The revitalization of Downtown St. Louis gained speed over the past year with many significant projects launched or completed. Ballpark Village Phase II is well on its way to being the new home for PWC, Live by Loews!, and hundreds of residents. The St. Louis Aquarium at Union Station will open this fall. The Last Hotel will open this summer, and construction of the new Moxy STL hotel and 21c Museum Hotel was announced. The highly anticipated Hotel Saint Louis opened to much fanfare, and delicious new restaurants, Gringo and the Hi-Pointe, opened in the MX. Laclede’s Landing saw the opening of its first multi-family residential development, Peper Lofts.

These high-profile developments tell a story of momentum, but there are many stories that don’t make the headlines. That’s where MyDowntownSTL comes in. We tell “the rest of the story.” In this booklet, we have featured just some of the stories of Downtown that you may not have heard. In these stories and videos, we talk to the people behind the projects. We highlight aspects of a development, perspective of a business owner, and unique stories of residents that you may not learn in a quick soundbite on the news.

Visit MyDowntownSTL (MyDowntownSTL.com) regularly to learn the rest of the story of Downtown St. Louis. And, pass it on!

Missy Kelley
President & CEO, Downtown STL, Inc.
In Memoriam – Vincent J. Bommarito

Vincent Bommarito was the proprietor of Tony’s Restaurant in Downtown St. Louis for over 50 years. He was an advocate for Downtown St. Louis who inspired others through his actions in caring for the streets of Downtown. Vince passed away on April 2, 2019. Following is the tribute to Vince that Missy wrote the morning of his passing.

“Missy, Downtown is only 10-feet tall.” This was one of the many nuggets Vince passed down to me at our lunches over the past three years. He understood the importance of the pedestrian experience and explained that people walking around don’t look up, so you have to make what is in their line of sight beautiful.

Vince was passionate about Downtown. Before the Community Improvement District was created, which spurred the development of our Clean Team that sweeps the sidewalks and picks up trash (among other things), Vince kept brooms at his restaurant and hired people to sweep around Downtown. One time he hosted a clean-up day and hundreds of students from across St. Louis participated in cleaning up the streets and sidewalks. He brought in the Bob Cuban band, and of course, fed the kids toasted ravioli.

For years, he would annually award the restaurant or property owner that made the biggest improvement in the area surrounding their building. He said it really caught on and people would call him to make sure he saw their new sign or flowerpots, asking if that might secure them the award.

Vince has been involved with Downtown STL, Inc. since 1958 when the organization began. In 1991, Vince was honored with the John H. Poelker Levee Stone, our lifetime achievement award. In 2016, Vince was named our only Lifetime Board Member.

“I lay my suit out for the next day every night before I go to bed. It’s important to have a reason to get up in the morning and to know that it’s important. Dressing for important work is a must.” Vince, your work was important and the honor you brought to the City of St. Louis and its Downtown will live on in the work we do every day. It is important work. May you rest in peace.
Meet Adam Wayne: The St. Louis Photographer With a Story as Impressive as His Pictures

Adam Wayne saw things differently as he walked through the woods three years ago.

He had been laid off from his job after damaging his hand in a workplace accident — he still has the scars as reminders. As the father of a four-year-old girl, he was restless and disheartened. But he was always comforted by the simplicity of the woods, and it was there that he saw life through a new lens. Branches seemed to reach out to him, colors became bright and vivid.

But he soon realized it wasn’t just nature that he was seeing differently.

After years of manual labor, Adam Wayne now saw his path winding in a new direction, one that bent towards creative expression. He wanted to capture and preserve this inspiration, and what better way to do so than through photography?

His decision was made. Unfortunately, he didn’t have experience. Or a camera. At the time, Adam was no stranger to challenges. He had confronted unemployment, a serious injury and fatherhood. Learning photography was the least of his worries. After scraping together some cash, Adam purchased a Canon PowerShot sx530, a relatively cheap camera, and definitely not “professional” by most photographers’ standards. But from the moment he broke the seal on the package, it was never about the device. It was about what he could capture with it.

