

**Approximate boundaries:**

**N**-E. Layton Ave; **S**-S-College Ave (partial);  
**E**-S. Howell Ave, **W**-Lake Pkwy-794 (partial)

# SOUTHEAST SIDE *General Mitchell International Airport*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

While General Mitchell International Airport is officially a neighborhood of the City of Milwaukee, it is not a residential area. There are, however, a number of businesses along Howell Avenue--mostly parking lots, hotels, and restaurants. One of the more interesting businesses is the Landmark 1850 Inn. The inn, also known as the New Coeln House, is a reference to the adjacent neighborhood to the south of Mitchell Field (for more information, [refer to New Coeln neighborhood](#)). See neighborhood photos below.

## HISTORY

General Mitchell International Airport is one far south side neighborhood among many that makes up today's Garden District. The boundaries of the Garden District are those of the 13th Aldermanic District, which include General Mitchell International Airport. All Garden District neighborhoods were once part of the Town of Lake, with boundaries of Lake Michigan to South 27th Street and Greenfield to College Avenues. By the mid-1950s, the City of Milwaukee had annexed the areas that today encompass the Garden District.



Today's neighborhood-  
Landmark 1850 Inn

### Early populations

Many of the far south side neighborhoods that comprise today's Garden District owe a debt to the dreams of a local Norwegian named John Saveland. Saveland owned a booming business on Water Street that provided provisions for fishing boats, steamships, and schooners that sailed from Milwaukee. And he also had an interest in real estate. In 1887 Saveland organized a group of investors that purchased 30 acres of land bordered by today's Bradley, Howard, Whitnall, and Howell. The group hoped to attract upper middle class home buyers to their project—people who would work in the city and retire to their county estates at the end of the work day.

But despite a convenient Milwaukee streetcar with stops along Howell Avenue, few lots were sold in the early days. Saveland ultimately turned some of the land into a recreational venture, with an amusement hall and grounds. It wasn't until the time of Saveland's death in 1909 that the area was finally beginning to attract settlers. These were not the upper middle class professionals that Saveland had expected, but south side working class people—mostly Poles.

### *A major airport is born*

The first county-operated airport, named Butler Airport, was established in 1919 on the northwest corner of Milwaukee County (next to the Village of Butler). It soon became obvious that the airfield was too small. Seven years later, the Milwaukee County Board approved the purchase of land owned by Thomas Hamilton, a local aviator, for a new airport facility. The first terminal, known as the Hirschbuehl Farmhouse, opened in 1927.

Between 1938 and July, 1940, a new two-story terminal was built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). In 1941, the name of the county-operated airport was officially changed to General Mitchell Field, due to the influence of Brigadier General William “Billy” Mitchell in aviation history. See the profile of the Mitchell family below.

## **General Mitchell International Airport profile (early 20th century)**

### **The Mitchells**

The Mitchell family made significant contributions to Milwaukee, the State of Wisconsin, and the nation. They have important ties to the West Town and General Mitchell International Airport neighborhoods.

The first Mitchell family that settled in today’s West Town neighborhood was that of Alexander and Martha Reed Mitchell. An immigrant from Scotland at age 22, Alexander rose to prominence very quickly in Milwaukee. He founded the Marine bank, sat on numerous boards of directors, and served two terms in the House of Representatives between 1871 and 1875. Over his lifetime he built the ornate mansion that stands today at 900 West Wisconsin Avenue (today’s Wisconsin Club).

His only child, John Lendum Mitchell, born 1842, was raised in the Mitchell Mansion. He followed in his father’s footsteps in his accomplishments, which included military service in the Civil War, two terms in the Wisconsin State Senate, president of the Milwaukee Public School Board, two years in the United States Congress, and one term in the United States Senate.

Probably the best known of the Mitchells was “Billy,” son of John Lendum and Harriet Mitchell (*see photo to right*). His legacy was expanding the use of air power in the U.S. military. Born in 1879, he enlisted in the army while still in college in order to serve in the Spanish-American War. Deciding on a military career, he also served in World War I and increasingly began to recognize the importance of aviation in battle. He learned to fly at his own expense. Mitchell rose to the ranks of Brigadier General and made Chief of Air Service of the Group of Armies, the top aviation command. However, his insistent claims of air superiority over the sea led to confrontations with the U.S. Navy and his superiors. He was eventually tried by court-martial and found guilty of insubordination.

When Mitchell resigned from service in 1926, he continued his advocacy for increased air power in the military—a position that was eventually accepted in the United States military. Because of his relentless struggle in the history of aviation and his family ties to Milwaukee, The Milwaukee County Board voted in 1941 to change the name of the county-operated airport to General Mitchell Field (later changed to General Mitchell International Airport).



Almost immediately following the building of the new terminal by the WPA and into the 1950s, flight operations at Mitchell Field grew. In 1955, the airport opened a new three-concourse, two-level structure that accommodated 23 gates.

Expansion continued in the 1970s with a renovation of the existing terminal building. This enabled the facility to house bigger shops and a larger baggage claim and ticketing area. In 1990, another expansion took place, with Concourse D opening a 16-gate addition, boosting the airport total number of gates to 42. A 425-foot moving walkway was added shortly afterwards. In 2015, the Baggage Claim facility was completely renovated.

Today the airport is known as the General Mitchell International Airport.

