

# Racine undergoing a renaissance



By [Gregg Hoffmann](#)  
Special to OMC



**Published July 13, 2007 at 5:12 a.m.**  
[www.OnMilwaukee.com](http://www.OnMilwaukee.com)

*The Milwaukee 7 was formed in September 2005 to create a regional, cooperative economic development platform for the seven counties of southeastern Wisconsin: Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Walworth, Waukesha and Washington. In this OnMilwaukee.com series, Gregg Hoffmann profiles each of the counties and highlights their unique attractions and appeal.*

Racine County sits to the south of Milwaukee County and is the heart of the Chicago-Milwaukee Corridor. The county has more than its share of attractions and benefits for the visitor and those who decide to make it their home or new business location.

The City of Racine has experienced a renaissance in the last decade or so, starting with a beautiful marina. The city offers history, culture, recreation and many other features. Racine's transformation has been so impressive that it has caught the attention of the national media as it received extensive coverage in The New York Times in September 2006.

Racine is home to a couple of gems created by architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The most recognizable is the SC Johnson Administration Building, the largest commercial project designed by Wright, was completed in 1939. The Great Workroom of the building utilizes almost one-half acre of workable floor space and has a ceiling supported by huge golf-tee shaped columns that have been termed one of the most advanced structural supports in modern architecture.

The Golden Rondelle Theater was constructed for the SC Johnson Wax pavilion at the 1964/65 New York World's Fair. It was brought back to Racine and placed on a new base, which was designed by the Taliesin Associate Architects to complement the existing buildings of the SC Johnson corporate headquarters.

Adjacent to the theater will soon be "Project Honor," a tribute to the late Sam Johnson who lead the company for more than three decades and played a dramatic role in the changes that have taken place in Racine. Project Honor will display Johnson's S-38 Sikorsky twin-engine sea plane, which he used in 1998 with his two sons when he flew the same route that his father, HF Johnson Jr., took in 1935 to study the carnauba palm in Brazil.

Another must-see in Racine is the Wind Point lighthouse. Built in 1880, the lighthouse is the oldest and tallest in operation on Lake Michigan. Fully automated in 1964, the building now serves as a town hall, but the grounds are open to the public.

Racine also boasts two excellent museums. The Racine Art Museum houses the third largest and one of the most significant collections of contemporary craft in North America. With major exhibitions of new work, as well as from the permanent collection of the Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts, the Racine Art Museum (RAM) focuses on ceramics, fibers, glass, metals and wood, which represent original and completing artistic expressions.

The Racine Heritage Museum offers three floors of entertaining and interactive exhibits celebrating the rich heritage of the community. Discover the tales of Racine's people, innovations and products including the

stories behind Hamilton Beach, SC Johnson, Modine, Twin Disc, Case and Horlick's Malted Milk.

You also can uncover Racine County's history as a shipbuilding center and port, our area's role in the Underground Railroad and exhibits honoring fallen astronaut Laura Salton Clark.

Hungry? If so, Racine is known for its Kringle. The oval-shaped, authentic Danish pastry is produced predominately in Racine County. Thirty-two layers of flaky dough -- and filling choices from fruits to nuts -- Kringle is made and baked locally and enjoyed by millions of international dessert connoisseurs each year.

Now a key part of the community's traditions, Kringle has helped put Racine County on the food map. The delicate and delectable pastry has been featured on national television, including the Food Network, Travel Channel and the Today Show, as well as in numerous travel and food magazines.

Five local bakeries that include Kringle among their specialties are Bendtsen's Bakery, Larsen's Bakery, Lehmann's Bakery, O & H Danish Bakery and O & H Danish Bakery Danish Uncle.

Several excellent restaurants offer cuisine ranging from traditional American to a variety of ethnic foods.

If you want outdoor recreation, Racine's North Beach is one of only two on the Great Lakes, which are Certified Clean Beaches, designated by the Blue Wave Committee of Washington, D.C. This 50-acre sandy paradise has soft, fluffy sand that is groomed daily in the summer. It reminds many of a West Coast beach in California.

North Beach has a concession stand called the North Beach Oasis where sandwiches, ice cream, water, soda, and adult beverages are served. On weekends from Memorial Day through Labor Day, live music entertains beach-goers. Also at North Beach, a newly paved bike path runs along the length of the beach, north to the excellent Racine Zoo and south to Downtown.

A community of volunteers has also built a massive children's playground called "Kid's Cove." This nautical themed playground is fun for young and old. North Beach is home to events like the EVP Pro Beach Volleyball Tournament and the Spirit of Racine Triathlons, which has been voted as one of the top 10 Triathlons in the Country.

Besides its easy access to Lake Michigan, Racine County boasts some impressive inland water as well. The Root River above Horlick Dam is navigable by canoe or small boat. The stretch of River from Horlick Dam to State Highway 31 is very scenic with an abundance of wildlife and natural areas.

Racine County owns land adjacent to the dam on the east side of the River and has constructed a canoe / small boat launch facility 500 feet north of the dam. Quarry Lake Park also is a great recreation facility.

If you head to the western side of Racine County, you will find a beautiful semi-rural area, featuring the Fox River, miles of rolling farm land, park land and charming smaller towns. Union Grove and Waterford offer small town quaintness while also featuring healthy business and shopping.

Burlington is a thriving community on the west end of Racine County, with a rich history and heritage. Check out the Burlington Historical Society and go on the BURSPUR route, taken by escaped slaves who were helped to freedom via the Underground Railroad. Burlington has been designated as Chocolate City, USA due to the long-term location of Nestle US in this community.

If festivals are your thing, you'll find plenty in Racine County. The Big Fish Bash, originally known as Salmon-a-rama, is one of the biggest fishing festivals on Lake Michigan. The Animal Crackers Jazzfest at the zoo is great. The Great Midwest Dragon boat races and County Fair in Union Grove are worth taking in. Chocolate Fest in Burlington has grown dramatically over the years. And, there are many more.

If this writer had one day in Racine County, I would start at the marina or North Beach to watch the

sunrise. After catching some breakfast, which would have to include some Kringle, I'd take in one of the museums and the Wright architecture in the morning.

Head west, and maybe play 9 holes of golf at Ives Grove, just one of the topnotch golf courses in the county. A definite stop would be Heg Park in the Town of Norway. There, you will find a monument to Col. Hans Christian Heg, a Civil War hero of Norwegian descent. The Norwegian heritage also is celebrated across the street, where Heg is buried in the cemetery of Norway Lutheran Church.

You can still have time for some sightseeing and a great dinner in Waterford, Rochester or Burlington before heading home.

Or, why not consider making Racine County home and establishing a business there? Major companies such as Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare Health Care, S.C. Johnson & Son Inc., CNH America Farm, InSinkerator, a Division of Emerson Electric Co., Modine Manufacturing Co., Aurora Health Care Health Care, JohnsonDiversy Inc., Bombardier Motor Corp. of America, Nestle USA Inc. and Rudd Lighting Inc. already do.

You'll find a skilled workforce, public and private sector cooperation, transportation and shipping to the Milwaukee and Chicago regions and many other services needed to make Racine County your home and place to do business.