“What most people would see a tree and think it would make for a cool picture. But I thought, ‘What if I got in the tree and took a shot that nobody else could think of?’”

This imagination would ultimately define his photography.

Adam started taking as many pictures as he could without even bothering to open the manual that came with his camera. He posted his best work on Instagram, mainly for his personal pleasure. But not long after, his follower count surged into the thousands. How was it that this man, with no experience and a cut-rate camera, was drawing more attention than photographers with equipment worth as much as a car?

“Most of the people who have this camera don’t take photography seriously, so they don’t really know how to use it,” he says laughing.

Self-taught and with a chip on his shoulder, it’s Adam’s minimalist approach to photography that appeals to so many viewers. To this day, he uses nothing besides the camera he bought three years ago. No tripod. No lights. No Photoshop. It’s his one-of-a-kind twist on otherwise mundane things that compensates for going without the frills. Retailers often try persuading him to upgrade his camera, but he just smiles and politely declines.
“Depriving myself of all the fancy equipment and software forces me to get more creative,” he explains. “All that’s important is loving what I’m capturing and doing it in a way that nobody else can replicate.”

Adam isn’t fazed by state-of-the-art drone photography, high-end cameras, or photographers with academic degrees in the arts. He’s just focused on what fulfills him, and that seems to be more than okay with everyone else. FOX 2 News has recognized Adam as one of the ten best photographers in St. Louis, his pictures have been featured in several local news publications, and his follower count on Instagram is climbing towards 14,000. He tells compelling visual stories, juxtaposing raw nature with refined urban structures.

Many of Adam’s photographs feature his hand, but a closer look reveals that it’s always his left one. While this may seem trivial, it’s how he instills purpose into his art: Adam damaged his right hand in the accident that cost him his job, but showcasing his left hand serves as a reminder, if only to himself, that a tragedy always opens the door for new opportunities. What’s more, the left arm is a direct path to the heart.

It may have taken him 35 years to discover his calling, but that’s only one more reason not to spend too much time looking in the rearview mirror.

So, if you’re out exploring Downtown St. Louis, be on the lookout for Adam Wayne: the guy with nothing but a scratched up Canon PowerShot and a wild imagination.

Find Adam on Instagram: @adamwayne_arts
It’s the energy, it’s the sense of community, it’s almost like you’re in a unique civilization that is different from suburbia.

Pamela Kelly Uses Diversity to Drive Results for Dot Foods in St. Louis

For St. Louisan Pamela Kelly, diversity isn’t about meeting a quota. It’s about optimizing an organization’s culture.

“It’s whatever your combined experiences are that will add to how you approach problem solving and how you see a problem,” defines Kelly, Director of Talent and Inclusion at Dot Foods. “And that, for organizations, is probably the strongest factor for innovation and driving change.”

Kelly joined Dot Foods in 2014, and after learning the foodservice company and its myriad of roles, she spearheaded initiatives to remove unconscious bias from job listings, discussions about candidates and other areas of the hiring process. She also educated all team members through expert reading material on the topic. The end result? “We’ve had a 135% increase in salaried diverse talent since 2013.”

Through growing a more diverse workplace, Kelly has been able to foster an environment focused on the cognitive diversity she says businesses need—and the same benefits of a cognitively diverse workplace are the ones she lists as top reasons her family lives in Downtown St. Louis.

“It’s the energy, it’s the sense of community, it’s almost like you’re in a unique civilization that is different from suburbia,” says Kelly.

Thanks to a community full of different backgrounds, lifestyles and experiences, when you live Downtown, she explains, culture is merely a few steps outside the door.

Kelly met her husband in Columbia, Missouri, where she attended college—and while she says it was a great place to live and raise her children, she was ready for a change from suburbia.

“When the opportunity came, I thought, ‘I can either buy another house or I can experience Downtown.’” Her family relocated into a Downtown loft, and—in opposite fashion from the stereotypical commuter—she began driving from the city into Chesterfield when she joined Dot Foods.

