



Little Italy/ University Village

By Brett Ashley McKenzie

Little Italy/University Village

In Chicago's Near West Side, the side by side neighborhoods of Little Italy and University Village offer a unique combination of storied historic culture and contemporary renewal. From the Old World touches along Taylor Street to the modernity of the University of Illinois—Chicago campus and its surrounding community, Little Italy and University Village intertwine to offer something for everyone.

Little Italy, A History

As with many groups of Chicago's early immigrants, Italian laborers arrived in the mid-nineteenth century, drawn to jobs in the railroad, construction and manufacturing sectors. By 1900, more than 16,000 Italians resided in Chicago.

The greatest concentration of Italian immigrants settled along the Taylor Street corridor, but as Italian cuisine garnered greater appreciation throughout the United States, hundreds of Italian grocery stores, restaurants, and bakeries sprouted throughout the city. Many Chicagoans enjoy pizza and sandwiches at their local **Pompei** (1531 West Taylor St.) without realizing that the first of these cafeteria-style Italian eateries was founded in Little Italy in 1909 as a bakery that made only bread and cheese pizza.

In 1911, the **Our Lady of Pompeii Church** (1224 W. Lexington St.) opened its doors for worship, serving the Italian-American community that continued to flourish around it. Today, calling itself a "holy place of pilgrimage," the landmark church continues to serve its mission to "express the richness of the Italian culture and to foster appreciation of this rich heritage as a gift to all within our multi-cultural Archdiocese and society."

Honoring Italian-Americans in a different light is the **National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame and Museum** (1431 W. Taylor St.). Joe DiMaggio, Joe Montana, even Mary Lou Retton are members of this small yet significant tribute to great Italian-American athletes. Videos and memorabilia help honor the achievements of some of the greatest to ever pass, punt, shoot, shuffle, and score.

In the 19th century, Little Italy's immigrant population gave rise to social welfare. With a mission that is near and dear to C.A.R. members' hearts, the **Jane Addams Hull House**

was founded in 1889 to "aid in the solutions of life in a great city, to help our neighbors build responsible, self-sufficient lives for themselves and their families." **The Jane Addams Hull House Museum** (800 S. Halsted St.) pays tribute to the founders of the famous social settlement house, and the causes they fought for.

Mangiare!

For a city made famous for its deep-dish pizza and Italian beef sandwiches, it's no wonder Chicagoans flock to Little Italy for top-notch traditional Italian fare.

Since 1908, the "**Original**" **Ferrara Bakery, Inc.** (2210 W. Taylor St.) has been serving savory Italian pastries, like the classic cannoli and profiteroles. Now in its 101st year, the bakery has added lunchtime fare like chicken parmesan and baked mostaccioli to its menu. Nearby, the **Italian Superior Bakery** (931-933 S. Western Ave.), established in the 1920s, operates under a bit of a misnomer—bread and pizza pies, not dessert pie, gets served up here, and the sweetest thing on the menu is the biscotti.

To satisfy your sweet tooth, head to **Mario's Italian Lemonade** (1068 W. Taylor St.) from May to September.

If it's a serious Italian culinary experience you crave, you have your pick of the cream of the crop on Taylor Street. Feast like a Roman at **Francesca's on Taylor** (1400 W. Taylor St.), where mussels in spicy tomato sauce, homemade gnocci, and pollo con polenta highlight the mouth-watering menu. Nearby, **Phil Stefani's Tuscany** (1014 W. Taylor St.) specializes in quality northern Italian fare—namely savory homemade stuffed pastas in creamy, fresh sauces. And of course, the original **Rosebud on Taylor** (1500 W. Taylor), elegant and timeless, offers stellar cuts of veal, succulent shrimp and lobster, and many Italian favorites in a setting that is tough to beat.



Our Lady of Pompeii Church

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Welcome to the Neighborhoods

Little Italy/University Village



Chicago's Busy Burger



Manny's Pastrami



Jane Adam's Hull House

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For an unpretentious atmosphere and friendly service, **Damenzo's** (2324 W. Taylor St.) offers food the whole family will love, from Italian sub sandwiches to their popular pizza puffs. And if DIY Italian is more your speed, stop by **Conte Di Savoia** (1438 W. Taylor St.), a gourmet grocery and delicatessen, which offers a wide selection of premium Italian ingredients or prepared meals perfect for a picnic basket or your dinner table.

University Village

Because it is recognized as one of Chicago's "newest" neighborhoods, University Village itself does not have a substantial history; but the area that now comprises most of **University of Illinois at Chicago's** (UIC) campus was once known as Maxwell Street.

