path leads walkers past historic treasures, and water trails connect to rivers and three area lakes ideal for canoeing, kayaking, and fishing.

Many of the city's eleven parks will also be connected to the surrounding trails. Waterworks Park on North B Street is



ideal for swimming and fishing. And each Saturday morning and Wednesday afternoon, locals gather in Howard Park (North Main and Grimes Streets) for the farmers market.

"We also have so many other things than just those festivals," 2005 market promoter Diana Krystofiak says. "We have people selling herbal oils, vinegar, and a woman who makes homemade Play-Doh." Other unusual items up for sale include handcrafted wooden pens, homemade face creams and lotions, and smoothies blended on-site using solar energy. The market was also given a boost by the area's Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign that stretches across seven counties and strengthens markets for locally grown food.

These collaborations, developments, and cultural revivals lend a unique atmosphere to Fairfield. Luci Ismert, director of the Fairfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, has perhaps developed the best summary of the town's character. A year ago, she came for an Art Walk and fell in love with the town. Since then, she's adopted a catchphrase to use when describing the area to guests and newcomers: "Fairfield feels good." 🌿

— Laura Bogumil is a freelance writer from Des Moines.



Regina's Restaurant
(dinner only)
607 West Broadway
641/472-1087

Revelations
112 North Main
641/472-6733

Thai Noodle House
59 North Court Street
641/472-0222

***Favorite places
to stop during First
Fridays Art Walk:***

Americus Gallery
100 West Burlington
Avenue

Emerald Gallery
808 North B Street

Flower Fine Art Gallery
105 South Third Street

Galleria Obscura
62 1/2 North Court

Gallery 51 East/ICON 2
51 East Broadway

**Henderson's Frames
& Gallery**
53 West Broadway

Skyline Gallery
57 1/2 North Court

**Temple Studio
of Fine Art**
111 North Main

Thymely Solutions
104 North Court

21st Century Books
108 West Broadway

Winter Moon Pottery
57 1/2 North Court



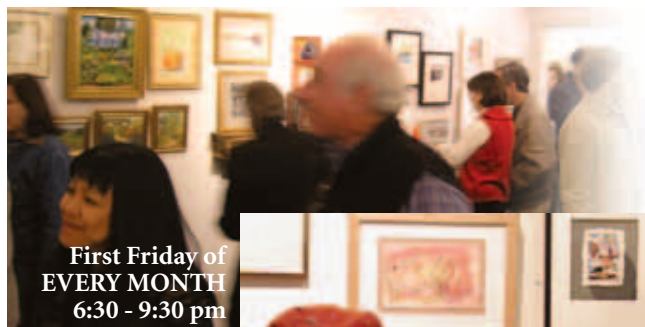
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