What makes the commute worth it? “It’s the element of surprise each day,” she says of her love of Downtown. “And then, for me, it’s the diversity.”
BUSINESS IS BOOMING

It’s no big secret that St. Louis is experiencing an entrepreneurial surge. We’ve been dubbed the “best startup city in America” by Popular Mechanics and recognized by Forbes as “the right way to build a tech city.”

And now, we’ve earned yet another notch on our belt as a startup city: St. Louis has more female entrepreneurs than any other city in America.

St. Louis Tops List of Cities With Most Female-Founded Startups

You read that correctly.

After analyzing data from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs, Seek Business Capital ranked the top 20 cities with the most female founders, with St. Louis leading the way.

Out of all St. Louis startups, 2,726 of them are female-owned (that’s nearly half of all startups in the region.) These female entrepreneurs generated an estimated revenue between $150 and $500 million last year, with the most popular industries being health care and social assistance.
“As if being one of the fastest-growing startup cities wasn’t inspiring enough, we’re now the most inclusive” said Missy Kelley, CEO of Downtown STL, Inc. “You couldn’t ask for a better time to be an entrepreneur in St. Louis.”

St. Louis’ closest rival, Austin, Texas ranked in a distant second with 1,433 startups having female founders.

The recent ranking complements last year’s venture capital boom for women-owned businesses. In 2018, fifteen deals brought $57 million worth of venture capital into female-founded startups, far exceeding the amounts in years prior.

Is St. Louis the Silicon Valley of the Midwest? It might be too soon to tell. But if the numbers are any indication, you can get used to seeing more startups heading for the Gateway City.

In 2018, fifteen deals brought $57 million worth of venture capital into female-founded startups, far exceeding the amounts in years prior.

New Business Surge Drops the Downtown Vacancy Rate to 10-Year Low

If Downtown St. Louis seems more vibrant and active than it has been in recent years, it’s not just your imagination. Thanks to an influx of new business, real estate developments, and an entrepreneurial boom, the Downtown vacancy rate is lower than it’s been in over a decade, according to commercial real estate company Cushman & Wakefield.

“Signature new construction and adaptive reuse projects across the urban core are shifting the perception of corporate relocation into the Downtown area,” says John Warren, director of Cushman & Wakefield. “The community’s emphasis on technology, local startup incubation and cyber-security will continue to benefit tech occupier demand and bolster office fundamentals.”

So, who are these new tenants that are boosting the Downtown economy? Here are six stand-out companies that recently opened up shop Downtown and are attracting swarms of fresh talent to the city.
After receiving an Arch Grant, the rapidly-growing payment solutions tech startup SwipeSum relocated from Los Angeles to St. Louis, which co-founder Michael Seaman called “a startup gem.”

After raising $1 million, SwipeSum moved from Washington Avenue into the Cast Iron Building on Laclede’s Landing.

KnowInk

Founded by St. Louis City Board of Elections director Scott Leiendecker, KnowInk develops technology to make polling and voting simpler, quicker, and smarter (get it? No ink.) KnowInk originally operated out of South County, but Leiendecker moved his business Downtown to Olive Street. KnowInk now has 45 employees.

Momentum

Headquartered in New York, advertising agency Momentum has 44 offices worldwide, one of which is across the street from Union Station on Chestnut Street. Momentum’s St. Louis office used to be in Richmond Heights, but the agency’s CEO cited Downtown’s creative energy as the reason to move Downtown. Momentum occupies 28,000 square feet and employs 150 people.

Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith

When Los Angeles-based law firm Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith looked to expand its footprint in the Midwest, Downtown St. Louis was at the top of the list. The firm’s new, 10,000 square-foot outpost is in the shadows of the Gateway Arch inside the Deloitte Building.

Label Insight

The three founders of Label Insight, another Arts Grant recipient, recently took their startup down I-55 from Chicago to the Gateway City. Label Insight uses data to help consumers make better-informed shopping decisions and enables retailers to be more transparent. Label Insight now operates with 50 employees in the STL Fusion co-working space on Washington Avenue.