Like Little Italy, Maxwell Street (completed in the 1840s) drew large populations of immigrants. Greeks, Russians, Bohemians, Mexicans, and Jewish immigrants settled the area, which was lucky to survive the Great Chicago Fire unscathed despite its close proximity to the fire's origin. In 1912, the **Maxwell Street Market**, widely hailed as one of the largest open air markets of its time, was established, offering an affordable, colorful shopping experience. MaxwellStreetMarket.com reports, "The old market was an important main shopping source for basic foods and household supplies; it was the only discount shopping area for the nearby neighborhood." In the 1990s, the City of Chicago demolished the market to make way for UIC expansion. A replacement market was built in the neighborhood, but according to MaxwellStreetMarket.com, "Although this New Maxwell Street Market on Canal Street and Roosevelt Road is an interesting and worthwhile place to visit, it lacks the full flavor of the original market." Similarly, the famous South Water Market, which was best known for its local Great Lakes produce for more than 78 years, was sold in the 1990s to make room for **University Commons**.

During the "Great Migration" in the 1920s, many African Americans moved to the neighborhood, and shortly thereafter, Maxwell Street

became famous for its blues musicians, who played outside on the streets in order to maximize the number of listeners they could reach.

In 1965, UIC was built, and members of the community were outraged as the school continued to grow, purchasing real estate along Maxwell Street and demolishing old buildings to make way for new. Today, however, UIC serves 25,000 students and has the nation's largest medical school, contributing valuable research and facilities towards health care in Illinois. Additionally, one in ten Chicagoans holds a degree from UIC. And in keeping with the Maxwell Street tradition, UIC is the fourth most diverse university in the nation.

The Culture Stays Alive

Visiting University Village without stopping for lunch at **Manny's Cafeteria and Delicatessen** (1141 S. Jefferson) is like visiting Paris and skipping the Louvre. If stacking a corned beef sandwich was an art form, Manny's would be revered for centuries to come. Since 1946, this family-owned spot has been frequented by everyday Chicagoans and celebrities alike—Mayor Daley recently held a birthday party there, and President Barack Obama stopped in shortly after his election, saying "[Chief-of-Staff] Rahm Emanuel sends his regards. I ordered him his corned beef." Obama left carrying three corned beef sandwiches (each topped with one of Manny's signature fried-to-perfection potato pancakes) to-go and two slices

of cherry pie. The food is prepared with love, the service is fast and friendly, the smiles are free, and dessert is a must.

How can you think of Maxwell Street without relishing (no pun intended) a Maxwell Street Polish? The first Maxwell Street Polish Sausage Sandwich was created in 1941 at **Jim's Original** (now at the Southwest Corner of Union and James Rochford Streets, relocated in 2001 from the original site at Maxwell and Halsted Streets) by a European immigrant known simply as "Jimmy." The story goes, "He piled succulent polish sausages high on the grill and created the first Maxwell Street Polish Sausage sandwich, with sweet grilled onions and a smear of mustard"

**What's selling in...
Near West Side?**

FastSTATS Fourth Quarter 2008 (8028)

Attached Single Family	Detached Single Family
Units: 142	Units: 4
Median Price: \$326,250	Median Price: \$220,000

Check out neighborhood stats for all 77 Chicagoland neighborhoods at www.ChicagoREALTOR.com.

FastSTATS consists of average sales price, median sales price, market time, units sold and percent change for Chicago and the suburbs.

Welcome to the Neighborhoods

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The Drum & Monkey



Sofia's Pizza



Chez Joel

(JimsOriginal.com). Sink your teeth into the delicious taste—and deliciously affordable prices—of Jim’s specials today, including the original Polish (\$3.25 with all the fixins), bone-in Pork Chop sandwiches (\$3.55), and Cheese Fries (\$1.60).

From Open-Air Markets to the Real Estate Market

Little Italy

“Little Italy and Taylor Street are uniquely Chicago,” said Brian Bernardoni, C.A.R.’s Senior Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy, who served as Executive Director of the University Village Association from 1998-2002, as the community was beginning its major expansion in housing through the redevelopment of ABLA. “We have a great mix of old neighborhood [residents] and young and established

professionals; in part thanks to the IMD [Illinois Medical District] and UIC, as well as our great location. With that, our parks and schools make it a great place to raise a family.” Bernardoni should know; he is currently raising his own family in the community.

He added, “Taylor Street has never been just Italian. Mexican and Jewish immigrants were early inhabitants, and today you can add about a hundred other ethnic groups into our melting pot!”

University Village

University Village, due to its proximity to the Loop and the prestige of UIC, has seen a tremendous influx in real estate value over the past two decades. It was reported in the 1990 Census that, in 1990, no homes in the neighborhood were worth more than \$400,000. A decade later, 62 homes were valued at more than \$500,000, with 13 homes reporting values of more than \$1 million. **CR**



St Basil Greek Orthodox Church

“Welcome to the Neighborhood” profiles a Chicago community each issue and highlights the major draws of buying and selling property within that community, as well as local perspectives on the neighborhood and interesting facts for you to share with your clients.

Photos by Kali Loader of the Chicago Association of REALTORS®



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