

Not our first rodeo...I mean total solar eclipse!

By Trish Erzfeld, Perry County Heritage Tourism

January 2023

In anticipation of the 2024 Great North American Eclipse the City of Perryville located eighty miles south of St. Louis, Missouri has officially begun the daunting but extremely exciting task of planning for the April 8, 2024, celestial event. Unlike many small communities in Missouri, Perryville has a unique front row seat to possibly the greatest total solar eclipse the United States has ever seen with 4-minutes and 5-seconds of totality. But with the amazing view comes many decisions to make concerning the great influx of people that will also want to witness this spectacular natural event and nobody knows that better than Perryville! With a city population of 8,225 and a county population totaling 18,971, Perryville will be ready to greet their astronomy fans and solar eclipse chasers just as they did for the 2017 Great American Eclipse. That's right this is their second total solar eclipse in just seven short years! In 2017 they had a parade, 5K Glow Run/Walk, Chalk Art Festival, Mud Festival, mobile planetarium, a carnival, plus multiple science themed booths, all rolled up into a four-day eclipse festival known as Solarfest.

Perryville Regional Airport located near the banks of the mighty Mississippi River is directly aligned with the eclipse's path of totality giving lookers a whopping three minutes and twenty-nine seconds of sheer amazement! Boasting a 7,000-foot airstrip it is sure to attract many astronomers and eclipse enthusiasts from around the nation just as it did for the 2017 Great American Eclipse. One-hundred forty-seven aircrafts of various sizes flew into this unique viewing location, and we anticipate that many if not more for the 2024 eclipse.

Perryville also had three free public viewing sites for visitors to enjoy and with each one of those sites on board again, there is enough room for everyone.

Currently an eclipse task force has been assembled and are strategizing on the best possible viewing locations, parking areas, shuttle routes, camping sites, and various weekend/evening entertainment options leading up to the main "totality" event. This task force is made up of city and county officials, economic development authorities, 911 and emergency management officials, local police and sheriff's department, county health department personnel, local businesses, and residents. These are the people, experts in their fields that will help us locate the best viewing sites, map the safest travel routes, bringing community awareness and education to our residents and creating an overall extraordinary experience for all our solar eclipse hunters.

In 2017, thirty-six states and seventeen countries were among those represented in Perry County, Missouri and in 2024 thousands of eclipse seekers will be traveling to destinations

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within the path. If you miss this one, you will have to wait another twenty years for your next chance.

As our task force works diligently in the following months to develop the perfect Perry County eclipse experience and viewing sites, just know if you are looking for a rural Mississippi River valley country setting away from light, buildings and pavement...Perry County is your place to sit, stand, or lay under the Missouri sky and witness the most amazing, unique, extraordinary total solar event to grace the United States. You really don't want to miss this.

For more information, contact Trish Erzfeld, Perry County Heritage Tourism at trish@perryvillemo.com or call 573-517-2069