Less Annoying CRM

When five Washington University grads from all over the country formed Less Annoying CRM, they considered both coasts to become their headquarters. However, an Arch Grant kept them home in St. Louis. The company, which has users in 71 countries, helps small businesses manage contacts, track leads, and stay on top of leads. After graduating out of T-REX, Less Annoying CRM built out a floor in their own space on Locust Street.

What’s Next for Downtown Developments?

The business momentum in the Downtown core is expected to carry over into 2020. Of note is Ballpark Village’s $260+ million second phase, featuring Downtown’s first new construction Class-A office building since 1989, which is expected to create 1,700 permanent new jobs.

Also of note is the 15,000 square-foot “Geosaurus, Powered by Bayer” Geospatial Innovation and Resource Center at T-REX. The space is expected to attract new geospatial technology companies in response to the NGA moving its headquarters to St. Louis. The Center will also serve as a talent pipeline for companies like the NGA and Bayer.

“There aren’t many vacant buildings left for developers to purchase Downtown,” says John Warren, director of Cushman & Wakefield. “Almost all have been rehabbed or have plans for rehab. It’s actually been a challenge to find vacant buildings for developers.”

10-Year Population Growth

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+95.8%
Thanks to GlobalHack, Software Is Everywhere In Downtown St. Louis

In just six years, GlobalHack has turbocharged the tech ecosystem in Downtown St. Louis. This is the story of how three local entrepreneurs made that happen.

Six years ago, there were plenty of ways to get involved with tech in St. Louis. But there was a discrepancy: the majority of those people seemed to be those with the right connections and the right skill sets in the right location.

What about the beginners? The people with the big ideas but no blueprints (or maybe even no WiFi connection)—what were they to do?

With that question in mind, three St. Louis entrepreneurs set out to build a better tech ecosystem. Those entrepreneurs were Gabe Lozano, Drew Winship, and Travis Sheridan: executives of Downtown startups LockerDome, Juristat, and Venture Cafe, respectively. Their mission? Drive social impact through tech. As it turned out, this wouldn’t require more money or even more startups.

Downtown St. Louis needed a more active approach to meet the surging demand for tech talent. Having built brands of their own, the founders converged on a key insight: when you gather talented and motivated people into a collaborative environment, good things happen. If they wanted to make tech more accessible, they needed to create a platform—and that platform became GlobalHack.
"As our day-to-day lives become increasingly complex, there’s a growing need for innovative methods to solve real-world problems," says GlobalHack executive director Matt Menietti. "Hackathons bridge that gap by combining interdisciplinary talent in a fun, competitive environment."

GlobalHack’s hackathons unite software engineers, designers, entrepreneurs, and citizens for weekend-long software competitions. After being presented with a challenge, teams trade sleep for work over the course of 48 hours to build software prototypes that solve real-world problems such as homelessness.

To close out the event, the prototypes are presented to panels of judges who award the top teams. But hackathons are about more than prizes, explains Menietti. "They’re designed to elevate St. Louis to its potential as a tech city and drive a positive social impact on the region."

GlobalHack’s summer camps also work to develop the next generation of tech talent. While some coding camps cost upwards of $800 per week and cater to highly-skilled students, GlobalHack’s camps are lower-cost and beginner-friendly, not to mention they offer travel assistance and full tuition scholarships.

“We recently received an email from a parent whose daughter attended one of our summer camps,” said Matt Menietti, GlobalHack’s Executive Director. “She was thrilled to tell us about her daughter’s newfound passion for coding and how grateful she was to work with like-minded girls.”

It’s stories like these that remind the GlobalHack team what it’s all about.

"From education, to government, to marketing, every industry is influenced by tech," says Menietti. "In the future, nearly everyone will need a baseline understanding of computer programming, and Downtown St. Louis is at the forefront of making sure that happens."

In just six years, GlobalHack has turbocharged the tech ecosystem in Downtown St. Louis, and things are only looking up from here.
Greetabl: The St. Louis Startup That’s Challenging a $6 Billion Industry

Joe Fischer doesn’t like to brag, but he had it made.

