

# A Place to Get Your Kicks: Route 66 Flea Market, Kickstand and Teri's Diner

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Route 66 has always been known for its diners, cafes, and mom 'n pop businesses. But now, just like in Route 66's heyday, sometimes it's just a “mom” shepherding the business operation. In this day and age of women-owned and -operated businesses

making news, there's one in Mitchell, Illinois (an unincorporated community near Granite City) that harkens back to the days of women establishing a little cafe or shop along the historic highway.

But this business is no pocket-handkerchief-size tea room or six-stool diner – this woman operator has grown a large operation – now up to a whopping 21,000 square feet total. Gina Korte first opened up the Route 66 Flea Market in 2006 at 3117 W. Chain of Rocks Road – Old Route 66. But in 2019, she moved the operation next door to her present location at 3121 W. Chain of Rocks Road.

Although it all began with just ten vendors, now Korte has over 150 vendors in the storage rental facility in Mitchell, Illinois. “Every one of those stores is like 500 . So you've got about 10,500 in the units and then about another 4,000 in the storefronts – seven storefronts -- so that's where we're at.”

An innovative concept, the former storage rental units are utilized as vendor booths. “It's really nice,” Korte said proudly. “We were located next door, and some of the reasons being, some things that the fire marshal wanted, so when we moved next door , we took all that into account. So every unit has its own circuit installed in it, motion lighting in them, so they have everything that they need.”

The main building at the front of the property was formerly a church, providing 4,200 square feet of vendor space. Two attractive new rustic-style buildings at the back of the huge parking lot were built by Gina's husband, Chris Korte, of Five State Construction Services. “He builds them and I run them,” Korte said.

Korte, who formerly worked for a brokerage firm, is proud of her woman-owned and -operated business complex and seems to enjoy the interaction with vendors and customers. In the last several years, she's expanded her operation to include a bar, gaming, and two locations for shoppers to get something to eat. Korte sees this as a perk because if a couple or group comes to check out the vendors if one gets tired or isn't so interested in shopping, he or she can get a drink, do a little gaming, or get a bite.



In April 2017, the Route 66 Kickstand opened, with a bar, food offerings including pizza and toasted ravioli, five gaming machines, and a jukebox that customers can play for free. Now, two years after the pandemic and its resulting restrictions hit, the Kickstand is once again enjoying gamers and those who just want to relax with a drink. “The Kickstand is more of a gaming parlor, but you can relax there and get a drink,” said Korte.

Next, Teri Bonzicino opened Teri's Route 66 Diner next to the flea market in 2019. “She was actually located inside the flea market next door, and then she moved over. We had to build her a diner,” Korte explained, which added 1,500 square feet of kitchen and dining space. “She's been in the Flea Market three years. She has the best hand-pattied burgers and she's known for her tacos.”

Does Korte have plans for any more expansion? You bet she does. “That's what we've been looking at. I've already got the concrete there to build the next few buildings, so the question is, what kind of building do we put because prices are all over the place with Covid,” she said. “I think you're going to see at least another building go up over the next six months, probably. And then we'll go from there. That's the plan. I have lots of room to keep expanding.”

The Route 66 Flea Market, Kickstand, and Teri's Diner is a real one-stop with shopping and antiquing, food, bar, and gaming. And it's in good company – located on old Route 66 not far from two icons of the Mother Road, the Old Chain of Rocks Bridge to the west and the Luna Cafe to the east. “We do get quite a few Route 66 travelers. And we're not too far from St. Louis,” Korte said. It's a newer place where both locals and travelers can get their kicks.

The Route 66 Flea Market is open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, from 8 am-5 pm. More information is available at [www.route66fleamarket.com](http://www.route66fleamarket.com), or find them on Facebook.

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