



SCOT, LEILA, NOAH AND KRISTEN FOX SMELSER WITH CLYDE
PHOTO BY BILL BARRETT

TOWN& NEIGHBORHOOD

MAPLEWOOD | THE SMELSERS

by catherine kiene

IT'S HARD TO BE MORE QUINTESSENTIALLY MAPLEWOOD THAN THE SMELSERS. Kristen Fox Smelser owns Stellar Batik, a local art shop, and husband Scot Smelser is general manager and executive chef of Schlafly Bottleworks. Their 3-bedroom, two-story home is close enough for both to walk to work—and just about anywhere else in Maplewood. Kids Noah, 8, and Leila, 6, attend Maplewood schools, and weekends never find them far from area parks or festivals. It's more than hometown love, Fox Smelser says. For her family, it's championing an unsung St. Louis gem. 🍷

>> HOW DID YOU END UP IN MAPLEWOOD?

It was 2004 when the brewery opened, and I was pregnant with Noah. We're a one-car family, which means we were looking for a walkable community so my husband could walk to work. Scot kept saying, You're going to love it here, and he talked me into it!

>> WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT THE COMMUNITY?

I love that we can walk anywhere in a 3-mile radius and get what we need, even with two young kids. It's a small-town feel in a big city. I could have opened my business anywhere, but we chose to stay here because we believe in making Maplewood better. As a business, I was part of Taste of Maplewood and will do Let Them Eat Art; it's a wonderful event to participate in as a local artist.

>> HAS MAPLEWOOD EXPERIENCED A BIT OF A RENAISSANCE?

I have seen businesses thriving, including ours. There is such a community bond of caring people. Even in the school district, people have come together to fight for things to be better. We joke that we see kids in skinny jeans moving into nearby rentals and think, We're cool now! Young families moving in and giving the community a chance is very exciting.

>> HAS THE SCHOOL DISTRICT CHANGED IN THE PAST DECADE?

I've seen a huge turnaround. It's almost a secret how good the schools are getting, and how much the community wants to make this town a great place to raise a family. Test scores have thoroughly improved, and the high school was just named a national model school by the International Center for Leadership in Education. Teachers and principals really care and let parents participate. It's a very inclusive experience, and I feel like my kids are constantly challenged.

[family faves]

BEST RESTAURANTS>>>

Water Street Cafe, Crow's Nest, Orbit Pinball Lounge, and Schlafly Bottleworks—of course!

BEST HANGOUT>>>

The local pool and concerts in the park the last Wednesday of every month

BEST SHOPPING>>>

Maven, Kakao, Penzey's, Vom Fass

BEST PLACE FOR KIDS>>>

The library has great events and reading clubs, and Ryan Hummert Park is just a few blocks from our house.