After graduating from Saint Louis University, Fischer worked his way to the top of the totem pole on Wall Street, becoming the youngest vice president of Goldman Sachs’ consumer/retail unit before his 30th birthday. But as he traveled the world making business connections, he realized he was missing out on a different—and arguably more important—type of connection: interpersonal relationships.

Leading up to 2011, Fischer had written dozens of congratulatory wedding cards and typed hundreds of “happy birthday” posts on Facebook. But those were a dime a dozen. He wanted his thoughts to make an impact, especially if he was on another continent—a tough task to accomplish with envelopes or pixels alone.

Fischer racked his brain for weeks thinking of a way to make greeting cards that were cool, useful, and memorable. Finally, during a *Mad Men* binge session, the idea came to him.

Challenging a $6+ Billion Industry

If you’re like most people, you make a distinction between “the card” and “the gift.” You know the drill: nod and smile appropriately, pretend to read the corny lines, then toss it into the heap of other cards. To Fischer, this routine was ripe for disruption. So, he decided to create a card that transformed into a gift.

He called it Greetabl.

With his kernel of an idea, Fischer teamed up with local graphic designer (and now co-founder) Zoë Scharf to design the world’s first greeting cube of its kind. The finished product put prototypical greeting cards to shame. Clocking in at about 3 x 3 inches, the gift boxes tap into the need for personalization in a cluttered world. Gifters simply choose a design, write their message (or choose a pre-written one), and add treasures like bath bombs, mini flasks, gift cards, or pretty much anything that fits.

The $6+ billion greeting card industry—like most dead-tree industries—is facing challenges. But Fischer and Scharf have found a sweet spot with Greetabl, which essentially created a market of its own with its customizable card-gift hybrid. Consumers are increasingly turning to digital alternatives for greeting cards, but even Facebook’s snazzy birthday video-messages, which have come a long way over the past decade, are no match for the Greetabl experience of opening a gift in real life.

“Our fondest memories don’t take place in the digital world, neither should your friend’s birthday,” says Fischer.

When Joe Fischer launched Greetabl, his goal was to make cards cool again. If numbers are any indication, he and Scharf did just that. Greetabl expects to ship its millionth gift within the next year.
A Downtown St. Louis Success Story

Greetabl is part of a growing group of Downtown St. Louis startups that graduated from T-REX into a dedicated office. After five years of growth, Greetabl moved into its current space at Olive and 10th in 2017, where the team continues to expand, attract investors, and most importantly, make people’s day with one-of-a-kind gifts.

“The Downtown startup community has been extremely supportive of Greetabl,” says Scharf. “Between the accessibility and affordable office space, I don’t think we could have built Greetabl anywhere else.” Greetabl’s success extends far beyond Downtown St. Louis, though. It’s been featured in The New York Times, Fast Company, and BuzzFeed. Even O, The Oprah Magazine gave Greetabl its stamp of approval: “When a card’s not enough and a bottle of bubbly’s too much, there’s Greetabl.”

St. Louis has a history of big ideas: Enterprise Rent-A-Car, peanut butter, ragtime music, the list goes on. But Greetabl proves that big ideas can come in small—like, really small—packages.
At its opening on September 1, 1894, Union Station was the largest and busiest railroad station on the planet. What’s more, it was a one-of-a-kind architectural marvel: a gold-leafed Grand Hall, Romanesque arches, stained glass ceilings, and the world’s largest roof span. Union Station was where spouses embraced upon returning from World War I and where visitors arrived for the World’s Fair.

Now, more than 40 years after the last train left Union Station, this National Historic Landmark is being transformed into a futuristic landmark that’s poised to attract more visitors than the Station has ever seen—and it starts with 1.3 million gallons of water.

The St. Louis Aquarium, slated to open in winter of 2019, is what many consider to be the final puzzle piece that will fulfill Downtown St. Louis’ potential as a global tourist destination. St. Louis has long been one of the few major cities in the U.S. without an aquarium, but after inking a deal with developers in late 2016, the vision quickly became a reality.

