

Approximate boundaries:

N-W. Brown Deer Rd; S-W. Bradley Rd;

E-N. Lauer St; W-N. 124<sup>th</sup> St.

# NORTHWEST SIDE *Dretzka Park*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Dretzka Park is a neighborhood with low population density. All of the residential housing—most newly constructed—is south of West Brown Deer Road and north of the park, also named Dretzka Park. There are business offices and industrial buildings on the neighborhood's eastern border along North Lauer Street.

The topography of Dretzka Park is hilly, with gently rolling to fairly steep inclines throughout the neighborhood. The 326-acre park, with a golf course and riding trails, makes up the bulk of the neighborhood. See current photos below.

## HISTORY

Over 50 neighborhoods on Milwaukee's northwest side once comprised the Granville Township in Milwaukee County, which extended from Hampton Avenue on the south to County Line Road on the north, and 27th Street on the east to 124th Street on the west. The Milwaukee neighborhood of Dretzka Park was once in the Town of Granville.

## Early populations

According to the *Milwaukee Sentinel* (March 22, 1877) there were originally three small settlements in Granville. The first, in 1835, was the family of Jacob Brazelton which included 11 sons. The second was duo Daniel R. Small and W.P. Woodward from Indiana who pitched their tents in the center of the Granville area shortly after the Brazelton family arrived and later built homes. The third group of settlers, the Joseph R. Thomas family and S.C. Enos, arrived shortly after Small and Woodward.

Within a few years a new group arrived from the town of Granville in Washington County, New York. The assemblage included the Evert, Brown, Crippen, Lake, Dutcher, and Norton families. They gave their new home the name of their former home in New York.

But it was not these earliest settlers that established much of the culture of Granville, Township. That role belonged to a wave of Pennsylvania "Dutch" (i.e., Germans) who arrived just a few years later from Telford, Pennsylvania, including the Wambold, Leister, Scholl, Barndt, Price, Bergstresser, Borse, Klein, Martin, Huber, Groll, Horning, and Lewis families. The Pennsylvania Dutch, under the leadership of Samuel Wambold, quickly established the German Evangelical Lutheran and Reformed Church (now known as Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church) in 1847. The following year, the church's pastor, Wilhelm Wrede, called a meeting of local Lutheran ministers at the church. This group would later become the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. A museum of these early synod activities now stands on 107th Street (see outings).

In the 1840s there were over 200 people living in Granville Township, and the numbers continued to grow. A small Irish community settled on Granville's eastern border to the center of the township. Initially they set up tents, built brush shanties, and log cabins. But during these early years, Granville Township remained strongly German, and more Germans arrived every year.

Today's neighborhood-  
N. 116th St & W. Brittany Way





## *Old Granville Station*

Today's Dretzka Park was part of a Granville hamlet known as Granville Station. The current neighborhoods of Granville Station, Riverton Heights, Dretzka Park, Pheasant Run, and sections of Land Bank and other adjoining neighborhoods once made up old Granville Station. The hamlet was centered on the south side of Brown Deer at 107th Street and Granville Road. An 1858 map shows a hotel, two stores, two general stores, a wagon maker, and a blacksmith in the hamlet. By 1886, the hamlet had added a painter, an undertaker, a brick factory, cigar factory, two schools, and two general stores. The population was 115. The area also had a railroad line with two stations that closed after World War II. Sometime in the 1960s, a Milwaukee Industrial Park and Land Bank was constructed between West 76th and West 91st Streets.

## *Movement toward annexation of Granville*

Economic prosperity reigned in Granville, due partially to the work ethic of these early residents. The township remained predominantly rural through the early half of the 20th century. Gradually industries began to open in Granville and the area eventually became the most concentrated base of industrial employment in Wisconsin—today including industrial parks and over 75 companies.

In 1956 the residents and property owners of Granville were given a choice to consolidate with the City of Milwaukee. Needing services that Milwaukee could offer—especially water--the majority of voters said yes to the referendum. By the 1960s, the western portion of Granville (16.5 square miles) was annexed by Milwaukee and the eastern section consolidated as the Village of Brown Deer. Milwaukee became one of the few large cities in the United States that still had working farms within its boundaries.