## INTERESTING FEATURES

- **USO Lounge on Concourse D**, a retreat for active duty military members, General Mitchell International Airport, 5300 S. Howell.
- **Mitchell Gallery of Flight**, a non-profit aviation museum, General Mitchell International Airport, 5300 S. Howell.

## RECURRING NEARBY OUTINGS (Health conditions permitting)

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.

OVERCOME YOUR FEAR OF FLYING PROGRAM			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
See General Mitchell International Airport website	5300 S. Howell Ave.	Opportunity to learn skills to feel more comfortable while flying.	Free

SELF-GUIDED AIRPORT TOUR			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Anytime	5300 S. Howell Ave.	Tour guided by booklet accessed on the website. See General Mitchell International Airport website	Free

GARDEN DISTRICT FARMERS MARKET			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Jun. through mid-Oct., Sat.'s 1-5pm	Just south of Howard on 6th St.	Market of fresh vegetables and other vendors.	Free

GARDEN DISTRICT CRAFT FAIR			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Apr., Sat. 9am-3pm	3333 S. Howell Ave.	Fair of over 25 vendors, concessions, prizes, bake sale, and more.	unk

### SLEDDING--WILSON

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Winter, daytime	Wilson Recreation, 4001 S. 20th St.	Sledding hills for family and friends.	Free

### GLOW SKATE

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Dec., Fri. 7:30-9pm	Wilson Park Arena, 4001 S 20th St.	Skating, glow-in-the-dark necklaces, holiday lights, music, prize drawings and a gourmet hot-chocolate bar (skate rentals available).	unk

### JULY 4TH CELEBRATION--WILSON

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 9am-10pm	Wilson Park, 1601 W. Howard Ave.	Parade, Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, music, games, fireworks.	Free

### EGYPTIAN COPTIC BAKE SALE—OAK CREEK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Dec., Sat., Sun. 10am-6pm	St. Mary & St. Antonious Coptic Orthodox Church, 1521 W. Drexel Ave., Oak Creek	Christmas bake sale, ethnic food, church tour, Egyptian souvenirs.	Free

### TASTE OF EGYPT—OAK CREEK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Aug., Fri. 12-8pm, Sat. 10am-8pm, Sun. 11am-7pm	St. Mary & St. Antonious Coptic Orthodox Church, 1521 W. Drexel Ave., Oak Creek	Opportunity to sample Egyptian foods at Egyptian Christian church, alcohol-free family fun.	Free

### OAK CREEK LIONSFEST

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Sep., Fri. starts 3pm, Sat. 12pm, Sun. 9am, Mon. 12pm	9327 S. Shepard Ave., Oak Creek	Labor Day long weekend festival with food, Brew City Wrestling, raffle, midway rides, and more.	Free

Most of these outings are provided courtesy of MECAH Publishing. To access the book that provides nearly 600 outings—all priced under \$10—for the entire Greater Milwaukee area, go to <http://mecahmilwaukee.com/NonFiction.html>

## QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS

### **Quotes from an ongoing oral history of the Garden District by Urban Anthropology Inc.<sup>1</sup>—about THEN**

“I would say it was solidly Democratic when I was a kid. Pretty much still now. Voting trends show more Republican but still the majority Democrat. As a matter of fact, John F. Kennedy came to Southgate when he was running. My mother shook hands with him and said she’d never wash it again.”

### **Quotes from an ongoing oral history of the Garden District by Urban Anthropology Inc.—about NOW**

“We have banners that say ‘10 years for the Gateway to Milwaukee’ and now we have the wreaths. We started with it last year and now we have more. By next year we plan to have more lights. Step by step. We have maybe 25 hotels now. We encourage the airport to take care of the highway. We work with them to do the maintenance. A lot of stuff. It wasn’t like that when I first came.”

“It’s a working class area. We have a commercial area and have hospitals, businesses, the airport, and a lot of job opportunities.”

“The Garden District does not have a lot of folks who are ‘stinking rich.’ It is solidly middle class, but that has been eroding as industrial employment is exiting. A lot of retired people as well. [I’ve] noticed a change in the past 20 years—various widows on the street from people who are older. The population was getting older, but then after the housing bust in 2008 a lot of people were leaving their homes or [experiencing] foreclosure – the empties were astonishing. As those houses were sold affordably, there are many more young families moving in. So, today, the Garden District has a relatively new generation buying the real estate. Housing stock is generally well-kept. Places that were the [most pitiful] during the lowest part of the recession were replanted, repainted, a lot of people put work back into those houses.”

“The fact that the airport began as a private airport and became the public airport and now we have the Gateway to Milwaukee, which is part of the Garden District. The filling in of the train tracks when the freeway was being built where the gardens are now. That covered the transportation route and now it’s being revitalized into a community space. That’s a pretty big deal and there’s still plans to do more.”



“Some of the smaller stores that were hanging on in the 80s and 90s and maybe the online revolution pushed them out. Some have not been filled with new entrepreneurs. Caterpillar closed down and that moved from an industrial-zoned area to a commercial, shopping area. Medium size companies are still here.”

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<sup>11</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-  
View from Howell Ave looking southeast (1)



Today's neighborhood-  
Entrance to international arrivals terminal



Today's neighborhood-  
View from Howell Ave looking southeast (2)



Today's neighborhood-Mitchell Field from Howell Ave looking east

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@currently.com](mailto:JFLanthropologist@currently.com)

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<sup>1</sup> Photo (modified) attribution: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/ba/Billy\\_Mitchell.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/ba/Billy_Mitchell.jpg)