But that progress hasn’t come hassle-free.
“Transforming an old mall from 1985 into a state-of-the-art aquarium without affecting the existing structure, sight lines, and materials came with challenges, but we’re thrilled with what we have in store,” says Chad Smith, Vice President of Design at Lodging Hospitality Management (the aquarium’s developer.)

The St. Louis Aquarium marries timeless infrastructure with futuristic aquatic attractions to create an experience that rivals the likes of the Georgia Aquarium and Shedd Aquarium in Chicago.

“The space is layered with technology that’s both educational and beautiful,” says Smith.

But it’s not just sharks and jellyfish that make the St. Louis Aquarium so appealing. Downtown St. Louis is already experiencing an economic upswing, and this project will be like jet fuel for tourism and economic development in the Gateway City.

“The Aquarium will draw more than a million visitors in 2020—that’s nearly as many as the Arch on an annual basis,” says Smith. “The magnitude of this attraction’s impact on Downtown can’t be overstated.”

Whether you’re a kid looking for some face time with sea creatures or civic enthusiast rooting for Downtown’s next economic development win, it’s safe to say the St. Louis Aquarium is the “splash” you’re hoping for.
Ballpark Village, Phase Two: 700,000 Square Feet of Potential

When developers broke ground on Ballpark Village in 2013, they embarked on a journey to make Downtown St. Louis the nation’s premier baseball neighborhood. Now, six years later, Ballpark Village is poised to transcend sports and become the socioeconomic hub of the Midwest.

That’s the grand vision of Ballpark Village’s phase two: a $260 million project that’s adding 700,000 square feet of mixed-use development to the east and west sides of the current district. Upon completion, Ballpark Village will be a vibrant 24/7 neighborhood in the heart of Downtown St. Louis.

“We are very excited about the second phase of Ballpark Village,” said Bill DeWitt III, President of the St. Louis Cardinals. “Our vision of a mixed-use neighborhood where people live, work and play will become a reality. This is a real game-changer for the city of St. Louis and the state of Missouri.”
What to Expect

You’re probably familiar with the cranes and construction trucks in the shadows of Busch Stadium, but you may not know what they’re being used to build. Highlights of the expanded BPV include a $65 million hotel, a 29-story luxury apartment tower, retail shops, and new dining and entertainment experiences.

The main attraction for the business community, however, is the construction of Downtown’s first Class-A office building in more than three decades. In all, the second phase of BPV is more than seven times the scale of the first phase and will complete a full build-out of Clark Street, transforming it into one of the most exciting streets in all of professional sports.

Keeping the Momentum Rolling

While phase one provided a notable influx of visitors and revenue to Downtown St. Louis, it also opened a world of potential to bring unseen levels of growth and energy within the community. Between Ballpark Village’s year-round programming and massive crowds of sports fans, it’s already the only entertainment district of its kind in the region. Moving forward, the expanded Ballpark Village will accelerate Downtown’s tourism and event attraction efforts, solidifying St. Louis’ reputation as a must-see city.

“The expansion of Ballpark Village will have a tremendous impact on Downtown’s social and economic scenes, just like the first phase did,” said Missy Kelley, Chief Executive Officer of Downtown STL, Inc. “The investments into business, entertainment, and residential living are critical to strengthening the heart of our region.”

But that’s not all. The second phase of Ballpark Village stands to create 1,500 construction jobs and more than 1,000 permanent new jobs. When it’s all said and done, developing the second phase of Ballpark Village could go down as the best business move Downtown has ever made.

“The expansion of Ballpark Village is also a model project for diversity and inclusion in Downtown,” says Cari Furman, Director of Communications for Cordish. As it relates to contracts for minority and women-owned businesses, out of $169 million dollars of total contract work to date, 32.3% are being completed by minority-owned businesses, exceeding the goal of 25% participation and equating to $42.2 million dollars in contracts. Out of the same $169 million dollars of total contracts, 7.8% are being completed by women-owned businesses, exceeding the goal of 5% participation. This equates to $13.2 million dollars in contracts to women-owned businesses.