## *Dretzka Park specifics*

The park preceded the neighborhood. Most of the park land was acquired in 1956 by Milwaukee County, when the area was still part of Granville Township. The 210-acre golf course opened in 1964 and featured tree-lined fairways, water that crossed 12 of the 18 holes, and elevation changes. Other facilities were added to the park, including a golf driving range, sand volleyball section, picnic areas, a multi-use athletic field, a segment of the Oak Leaf Trail, a disc-golf course, and a groomed cross-country ski trail.

The park and the neighborhood owe their names to one man. His Milwaukee County contributions are profiled below.

### **Dretzka Park profile (mid-20th century)** *(Information from U.S. Census and other public records)*

#### **Jerome C. Dretzka**

The neighborhood's park (and hence the neighborhood) was named after Jerome C. Dretzka. Dretzka was born in 1881 in Poland. He immigrated to the United States with his older siblings and parents, Frank and Amelis Dretzka, in 1888.

Dretzka did not grow up in Granville. He was raised and lived his entire life in a large family in Cudahy. Despite never attending high school, Dretzka was an ambitious young man. He went to work as a day laborer out of elementary school, and within a few years advanced to the role of bookkeeper for a dry goods store. Soon afterwards he found himself in the real estate trade and shortly after that, founded his own real estate firm.



By 1920, Dretzka had married Elynor Kleineider, who was born in Wisconsin in 1897. This was the year that he was appointed to the Milwaukee County Park Commission. Dretzka's work became integral to the park system. During the Great Depression, he acted as procurement officer of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) for Wisconsin and upper Michigan, authorizing and supervising purchase of all services and supplies needed for the program.

With his service, it was not surprising that when land was acquired for the current Dretzka Park in 1959, that the Dretzka name would be attached to it. Jerome Dretzka remained with the park commission until the year of his death in 1963. He was buried at Holy Sepulcher Cemetery in Cudahy. Elynor died in 1978 and was laid to rest next to her husband (*see photo from Ancestry.com, public records*). The couple had six children during their lifetimes.



### *A new population arrives*

In the second half of the 20th century African Americans began to migrate to the neighborhood. This happened for two reasons: (1) the need for housing following the razing of over 8,000 homes in the African American Bronzeville community in the late 1950s through the mid-1960s (*see Halyard Park neighborhood*), and (2) the availability of family-supporting jobs in industry in the former Granville community. As in most German-dominated areas in Milwaukee, the integration of the new population proceeded relatively smoothly. Many African American families were able to purchase homes and move into the middle class.

These changes did not immediately affect Dretzka Park. The neighborhood was settled relatively late. By the end of the 1950s, West Heather Drive, Brown Deer, and Bradley Road were the only east-west streets in the area that would later become the Dretzka Park neighborhood. The region remained solidly rural throughout the 20th century, and most of the neighborhood's homes are recently constructed.

### **Current populations (as of 2025)**

Today, there are just over 1,300 residents in Dretzka Park. There is almost the same number of African Americans (38.5%) as there are whites (32.5%) in the areas. The rest are mostly Latinos (13%) and Asians (11%--mostly Pakistanis and Chinese).

The median household income in Dretzka Park is just over \$30,000, placing the neighborhood in the lower middle-income stratum. But the largest number of residents earn between \$20,000 and \$25,000 annually. The main occupations among adult residents are in the fields healthcare, management, and sales. There are significantly more adults in the field of farming than their proportions in other Milwaukee areas. The preponderance of farming in this sparsely populated neighborhood might account for the modest median household income, as many families might be relying on their own crops for much of their food, hence can live on less money.



## INTERESTING FEATURES

- **Masjid Al-Quran Mosque and School**, at 11713 W. Brown Deer Rd., a predominantly Indian/Pakistani mosque and school.
- **Dretzka Park Golf Course**, at 12020 W. Bradley Rd., a 210-acre course (see above for details).

## RECURRING NEARBY OUTINGS

In the following section the website addresses have been eliminated due to technical problems with the various ways different web browsers display PDF files. Website information on these events is available through the book *Milwaukee Area Outings on the Cheap*. See below.

