



Pickers' Paradise

Treasure hunters descend on this lively outdoor market that takes over downtown Litchfield, Illinois

BY SUZANNE CORBETT

After a few minutes of bouncing back and forth between tables brimming with collectibles set up on both sides of State Street, I discovered a strategy that worked for my treasure hunting at the open-air Litchfield Pickers Market. If I walked down the center of the street in this 12-block marketplace, I found that I could spot the items that drew my attention, and then I could scurry over for a closer look—before someone else could snag my quarry.

Whatever shopping method you choose, just be prepared to spend several hours combing through the abundance of antiques, crafts, home decor, upcycled items, and all manner of bric-a-brac. Held from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the second Sunday of each month, May through October, the Litchfield market attracts hundreds of vendors and upward of 7,000 shoppers. The streets are closed during market hours in much of the downtown area of this southern Illinois community located about 55 miles northeast of St. Louis.

The funky pop-up, which has the feel of a street festival, enters its 10th season in May. At its heart is the juried vintage and antique vendor section, where everything on display must have been made before 1985. This feature distinguishes Litchfield from other regional picker markets and brings out early bird shoppers hoping to find prized objects—and perhaps a few bargains—before the tables get picked over.

“The market has lots of good stuff,” says Kelda DeBarr, one of Litchfield’s juried vendors, who has been part of the market since its 2015 opening. “It has a little bit of everything, including what I call ‘repurposed junk.’ We sell different stuff every month. Some months we sell a lot of glassware; last month we sold lots of toys.”

Some of the juried-section items that piqued my interest included a stack of old *Look* magazines, a 1950s Coca-Cola cooler, and a circa 1930 one-eared celluloid Mickey Mouse figurine (which I vacillated on mightily before passing on it).

On Monroe Street, which runs parallel to State Street, you’ll find arts and crafts vendors and a farmers market. When hunger calls, choose from among the 10 or so vendors selling breakfast items, beignets, pizza, barbecue fare, and sandwiches. While you eat, tap your toes to live music in Library Park.

To plot your course through the menagerie, begin at the information booth outside the Carnegie Library Building on the town square. There, you can pick up a list of vendors and buy a shopping bag if you forgot to bring a tote or wagon.

After my first foray to the market, I made a mental note to remember to take a cart for hauling all my loot back to the car on my next Litchfield picking adventure.

If You Go

Parking is free on the streets around the market perimeter. For details, go to visitlitchfield.com.

A freelance writer from St. Louis, **SUZANNE CORBETT** specializes in food, travel, and history.