“As a proud St. Louisan, I’m excited to advance the great work already started and continue to rally the support of local, regional, and national brands while reaching audiences of all kinds,” said Mike LaMartina, Chief Revenue Officer of Ballpark Village St. Louis. “This property truly represents the growth and evolution of Downtown and provides a vibrant destination for people to visit and experience — all of that is really something special to be part of.”
Women’s World Cup Match Proves St. Louis Is Ready For More Soccer

Downtown St. Louis has seen its fair share of mesmerizing sporting events in the past decade – from the Cardinals winning their 11th World Series title to the Blues taking the NHL’s Western Conference Championship and capturing the Stanley Cup for the first time in franchise history.

One of the most meaningful sports events to St. Louis – or at the very least, to the rabid Midwest soccer fans – was the women’s international friendly soccer match between the United States and New Zealand on May 16 at Busch Stadium.

St. Louis is a hotbed of passion for the sport and events like these have immense implications for the region, especially as it seeks a Major League Soccer franchise.
Just under four minutes into the overtime period in game two of the Stanley Cup Finals, Blues defenseman Carl Gunnarson ripped a shot past Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask to level the series at one game apiece. A crowd of nearly 20,000 at Enterprise Center erupted when the puck found the back of the net. The arena turned into a state of bedlam as fans roared and “Gloria” boomed through the streets. Even usher Tom Maddox was slapping high-fives with fans in the corridors after the victory.

This same overflow of support was met (and surpassed) as more than 20,000 fans stood shoulder-to-shoulder at Busch Stadium to support the Blues in game seven. Erupting with excitement, Blues fans rattled Downtown as their team won their first Stanley Cup in franchise history.

“We’ve had a track record with U.S. Soccer including two matches with the women and the men’s World Cup qualifier in 2015,” said Vicki Bryant, the Cardinals Vice President of Event Services and Merchandising, who led the game preparations for Busch Stadium. “Both had great fan response and attendance and U.S. Soccer was pleased with their experience. So we kept in contact and were given an opportunity to host a send-off series before the ladies headed off to the World Cup in France.”

The scene was set: Busch Stadium, an ESPN telecast, the pitcher’s mound removed in favor of a soccer pitch and the seats packed to the brim with nearly 36,000 fans—the third-largest crowd in U.S. women’s soccer history. The pre-game festivities included fireworks and flyovers, and when it was all over, the Americans put a proverbial whooping on New Zealand by a count of 5-0 in preparation for this summer’s World Cup.

“It was a beautiful night — I’m honored to be able to play here in front of that crowd,” Ladue High School graduate and U.S. Soccer star Becky Sauerbrunn told the Post-Dispatch. “There’s definitely a moment where I had to stop and let everything sink in for a moment. Everything really has come full circle for me. I grew up playing here, I had some of my high school friends here in the stands. It’s just kind of wild, thinking about how far I’ve come on this journey.”

It was a memorable experience for Downtown St. Louis as well as the U.S. Women’s National Team, but the event’s significance transcends that one night. After months of speculation, Major League Soccer owners decided in April to expand the league to 30 and enter into “exclusive, formal discussions” with the top two bidders — St. Louis and Sacramento.

The match was a temperature check for the Gateway City’s readiness to become a soccer city, and the results are in: the time is here.

“We All Bleed Blue: Inside the St. Louis Blues’ Extreme Fanbase

Just under four minutes into the overtime period in game two of the Stanley Cup Finals, Blues defenseman Carl Gunnarson ripped a shot past Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask to level the series at one game apiece. A crowd of nearly 20,000 at Enterprise Center erupted when the puck found the back of the net. The arena turned into a state of bedlam as fans roared and “Gloria” boomed through the streets. Even usher Tom Maddox was slapping high-fives with fans in the corridors after the victory.

