## The Year In Review: 2020

## Belleville perseverance, adaptability aids during trying year, mayor says

Even though the pandemic has strained economies all over the world, the city of Belleville has maintained momentum on several existing projects while welcoming new businesses and residents.

"2020 has been extremely challenging for cities and towns throughout the country," said Mayor Mark Eckert. "It has been an emotional roller coaster and a financial nightmare for small businesses. But even with that in mind, we've attracted businesses and residents and have seen some of our local businesses pushing to survive the pandemic and actually thriving."

Some of those businesses include Bennie's Pizza Pub which is expanding from 124 E. Main to a larger location just down the street. Additionally, Right at Home, a home health-care provider, relocated from Collinsville to Belleville, and Circa Boutique & Gifts has expanded its online presence and delivery options, reaching more customers throughout the metro area than ever.

"I want to commend our local business owners who have adapted during these times," said Eckert. "Without a doubt, it's been challenging, but their perseverance and adaptability during this time of crisis has not only been inspiring, but really shows the kind of community Belleville is."

As of the top of December, the city issued 77 commercial occupancy permits in 2020. Some of the new restaurants to try for the new year include Sugar High, a café and bakery at 100 E. Main St., Joe & Onie's, a coffee shop and café at 18 E. Main St., and Nettie B's, a Southern-

style restaurant at 8201 W. Main St.

Progress continues at the Lofts on the Square, a 47-unit senior living facility on Belleville's Public Square, adjacent to the fountain. Likewise, new apartments on Route 161 on the east end of town will be a great place for military members from nearby Scott Air Force Base to call home. The city's inaugural Infill Redevelopment Project, which was piloted on E. 'D' St. is elevating that neighborhood greatly and retaining architecturally significant buildings.

The city has also seen progress by its many partnering organizations throughout the city. The Belleville Mural Project installed another mural at 801 W. Main St., adding art to the newly finished streetscape from 6-12th streets. Additionally, Memorial Hospital was named as a "High Performing" hospital and Memorial Care Center was named as one of "America's Best Nursing Homes" by U.S. News & World Report. Memorial Hospital also received the MAGNET designation by the American Nursing Credentialing Center, something only 6 percent of hospitals in the nation have received.

This year, the city received funding through the Rebuild Illinois Grant, dedicated to infrastructure improvements and demolitions of derelict properties in addition to the construction of a splash pad at Bicentennial Park.

The city also received \$150,000 in Local CURE's Act funding for the Belleville COVID-19 Business Recovery Grant Program.

These funds will go to locally owned small businesses affected by the pandemic.

## St. Louis Downtown Airport, partners push ahead on projects

Air traffic was slow for much of 2020, but it's been full speed ahead on various projects to enhance St. Louis Downtown Airport located in Cahokia and Sauget.

Work to improve the Curtis Steinburg Drive and Sauget Business Boulevard intersection was nearing completion in late December. This, along with recent improvements to the roadway entering the airport, will reduce travel times for employees at both Gulfstream and FedEx and improve first-mile, last-mile delays. Both projects were supported by more than \$1.5 million in federal and state infrastructure grants secured by the Village of Sauget and the Airport.

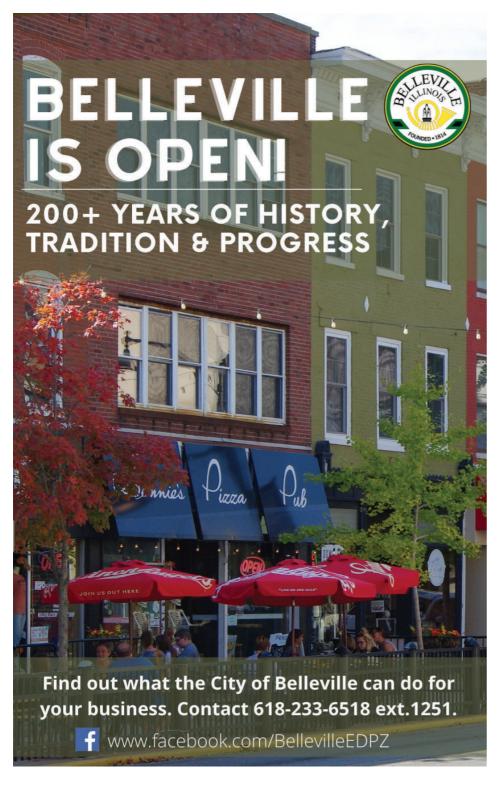
The village also secured a Surface Transportation Block Grant for safety improvements along Sauget Business Boulevard, including new lighting and guardrails. Construction has been approved by the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Federal Aviation Administration and bid letting is scheduled for June 2021. The project starts at the intersection of Curtis Steinburg Drive and goes to Goose Lake Drive. A second grant through this program will cover related safety improvements to follow in 2024. Total cost of both projects is just over \$1.7 million, and the village participation will be 25 percent. Design is also underway for improvements at the intersection of Route 3 and Queeny Avenue. The draft agreement from IDOT has been received and bid-letting is expected in the spring.

A partnership with Gulfstream has improved storm water management on the east side of the airport, and work to cut deeper and wider ditches that will be moved more frequently is almost complete.

"This airport is the region's front door for business aviation, and the potential for additional growth in and around the airport is enhanced when we provide a welcoming environment for existing and prospective tenants, employees and guests," said Rich Sauget Jr., mayor of Sauget.

As COVID-19 has significantly impacted air traffic across the nation, one ripple effect nationwide has been a sharp decline in fuel sales. Thanks to grant funding awarded through the CARES Act, St. Louis Downtown Airport secured \$69,000 to help offset operational costs — including some of the COVID-19 related loss of fuel sales — which was a big win.

Another impact of the pandemic was a reduction in control tower operation hours. Typically open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily, the tower operated from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the first few months, meaning pilots using the airport after hours had to rely on alternate communication forms. St. Louis Downtown Airport continued to operate safely while making necessary adjustments. By mid-May, as some restrictions were lifted, flight training and travel began to resume at the Airport. The FAA extended the control tower hours back in June and it is currently open from 7:30 a.m. until 8 p.m., adding more hours back into the operating schedule to cover the popular evening flying time.





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