### TOUR OF MUSEUM OF WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD (WELS)

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
By appointment	Salem Lutheran Landmark Church, lower level, 6814 N. 107th St.	Tour of more than 1,000 artifacts and pictures of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod	Free, but donations welcome

### GRANVILLE BID CAR, TRUCK, AND BIKE SPECTACULAR

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Sep., Sun. 10am-3pm	Russ Darrow, 7676 N. 76th St.	Exhibition of iconic custom vehicles.	Free

### JULY 4TH CELEBRATION

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 9am-10pm	Noyes Park, 8235 W. Good Hope Rd.	Parade, Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, games, fire-works.	Free

### OPEN SWIM

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Daily, 1-5pm, holiday times vary	Noyes Park, 8235 W. Good Hope Rd.	Open swim year-round at indoor pool with diving boards, locker rooms, vending machines.	unk

## BUTLER FARMERS MARKET

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Jun.-mid Oct., Mon. 12-6pm	Hampton Ave. at 127th St.	Fresh produce from Wisconsin farmers, baked goods, arts, crafts, activities.	Free

These outings are provided courtesy of MECAH Publishing.

## QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS

**In *The Golden Years of Yesteryear* by Emily Treichel Boehlke (reprinted in *A History of Granville* by Miriam Y. Bird, 1996), Treichel Boehlke writes about her family's history in Granville from the mid-1800s through the late 20th century. The following are passages from this work.**

"When my Grandparents Treichel were first married and lived in their one room cabin, the Indians would stop in and admire their baby. . . At Grandfather Hackbarth's the Indians set up camps in the woods every spring and fall when they came to do their trading in Milwaukee."

"Weddings in the 1860s and later were quite different from today. The invitations were hand written by the bride and groom and they were the hosts, not the parents of the bride. . . the silk material for the brides' dresses was only 18 inches wide, so for a fancy dress, it took 18 to 20 yards of material. It was not unusual for a man to wear his wedding suit 20 to 25 years, or as long as it fitted."

". . . the settlers were having church services at the home of Ernest Zautcke, who had brought a reed organ from Germany to help him with his singing. One of the men could read a text from the Bible and the other religious books which they had brought from across. Mr. Zautcke then donated land for a church and school on the corner of [today's] Hopkins and Silver Spring Roads. They were served by visiting pastors from Milwaukee and vicinity."

"School [of her parents] was then held at the house of one of the member's house one month and at another one the next month, whoever had a room big enough to seat the children."

"The housewife had to plan well ahead for her household. There was the Arab that would come about once a month with two heavy suitcases full of notions and yard goods for house dresses. When he begged for a night's lodging the housewife would get a spool of thread for payment. Also a man with a big basket of oranges and bananas would come. Bananas were 25 cents a dozen for nice large ones. Later a baker would come once a week with bread and sweets."

"Every mother had to be well-schooled in home remedies. . . Plants and herbs were gathered in the summer to be dried and stored for the winter, to be used for any and all ailments."

"Grandfather would sit and knit many mittens and stockings for all the grandchildren while Grandma read to him and tended her many plants of which she had quite a variety."



“Even the first street cars were propelled by horse power. There were only 2 lines, one on 3rd Street to Williamsburg, a section of the city at North Avenue and Center and [one] further north (an all-German settlement).”

“In the beginning of the 1900s, there was no Silver Spring Drive, not even a wagon trail west of Hopkins Street. But the plans were made to have a road there, so one of the farmers would ride through the woods with horse and wagon or on horseback as best he could, so it would be legally kept as a driveway to the next mile west.”

“During the first World War, all gathering of people was forbidden, due to the spreading of the flu. So at Freistadt Church only every other pew could be sat in, so all the people east of the church came for early services and all those west of the church came for later service. Also all talking and preaching was to be done in English, but Pastor Wehrs insisted on preaching in German as many of his older members could not understand English.”

“There were about 12 to 14 neighbors that exchanged labor. This was a hard job for the ladies also, with breakfast at 6, lunch at 9, dinner at 12, another lunch at 3, and supper at sundown. No 8 hour days.”