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The craziest part? In both of these unforgettable games, the action was taking place 1,200 miles away in Boston.

It takes a special breed of fans to sell out an entire arena to watch an away game. But as any St. Louisan will tell you, that’s how we do it here. For decades, the St. Louis Cardinals have cultivated a reputation for having the best fans in baseball. But between sell-out watch parties, impromptu a capella national anthems, and some bizarre superstitions, we have to raise the question:

Do the Blues have the best fanbase in the NHL? To answer that question, let’s revisit the story of St. Louis Blues superfan Danette Duckworth.
Buried in Blue

Duckworth’s beloved Blues were in next-to-last place in the Central Division when she was confronted with devastating news: Her cancer had returned and was spreading. And yet, Duckworth kept her spirits high with a bold prediction: 2019 will be our year.

After 38 years of watching the Blues with her husband, Ken, Danette passed away on February 2nd. She was buried in the jersey of her favorite Blues player, Chuck Lefley, who played during the ’70s and ’80s. Danette, a superfan if there ever was one, urged her family to witness a Blues Stanley Cup game in person if they just so happened to make it. Well, they fulfilled her wish, as Ken and his daughters attended Game Three at Enterprise Center.

“She waited 49 years for this, and now she has the best seat in the house,” he said.

Dirty Jerseys, “Winchiladas,” and “Gloria”

Less tear-jerking (but equally impressive) are the superstitions that Blues fans adopted to preserve this year’s unprecedented championship.

In late May, KMOV’s Brenden Schaeffer took to Twitter to ask Blues fans: “Do you have any superstitions or gameday rituals you’ve been observing throughout these playoffs?”

And they did, with some swearing by lucky sweatshirts, jerseys, and t-shirts.

“You don’t want to know the last time this yellow Blues shirt was washed,” said one fan. Another has worn the same jersey and hat every game day—unwashed—even at a wedding rehearsal.

“During the 11-game win streak I ate a ridiculous amount of enchiladas,” said another. “I now call them Winchiladas. I’ll be picking some up on my way home tonight.”

And then there’s the ultimate tradition: singing “Gloria” after a win. Y-88 played it for 24 hours straight after the Blues won the Cup. But what exactly is the story behind the song?

Early in the season, Laura Branigan’s song from 1982 was adopted as the team’s post-game victory song. According to a February article from NHL.com, Alexander Steen, Joel Edmundson, Robert Bortuzzo, Jaden Schwartz, and Robby Fabbri were watching the Eagles/Bears NFC Wild Card game in January when a DJ played ‘Gloria’ during a commercial break.

“This one guy looked at the DJ and said ‘keep playing Gloria!’” Edmondson told stlouisblues.com. “Right there we decided we should play the song after our wins. We won the next game, we got a shutout, so we just kept on playing it.”
The “Rally Note”

As if wearing dirty clothes, eating enchiladas every day, and spending eternity in a Blues jersey wasn't enough to prove St. Louis' support for the Blues, a Hazelwood resident has emblazoned a giant Blues logo on his front lawn for the past four years.

"I call it the rally Note," Zach Pyles told KSDK. "The first year I painted it was 2015."

Of course, this recent Stanley Cup victory made his effort (he used 30 cans of paint) so much sweeter. With this most recent Championship victory, the infectious spirit of these superfans only seems to be spreading. In fact, many crazed Blues fans even pulled an all-nighter at Lambert airport and Enterprise Center to welcome home their beloved team (and Stanley Cup).

Not from St. Louis? You Wouldn’t Understand

Whether we’re playing “Gloria” on repeat, refusing to wash our clothes, or spending hard-earned money to watch the Stanley Cup on a jumbotron, outsiders just don't get it. Sports fans—especially Blues fans—are cut from a different cloth in the Gateway City. Maybe it's because we hadn't been to the Stanley Cup final since the Beatles broke up. Maybe it's because we have unrivaled civic pride.

Love us or hate us, one thing is certain: We all bleed blue, and 2019 was the best year to be a Blues fan in our franchise's 52-year history.
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