

# **Grafton Ferry opening tomorrow, promising to start tourism season in Grafton**

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**GRAFTON** - As many as 21,000 cars came across the Grafton Ferry during its 2016 season.

Outgoing Grafton Mayor Tom Thompson, whose term ends on May 2, 2017, said the ferry was originally viewed as unpopular among Grafton officials, who believed it was a waste of money and time. Thompson said he reinstated the ferry service after his 2009 election, and has not regretted it at all. In fact, Thompson believes the ferry service makes Grafton unique as a tourism destination, adding those visitors don't always stay in "little Grafton."

"I think we draw a lot from O'Fallon, Missouri, and the outlying area," Thompson said. "I've talked to so many people, and it surprises me how far they have come. Not everybody who comes to Grafton on the ferry come back on it. Some go north to the state park and Calhoun, and others go south to Alton, and take a long way around to get back home."

Thompson estimated as many as 13,000 of those cars stay in Grafton to enjoy the shops, restaurants and venues. He said that was a conservative estimate as well. Each of those cars carries at least two people on average, Thompson said. According to estimates from the Grafton Chamber of Commerce, Thompson said the average visitor to Grafton also spends as much as \$30 during a visit.

The ferry goes back and forth from Grafton's landing to a landing in St. Charles County, Missouri. The City of Grafton owns both landing areas.

"I was criticized a lot when we purchased that piece of land in Missouri," Thompson said. "People wondered why the Village of Grafton would ever want a piece of land in Missouri. Without that, though, we wouldn't have the Grafton Ferry as it is."

Taking the ferry from Grafton to Missouri will result in reaching Grafton Ferry Road - a road, which was recently repaved - leading to Highway 94. A right turn on that highway will take drivers into the heart of Downtown St. Charles, making the ferry a two-way tourism vehicle.

Operating hours for the ferry are 10 a.m. - 10 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. on Sundays. It operates other days of the week only if they fall on a holiday, such as Memorial Day or Independence Day.

A round-trip ticket for the ferry is \$15, which goes toward helping the ferry's operators - Calhoun County Ferry Company - maintain the ferry, with a small portion of that going to Grafton to continue advertising for tourism.

"They make a profit, but I don't think it's a huge one or anything," Thompson said. "We could never operate it ourselves. The insurance rate alone is enormous. They also spent a couple hundred thousand dollars to rebuild a motor one year."

Ferry operations will begin on Friday, April 28, 2017, as they usually begin on the last weekend of April. They will continue into at least the first weekend of November, Thompson said. Weather-permitting, ferry operations may continue until as late as the second week of November.