

## Destination: Reading

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**Reading makes it tough to buy and even tougher to sell.** By Jack Morris



“Reading? Where’s that?”

Funny though that may seem, it’s not an uncommon question heard from “outsiders” unfamiliar with this quiet community 10 miles north of Boston and kitty-cornered by interstates 93 and 95.

“Oh, you mean where Jordan’s is?”

Yes, that Reading. Although if you talk to just about anyone in town, the massive furniture playground that juts out over I-95 comes up less frequently than talk about the recent downtown restoration project, the high school band, and,

oddly enough, cougars (see “Venetian Moon.”).

Town Manager Peter Hechenbleikner, who has lived here for 23 years, is very matter-of-fact about Reading. “We like to have a good time in this town,” he says.

That restoration project, which brought about many furrowed brows from residents and commuters traveling on Rt. 28, was completed in the fall of 2009. Traffic was rerouted and sidewalks were expanded, while parking, lanterns, and brick crosswalks were added, all at the cost of \$6 million (the town paid \$600,000 and the rest was picked up by the state). In addition, Reading recently approved a smart-growth zoning area, meaning more people will be able to live and shop right in the heart of town.

“We encourage small businesses in Reading,” says Hechenbleikner. “They are the future of this town.”



There is certainly no lack of small businesses in Reading. In fact, during the downtown construction phase, The Chocolate Truffle ([thechocolatetruffle.com](http://thechocolatetruffle.com)) made a “road construction” mix of their finest treats, and they were a huge hit. Goodhearts ([goodheartsshop.com](http://goodheartsshop.com)) makes shopping for baby clothes well worth sitting through a boring shower just as long as you pick up a cup of coffee and a fresh blueberry muffin from The Hot Spot (781-942-5777). Harrow’s ([chickenpie.com](http://chickenpie.com)) is a must for chicken pies, as is Calareso’s ([calaresosfarmstand.com](http://calaresosfarmstand.com)) for produce and flowers. Need a place to fix up that old grandfather clock? The Clockfolk of New England ([clockfolk.com](http://clockfolk.com)) is the call. Great party gifts can be found at Be Gifted (781-942-9500), while Aine’s Boutique ([ainesboutique.com](http://ainesboutique.com)) brings a taste of Boston to women’s fashion in Reading. The list could go on and on.

Large businesses, too, are seeing success in town. Keurig, the single-cup coffee brewing system, is headquartered here. But there’s more to Reading than just business. According to

Hechenbleikner, the number of homes sold by residents to residents is off the charts. He credits the quality of the public school system. Donna Hamer, the mother of two recent Reading High graduates, agrees.

“In Reading, you don’t sell and move out of town,” she says. “It’s like a game of checkers. You sell and move around the board.” Hamer is also quick to credit the high school band. She says that she and her husband,

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Peter, remain active with the band, even though both of their boys, who played throughout their high school careers, are now in college.

"Being a band family was so cool because the kids wanted us to be involved," says Hamer. "You meet all these other parents and they become friends who will see you into retirement. It's the last stop before the kids leave the nest."



**The National Guard's Camp Curtis Guild is at the ready.** By Jack Morris. Photograph by Robert Boyd.

For anyone circling the rt. 129 rotary just off I-95 on the Wakefield/Reading line, missing the turn and doing another lap is a common occurrence. It's OK. Just blame it on the tactical Humvees painted in camouflage and parked at Camp Curtis Guild. They've been known to attract attention.

Acquired by the state in 1926 from the Bay State Rifle Association at a cost of \$65 million, Camp Curtis Guild (named after former Massachusetts Governor Curtis Guild, Jr.) is home to the Massachusetts Army National Guard. Sitting on more than 680 acres of land, the site is a local training ground for National Guard soldiers, as well as local police officers looking to hone their skills. It is here, for at least one weekend out of every month, where National Guard soldiers from all over the North Shore come to train. It includes 15 training areas, a land navigation course, a vehicle-recovery site, a dig site, and a helipad. The site also has 10 miles of backcountry roads for off-road driving instruction.

But according to Lt. Col. Steven Fernandez, who handles public relations at Camp Curtis Guild, there's more to the site than just preparing soldiers for deployment in Iraq, Afghanistan, and beyond. "We're the militia, protecting the home front," he says.

Domestic emergencies often call for the National Guard. The ice storm that knocked out power to hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts residents in December of 2008 brought the focus to Reading, where the National Guard set up its controlling headquarters. "We had engineers out there with chainsaws and soldiers helping residents," says Lt. Col. Fernandez. "We're a community-based organization. We're here for the community."

He also says that while Camp Curtis Guild is not open to the public, he is happy to conduct private tours or even entertain school field trips. 508-233-6756, [ma-pao@ng.army.mil](mailto:ma-pao@ng.army.mil).



**Reading delivers big-city entertainment, minus the hassle.** By Jack Morris. Photographs by Robert Boyd.

**Venetian Moon** For a family-friendly town, the glitz and glamour pouring out of this downtown bar and restaurant is surprising. With over 220 different types of vodka offered at the upstairs bar and a decidedly Miami-chic vibe oozing from the downstairs room, Venetian Moon gives couples, singles, and cougars a real reason to pass up a night in Boston in favor of downtown Reading. 680 Main St., 781-944-3633, [venetianmoon.com](http://venetianmoon.com).

**Jordan's Furniture** You've got to hand it to the folks at Jordan's. Going furniture shopping will never be the same, especially when you can watch a 3-D Imax movie, learn to swing on a trapeze, take in a water light show, eat a one-pound burger followed by a bowl of ice cream and some candy, and then play a duck boat game. 50 Walker's Brook Dr., 781-944-9090, [jordans.com](http://jordans.com).

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**O'Dea's Barbershop** If it's off-season and the Red Sox beat the Yankees 14-0, then you must be at O'Dea's. During the baseball season, owner Tim O'Dea updates his makeshift Fenway Park scoreboard that lines the wall of his popular barbershop on a daily basis. A regular cut here is still only \$15. Talking smack about the Yankees is, of course, free. 231 Haven St., 781-944-0800.



**Swissbake Express** One bite of the Chocolate Berliner and you'll swear off regular doughnuts for the rest of your life. This lightly fried ball of buttered bread dough oozes Swiss chocolatey goodness with every bite. Also be sure to take home a loaf or two of the challah bread and while you're at it, a Swiss Apple Cake for dessert. At the Reading MBTA stop (junction of Haven and High streets), 781-354-6989, [swissbakers.com](http://swissbakers.com).

**Comically Speaking** Who reads comic books these days? By the looks of this downtown cartoon playground, everybody and their uncle. Flip through thousands of comics from the golden age of DC's Superman to modern indie hardcovers and everything in between. Kids especially love the boxes upon boxes of action figures and life-sized statues of Yoda and the Incredible Hulk. Good luck getting your young one out of this place. 575 Main St., 781-944-9636, [comicallyspeaking.com](http://comicallyspeaking.com).

**Everything But the Dog** From comfy beds and Patriots jerseys to chew toys and chicken pot pie treats, this ode to our canine friends might make you wish you had four legs of your own. What's even better is that prices are low, and there's even a "cat corner" for felines. Humans are welcome, too. 2 Haven St. #101, 781-944-5300, [everythingbutthedog.net](http://everythingbutthedog.net).