



CITIES WITH A NATURAL CONNECTION

Just a few years ago, two Kentucky cities capitalized on a national trend to turn abandoned railways into walking trails for public use. Greenville and Central City, both in Muhlenberg County, joined forces to build what is now the longest “rail trail” in Kentucky along a six-mile stretch of the former Paducah and Louisville Railway Inc. The asphalt path now connects the two towns; an estimated 300 citizens a day use it for walking, jogging, biking and skating (cars and other motorized vehicles are not permitted).

The trail was the idea of former Muhlenberg County Judge-Executive **Rodney Kirtley**, who was looking for a way to physically link Greenville, the county seat of about 4,400 people, with Central City, the larger town with 6,000 people. Kirtley hoped a cooperative venture would help the two small towns work together more effectively—in the past they had often been antagonists. “Whether it was on the basketball court, the baseball field or attracting industries and new residents, the two cities always seemed to have a healthy dose of competition,” said **Ben Van Hooser**, city administrator for Greenville.

The county obtained a federal grant for the project in 1999, and a local committee oversaw it. A week after the trail opened in 2000, local bike stores sold out of bicycles. Soon Greenville had to expand parking lots near the trail.

The trail “was an immediate success and has continued to be successful,” said Greenville Mayor **Ed DeArmond**. Since 2000, improvements have been made along the way, including decorative lighting at both ends and a covered

bridge. In 2005, the trail received the Greenway Award from the Mid-American Trails and Greenways Conference.

Today, each city is known for something different. The trailhead in Central City has a naturalist flavor, with a nearby stream and wildlife. It also features an antique caboose from the Paducah and Louisville Railway that has been turned into a railroad museum, and there are plans to open a wellness center. The Greenville end is more town than country, with the city’s commercial district surrounding the trailhead.

Besides its appeal to individuals and families, the trail serves the community in many different ways—foundations such as the March of Dimes and Kentucky’s Get Moving Program use it for fundraisers. The high schools in Greenville and Central City also hold their cross-county track meets there.

Through the rails-to-trails project, Greenville and Central City are following the principles of the NewCities Institute by being stewards to the environment, planning and developing over time and rethinking their boundaries. And they’ve done this in a big way. In the years since the trail was proposed, Central City Independent schools merged with the county school system. This consolidation was the last one to take place for all of the schools in Muhlenberg County to be in one district.

Another consolidation that took

place was the merger of the cities’ chambers of commerce.



Kentucky now has 30 “rail trails” with many more under consideration, but is still behind most other states in the number of rail-trail miles, according to the Kentucky Rail to Trails Council. Railbanking—a way to preserve railroad rights-of-way for possible future use—has become a common practice throughout the United States, including Kentucky. The nonprofit organization Rails-to-Trails Conservancy promotes the acquisition of land for railway trails and helps communities find funding for such projects (it does not provide funding itself).

If not converted to trails, land that was once used by railroad companies could go back to original property owners or to the state or county governments. Railway trails are usually 9 to 27 meters wide and have been either paved or graded and covered in gravel; some are even left as dirt trails.

—NEWCITIES INSTITUTE STAFF

Greenville and Central City at a Glance

GREENVILLE

Mayor: Eddie DeArmond

Population: 4,398

Location: Greenville is located in Muhlenberg County and is the county seat and oldest city in the county. Greenville can be found settled on top of seven hills and in the surrounding valleys in Muhlenberg County. Today Greenville is known for its beauty, culture and refinement while humbly maintaining a warm, friendly environment.

History: Greenville receives its name from the Revolutionary War General **Nathan Greene**. Two of Greene's soldiers came to the area to claim their land grants, which were given as payment for their service in the war. Colonel **William Campbell** and General **William Russell** named the area Greenville in honor of General Greene.

In past years, Muhlenberg County has been known as the largest coal producing county in the United States. Even with the decline in coal, Greenville continues to thrive with lots of outdoor activity.

Attractions and Events: The Duncan Cultural Center has a coal museum, art gallery and artifact center for Muhlenberg County. The center was once the home of **William Graham Duncan**, owner of The Duncan Coal Company. The House of Onyx has been in business for more than 40 years and offers a wide variety of jewelry and unique stones and gifts from all over the world. In August, Greenville hosts the 18th Annual Kentucky Deer Classic. This one-day event allows deer enthusiasts from all over Kentucky to come and prepare for the upcoming deer season. J.P. Morgan Memorial Park is open to visitors throughout the year and has many activities for them to enjoy such as an amphitheatre, picnic pavilions, playgrounds for children, a swimming pool and basketball and tennis courts. The Rails to Trails walking and biking trail between Greenville and Central City is also located in the park.

Native Sons and Daughters: Greenville was home to two United States representatives.

Alney McLean (1778-1841) served as a representative from 1817-1819 and **Edward Rumsey** (1796-1868) served from 1837-1839. **Ephraim Brank**, a hero of the Battle of New Orleans in the Revolutionary War, was born in Greenville in 1791.

CENTRAL CITY

Mayor: Jerry Mitchell

Population: 5,893

Location: Central City is located in western Kentucky along the Green River.

History: In 1826, Central City was known as Morehead's Horse Mill in what was then Kentucky County. In 1873, it incorporated into Stroud City. Central City's website says it then became Owensboro Junction after the arrival of the Owensboro and Russellville Railroad. Finally, in 1882, the town became a 5th class city called Central City. In 1902, Central City earned 4th class status and is now the largest city in Muhlenberg County.

Attractions and Events: The Everly Brothers Monument located on North First Street is a tribute to the Everly Brothers, who took their style of music around the world. Paradise Park Museum Complex is home to Springridge School a two-room school house from Central City that now has artifacts from the area displayed for visitors and the Hall of Fame Stage that is home to "Pickin' in the Park" every Friday and Saturday night in September. The Rails to Trails, an automobile free, six-mile trail, connects Central City and Greenville and offers scenic-lined paths and covered bridges to enjoy as you travel between the cities.

The Central City/Everly Brothers Music Festival takes place annually on Labor Day weekend along with the Central City Poker Run, sponsored by the Purple Onion and the American Bikers Association, and the Central City Car Show.

Native Sons and Daughters: Don and Phil Everly of the Everly Brothers,

best known for hits such as *Wake Up Little Susie*, *Cathy's Clown*, *Bye Bye Love* and *All I Have to Do Is Dream*.

Tom Christerson, the second ever recipient of the artificial heart transplant, was from Central City. Today to honor Christerson, golf scrambles are held and teams are formed in his honor to walk in the American Heart Association, the Heart Walk each year.

Patrick Sparks, former University of Kentucky shooting guard.

James Best, actor best known as Roscoe P. Coltrane on the television series *The Dukes of Hazzard*, and the late **Warren Oates**, actor best known as Sergeant Hulka in the movie *Stripes*, were born in Muhlenberg County.



James Best



Don and Phil Everly, best known as the Everly Brothers.



12 Principles for NewCities

1. Connect to the world
2. Encourage youth, diversity and inclusiveness
3. Feed the mind, nurture the soul
4. Embrace healthy living
5. Remain true to the city's uniqueness
6. Don't merely grow; plan and develop over time
7. Build beautifully and steward the environment
8. Cultivate leadership and citizen involvement
9. Recruit, retain and generate wealth
10. Mimic bigness, but think small
11. Rethink boundaries
12. Buy locally, sell globally



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