“When the first threshing machine came out the farmers started to raise barley for the Breweries in Milwaukee. My father raised quite a lot of it and we girls had to man the farming mill in the evening when milking was done and our lessons were finished. This was a cold and tiresome job until enough was cleared for a load to be hauled to town the next day.

**Quotes from an oral history of the Granville neighborhoods currently being conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.<sup>1</sup>—About THEN.**

“My earliest memory, and this will be about age five, I mentioned this tie treating facility. In the Granville Center--in the Granville Station area. Believe it or not, I believe there were four bars. There was a couple gas stations, a blacksmith station, believe it or not, a tanning factory, a lumber yard, and there were quite a few businesses actually. And I remember when we first got there, there weren't a lot of grocery stores very close. We had to drive to Menomonee Falls or Hampton Avenue to go food shopping. So that's one thing that has definitely changed. More stores are closer to the actual residents. That probably was actually how sparse the community had been when we got there.”

“[When we first came] we were all the same. All middle class. Everybody had jobs; everybody had a car. That has gradually changed because in my neighborhood it is not so much single family anymore; it is side-by-side duplexes. And when we first moved here, as these duplexes were built, the people lived in them and then rented out the other side. That gradually changed so that those people left. These owners would now rent out the entire building, or they sold it to somebody else. Now there are different classes of people that live in them. Many of them are in assistance with the government. The landlords don't always stay on top of things so there's been a decline in the property value of the area as well.”

“Well there were tons and tons of restaurants. You know it [Northridge] was the biggest mall in the state at the time. You know you had Sears, JC Penny, Boston Store, Gimbels as the anchors and it was just full. Great and a huge movie theater.”



## Quotes from the oral history of the Granville neighborhoods—About NOW

“The cultural arts festival in June. It’s the largest thing celebrating our multiculturalism. We’re working with the businesses to get them to work with the students with the schools. We’re hoping that doing that will get the kids in the neighborhood to understand the jobs in the neighborhood and then we have a more thriving neighborhood if we have the folks that live up there can actually get the jobs up there.”

“We haven’t seen a mass exodus, so people are still in their houses. We are actually getting a lot of new construction happening. . . house and mid-home construction. I am working on new condos coming in hopefully in the spring. We have older houses outside of the new construction that are not feasible for new families and college kids. We are looking for townhomes with all the amenities and that are affordable.”

“It went from being a low middle income of homeowners to people owning 20 to 30 units. There was no rent control. The neighborhood homeowners fled. The people that did settle in the neighborhood settled for the racial diversity in schools. There are some middle class, some poverty who are deprived. There’s very little upper middle class and upper class anymore.”

“We don’t have a lot of recreational stuff up there. So really whatever people are doing, they’re not doing in Granville. The soccer fields tend to be very white suburban. We don’t have a lot of activities. I would say the golf courses are very multicultural. Otherwise we really do not have much going on.”

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<sup>1</sup> Urban Anthropology Inc. complies with human subjects requirements of formal research and asks informants to sign informed consent forms that stipulate anonymity, hence names are not provided with the quotes.

## PHOTOS



Today's neighborhood-N. Lauer St. & W. Brittany Way



Todays neighborhood-  
Dretzka Park (1)



Todays neighborhood-  
Dretzka Park (2)



Todays neighborhood-  
N. 116th St & W. Brittany Way





Today's neighborhood-Masjid Al-Quran Mosque and School

For more information on the history of Granville, refer to Miriam Y. Bird's *A History of Granville Township*.

For more information on Milwaukee neighborhoods, refer to John Gurda's *Milwaukee, City of Neighborhoods* and Jill Florence Lackey's and Rick Petrie's *Germans in Milwaukee: A neighborhood history*.

Do you have great photos of this neighborhood? Are you a resident with an interesting quote about this neighborhood? Do you have recurring outings, additions, corrections, or general comments about this neighborhood? Please email your input to:  
[JFLanthropologist@sbcglobal.net](mailto:JFLanthropologist@sbcglobal.net)