



America's Main Street—Route 66 Alive and Kicking in Springfield, Illinois

Route 66. It winds from Chicago to LA, more than 2,000 miles all the way. Once the definitive road that connected the country, Route 66 has now become a legend. Since 1926, this ribbon of asphalt and concrete has provided a unique way for travelers to follow their dreams of adventure. No other highway has been so immortalized in song, prose or film. To songwriter Bobby Troup, it was "My way...the highway that's the best." To novelist John Steinbeck, it was The Mother Road, the road of flight and the Glory Road to the Land of Second Chance. To desperadoes and bootleggers, including the likes of John Dillinger, Al Capone and Bugs Moran, Route 66 was the ultimate escape route, the highway of kicks.

Some say the old road and the feelings it evoked are gone forever. Fortunately, the people of Springfield, Illinois haven't heard the news. For us, the nostalgia, scenic beauty, charm and spirit of Route 66 can still be found in the patchwork of hidden places and secret corners of our midwestern community.

Take the Cozy Drive In for instance. A familiar Springfield landmark on old Route 66 since 1949, the Cozy Drive In may have recently undergone a facelift, but little else has changed over the decades. The original owners, the Waldmire family, are still serving up the same friendly atmosphere and home-cooked, mouth-watering recipe of Cozy Dogs (hot dogs deep-fried in a secret bread batter) that travelers from around the world have come to love.

Over on the north side of town you'll find Bill Shea, a Route 66 Hall of Fame Member, dishing up a few good stories of his own. An original Texaco station owner, Bill has one of the most complete Route 66 museums this side of the Dixie Truck Stop. These days, Bill spends his time selling a truck cover or two and sharing his infinite knowledge about the old highway with people from all over the globe.

During the last weekend in September, Springfield hosts a tribute to that great road with the annual **International Route 66 Mother Road Festival & Car Show**. Each year thousands of people from around the world descend on Springfield for three days of good times, great cars, nostalgic music of the 50s, 60s and 70s, loads of Route 66 memorabilia, festival food and

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the opportunity to hear tales from some of the most-experienced Road Warriors around. Last year, more than 800 top show cars, from the industry's earliest vehicles to models hot off the assembly line, lined the 20-block area of the festival site to the delight of the young and the young at heart. Join us for the 2005 event, Sept 30-Oct 2, 2005, in downtown Springfield. In the meantime, check in with the festival website from time to time for updates on this year's celebration of the Mother Road, www.route66fest.com.

You can also take a side trip off Route 66 and discover some rural towns that embody the spirit of the Midwest. For instance, to the south of Springfield you'll discover charming little farming communities like Chatham, home of the annual Sweet Corn Festival and Cow Chip Throw. On down the road, Divernon is home to The Railsplitter, listed in the Guinness Book as the world's largest covered wagon. In Carlinville, named one of the "100 Best Small Towns in America," in 1993, you'll find the largest collection of Sears & Roebuck mail order homes in America.

Follow the rolling hills of the Illinois River country northwest of Springfield to Salisbury and the quirky home of nationally known folk artist George Colin. Another 10 miles down the road is New Salem, a re-creation of the pioneer log village where young Abraham Lincoln lived and worked as storekeeper, postmaster and surveyor before moving to Springfield.

Travel north from Springfield to the Windy City and find all but 11 miles of the original Route 66 still intact. Be sure to stop in McLean at the famous Dixie Truck Stop, which boasts a Route 66 memorabilia collection from its heyday as America's crossroad.

Many people say Route 66 is the most famous highway in the world. Most would also agree it was an important passageway that helped shape our country's history and culture. We say it is still an exciting experience, a chance for people the world over to discover America.

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