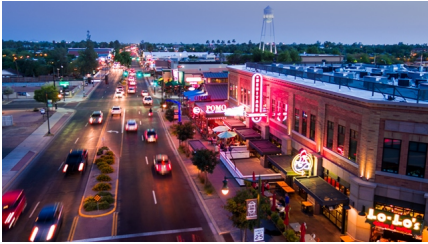


Go, Go Gilbert: One City's Renaissance

Written by Melissa Larsen



Safest city. Best city for families. Cleanest city. Over the past six years, Gilbert has been racking up the recognitions, making it a desirable destination to call home. So just why has this fast-growing community become such a residential hot spot in recent years?



Since 2010, the town of Gilbert has seen an increase of 40,000 residents, with nearly 250,000 people now calling the East Valley locale home. The downtown Heritage District is growing leaps and bounds, a new regional park is being planned and lofts are recurrently being constructed. It is safe to say the town is experiencing a renaissance of sorts at the moment, appealing to just about every demographic from young families to hip millennials to retirees.

"Gilbert has always been an incredible place to call home, and we've had generations of Town leadership who have had vision along with great residents who invest their time, talent and energy in our community," says Jenn Daniels, council member with the Town of Gilbert. "With over 240,000 residents, some of the highest quality options in education, healthcare and housing and a growing reputation for delicious food and a vibrant atmosphere, it is no surprise to us that people have taken notice of our big city that we call our Town."

An area of Gilbert where growth is most visible is Heritage District, an expanse of 260 acres along Gilbert Road, roughly between Elliot Road and Juniper Avenue bursting with top-notch dining opportunities, unique shopping and arts and cultural attractions. Joe's Real BBQ (from one of the area's early adopters, Joe Johnston), Oregano's, Hale Centre Theatre and The Farmhouse, for instance, have all stood their ground along Gilbert Road successfully for years; the likes of Postino East, Joyride Taco House, Barrio Queen and Pomo Pizzeria, to name a few, made themselves at home there more recently.

"[Heritage District] is a place where residents and visitors alike congregate to enjoy restaurants, retail and entertainment and learning arts and culture within this one place," says Amanda Elliott, Heritage District liaison. "We want it to continue to be a clean and safe place for families to gather."

In the coming months, Heritage District is about to see another boom in business with the opening of Clever Koi, Tuft & Needle, The Art House-Gilbert, Sushi Brokers, Farm & Craft, Grubstak, Even Stevens and the Valley's third Dierks Bentley's Whiskey Row. "What is really unique to this particular Whiskey Row, it will be very family-friendly and in line with what we are trying to accomplish in the Heritage District," says Elliott. "It will also have some different things you might not see at the other Whiskey Rows to enhance that family-friendly atmosphere." Elliott is also highly anticipating the opening of 313 Gilbert, which will house TicketForce headquarters, a restaurant and a rooftop bar.

Also coming down the pike, Elliott expects the area to welcome another Sam Fox restaurant or other entertainment concept, a high-end bowling alley and, hopefully, an arts festival along the canal (Heritage District is already home to a popular artwalk). "One of the things we are working toward in the Heritage District is creating opportunities for additional events." Though single-family homes and custom builds are common throughout Gilbert (in fact, Elliott says the area still issued building permits during the recession), there is a new apartment development underway to attract young people who are making Downtown Gilbert their stomping ground.

Located along the train tracks, District Lofts (rendering, above), a 170-unit residential rental community, is currently under construction. "The walkways will remind you of rail lines and some of the buildings have a barn-type look but are very high-end to showcase our history and our culture," Elliott says.

Though the downtown area is most certainly enjoying the limelight at the moment, the remainder of the town—where you'll find such popular destinations as SanTan Village and Agritopia—is likewise bringing the action. "We are in the final stages of planning a new 262-acre regional park in town and the open space will offer some amenities to Gilbert that we've never had before," says Daniels. The park will be located south of Queen Creek Road and west of Higley Road; proposed amenities include multi-use trails, a recreation/aquatic center, an amphitheater, a multi-use event center, playgrounds, a splash pad, a lake, a disc golf course, a dog park, a food truck court, skate and bike parks, a great lawn for special events and flex space, various sport courts, retail space and more.

Daniels adds: "Agritopia's Barnone is under construction and will be another creative way to showcase Gilbert." Barnone, also from Johnston and slated to open later this year, will comprise three buildings housing 12 craftsmen (from a florist to a graphic designer and various others), including four food-and-drink establishments.

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And what do Daniels and Elliott like to do to show off their town to visiting family and friends? “From October to March, I bring them to the artwalk and farmers’ market. There is also a great art gallery called Art Intersection,” says Elliott, adding that the newly opened TopGolf and Friday-night food truck court near Gilbert Town Square are also big draws. “We hop on our bikes and explore Gilbert,” says Daniels. “Our favorite destinations include the Gilbert Riparian Reserve where we ride around on the trails and are sure to see some wildlife.”



Chef Gio Osso has been a darling of Valley diners since opening Virtù Honest Craft in Scottsdale in 2013. This spring, Osso opened his second restaurant, Nico Heirloom Kitchen, in Downtown Gilbert. Here, the Gilbert resident shares three of his family’s favorite hometown haunts.

1 “I love going to SoCal Fish Taco Company. The food is great and you feel that you’ve escaped the hot desert and are in a little beach town chowing down on some great tacos. The ceviche is one of my favorites around.”

2 “I really enjoy taking my kids to Freestone Park. It’s an amazing park with lots to do. Lakes, playgrounds, ball fields and more. My son, Nico, especially loves the train ride. The excitement on his face when we come around one of the lakes is priceless. It’s a place where memories are made.”

3 “The Gilbert Farmers Market, of course, is my fave! I love walking around there with my family on a Saturday morning. We share a couple of orders of doughnuts from the awesome doughnut truck, grab some of the best produce for home and the restaurant and say ‘hello’ to all of our neighbors.”