

A CITY'S CHARM

Meet Bardstown, Kentucky

by Amy Knebel



PHOTO COURTESY OF HILARY BALLARD

Customers, residents and store owners all enjoy the scenic, historic beauty of Bardstown, Kentucky.

BARDSTOWN, KENTUCKY

POPULATION: Just over 12,000

LOCATION: Bardstown is located just 35 minutes from Louisville, KY and about 60 minutes from Lexington, KY

DATE OF INCORPORATION: 1780

MEDIAN HOME VALUE: \$125,000

AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME: \$43,498

OF RETAILERS: 150

OF DOWNTOWN RETAILERS: 28 out of 150

OF RESTAURANTS: 33

America” in the Best of the Road Competition sponsored by Rand McNally and USA Today. It’s clearly evident that local efforts to retain the town’s historic integrity and beauty paid off. Bardstown is also known as the “Bourbon Capital of the World” since it is home to two distilleries and a short drive to several others such as the well-known Maker’s Mark and Jim Beam distilleries. Many people make Bardstown a destination for travel since it is on the Bourbon Trail and boasts several attractions for history buffs. Federal Hill, said by many to be the inspiration for the state song “My Old Kentucky Home,” and over 300 National Register of Historic Places sites are located within an easy walk of downtown Bardstown.

Tourists and locals from surrounding communities are also drawn to Bardstown to enjoy shopping and dining. With 150 retailers and 33 restaurants, there’s something to please everyone, especially when you can visit 28 of those retailers within the downtown Bardstown area. From furniture to clothing to art and antiques, Bardstown offers up a retail paradise for shoppers. But what makes it special and unique enough to win multiple awards as a can’t-miss place?

Owner Catherine Clements of women’s boutique Peacock on Third has been a lifelong resident of Bardstown; she credits the beauty and the people of Bardstown as what makes working in the downtown area so wonderful.

“I enjoy going to work everyday. My store is in a beautiful building in a beautiful, vibrant, historic town and I have a terrific staff that helps to make the shopping experience for my customers fun and exciting,” Clements states.



PHOTO BY KIP MCGINNIS

The beauty and charm of Bardstown has been recognized nationally through a variety of awards.

Another reason Clements enjoys being a local merchant? How many of the area businesses work together to help each other succeed – something Retail Minded sees again and again in vibrant communities with thriving businesses.

“The majority of business owners in Bardstown belong to a Downtown Merchants Group that meets monthly. We pay dues that we use collectively to advertise our town and businesses. We all work together and communicate as neces

Every spring we are treated to one of the “Greatest Two Minutes in Sports” – the running of the Kentucky Derby. For many people, this afternoon of hats, horses and mint juleps becomes their idea of what Kentucky is like. Many people have no idea that the Commonwealth of Kentucky is full of surprises, many of which come in the form of small towns with great retail Main Streets.

Take Kentucky’s second oldest city, Bardstown, for example. Located in central Kentucky in the heart of Nelson County’s rolling hills, Bardstown dates back to the 1780s when it was settled by European Americans migrating west after the Revolutionary War. Many of the settlers were Catholic, and Bardstown became the first diocese west of the Appalachians and a cultural center for the surrounding area. St. Joseph’s Basilica and Old Talbott Tavern anchored the downtown area, which next gave rise to the merchants and businesses that grew in a twenty-six block area now known as the Bardstown Historic District. Thanks to the efforts of several historical societies and zoning laws, most of downtown Bardstown consists of original Federal and Georgian architecture, revived and restored to their original beauty.

Today, Bardstown is known for many things. Most recently, Bardstown was named as the “Most Beautiful Small Town in

sary to ensure we don't duplicate merchandise and can make each store unique. If we don't have the item someone needs, we always encourage them to try one of the other stores," Clements explains.

Anne Ballard, also a lifelong resident who is now the Director of Downtown Development for the Main Street Bardstown Program, agrees that the people and – more specifically – the attitudes of the people of Bardstown are what make working and living in Bardstown so wonderful.

"What makes our downtown area stand out are the people that work in these buildings. We have several unique boutiques including a family owned retail store that has been in business for 156 years and is still going today. We still have an old soda fountain in the drug store on the corner that remains the best place to sit, watch the traffic go by and have a milkshake," Ballard explains.

It's natural for a Main Street Director and a local store owner to want to see their community thrive, but what about the area resident who doesn't work in Bardstown?

"There are a lot of dedicated locals who are passionate about keeping our Main Street alive," Ballard further states. The result? Loyal customers. Stores, restaurants and other locally owned businesses see familiar faces often, to which they credit both their success and the general enjoyment residents, customers and business owners alike all gain from Bardstown.

Bardstown is a perfect example of a community invested in preserving its past while promoting its future. Retailers and residents alike take extreme pride in making sure that everyone who comes to Bardstown comes away knowing why it collects so many awards and accolades. We call another state home, but it's easy to see why Retail Minded wouldn't mind making Bardstown our own "Old Kentucky Home."



Everything that we do - from being extra helpful and friendly to bringing and sending people to each others' stores - comes from a shared attitude that what's good for you is good for all of us.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAQ & COCO

Bonnie Hamilton has two stores in Bardstown. Her store Shaq & CoCo is a well visited home and accessories boutique (above) while she treats customers to sweets and candy at her other store.