

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Belleville Provides Sense of Hometown Community for Military Family

Belleville, Ill. – February 27, 2020 – Ash and Emily Smith have lived a lot of places – Ohio, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Italy, just to name a few. As children of parents who made careers in the military, they both were used to a childhood of new homes, schools, cities and even countries. Perhaps that’s why they gravitated toward one another in 2006 when they met as undergraduate students at Fayetteville State University. The couple wed in 2008, and like their parents before them, dedicated themselves to a life of military service.

“Before we came to this area, I was selected for a mission that was either going to put us in Washington D.C. or at Scott Air Force Base,” said Ash, who is an air operations planner at Scott Air Force Base. “I had the opportunity to telework for about six weeks between Scott [Air Force Base] and Charlotte, where I was stationed at the time, and with that, I got to explore this region and became really drawn to it.”

Then, orders came down, and the Smith family was officially stationed to Scott Air Force Base.

“We were thrilled to be stationed here,” said Emily, who works as a freelance marketing and writing professional. “We looked all over the area – O’Fallon, Shiloh, Fairview, Mascoutah – but Belleville drew us in. It kind-of hit us when we learned of the charming downtown, the historic neighborhoods, and the community centeredness that Belleville offers.”

In fact, it was those historic neighborhoods and homes that sealed the deal for the Smiths, who had always dreamed of rehabilitating a home to make their own. So, that’s what they did in 2017, when they bought a 5,000 square-foot home on Belleville’s historic Abend Street.

“We’re basically living in a piece of art,” said Emily. “The craftsmanship, details, history and stories of this home make it unlike any other, and this is where I want my boys to grow up. I want to provide them with a sense of a hometown and lifelong friends and connections, and I want to do that right here.”

Not only has the home rehabilitation connected the Smiths to other like-minded individuals in their neighborhood, of which there are plenty, but the couple also connected with a strong homeschooling organization as they homeschool their boys, Ben, 10 and Wes, 7.

The City of Belleville, Illinois, incorporated in 1814, is the St. Clair County seat and the largest city in southern Illinois. With a current population of 44,478 (2010), Belleville is home to the longest contiguous main street in the United States, excellent education and healthcare organizations, and thriving businesses and neighborhoods, including three National Historic Districts. Mayor Mark Eckert runs the municipal government along with elected officials including City Clerk Jennifer Gain Meyer, Treasurer Dean Hardt, and 16 aldermen representing eight city wards. The vision for the City of Belleville is one where all sectors of the community work together to help the city grow and prosper and to become a model for other communities to follow.

“We’re part of a completely secular and diverse group of homeschoolers,” said Emily. “That has connected us to surrounding communities and other families who want to provide this kind of education to our children. That’s made this move a seamless transition for our boys.”

While the couple has made a concerted effort to make friends and become involved in their new city, the atmosphere in Belleville has made that unusually easy for them.

“Belleville is one of the most welcoming communities we’ve ever lived in, and that allowed us to get involved quickly,” said Emily. “Belleville’s really easy to plug into. Between the old house culture and meeting other people who are renovating or restoring houses, we’ve made a lot of good friends. We made friends quickly here, enjoy the variety of festivals downtown, and have connected to a lot of other people our age who are working to shape this community for the future.”

Another attractive aspect for the Smith family is the progress they’ve seen throughout the city.

“Belleville is changing and with that, there is a focus on culture, art, and creating a vibrant city,” said Ash. “That is not only attractive as a homeowner and father, but to see a community come together and support things like the Mural Project, Art on the Square, and other cultural enhancements going on, well, it makes us want to be part of it.”

To learn more about the City of Belleville visit www.belleville.net.

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