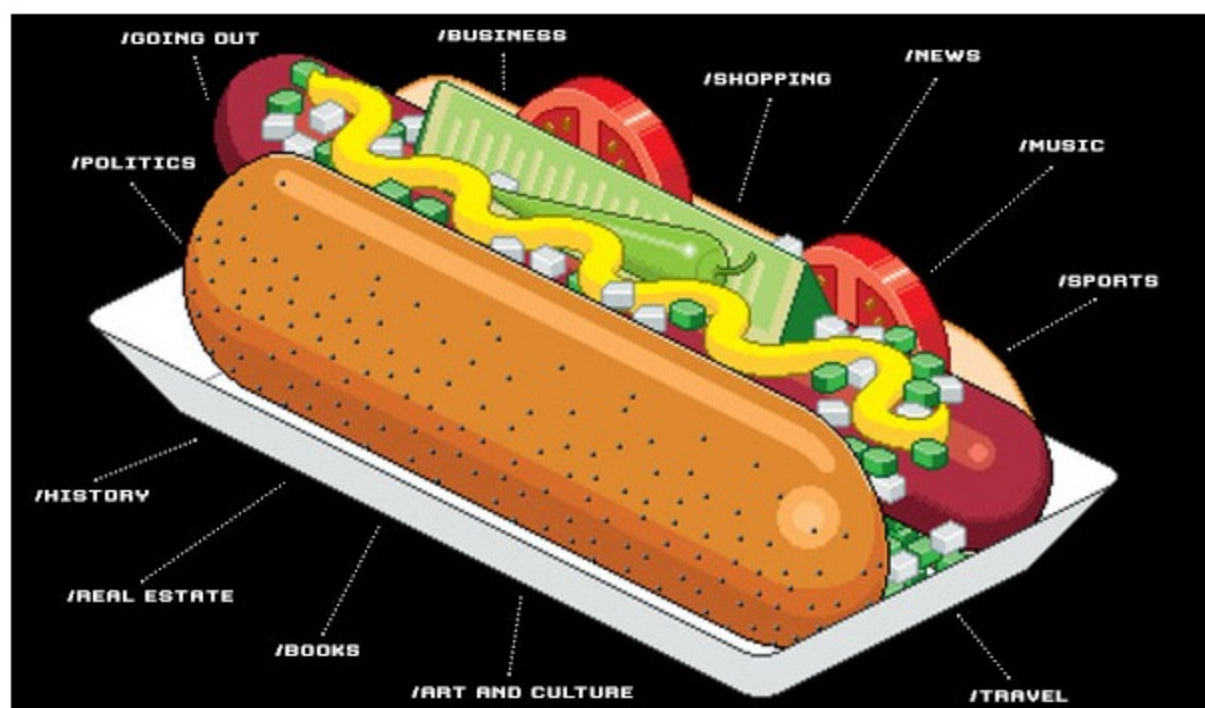


Nothing But Net: 171 Great Chicago Web Sites

Lost in front of the Web address bar? Search engines letting you down? We scoured the Web to find the sites that make the lives of Chicagoans better in the real world, winnowing the chaff from the wheat to give you the best real-estate search, the most active foodie forum, the top local news sources, and much, much more.

BY STUART LUMAN, GRAHAM MEYER, AND DAWN REISS

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Just defining the criteria for this list flummoxed us. Fantasy baseball? Too frivolous. A cocktail database? Not Chicago-specific. Svengoolie's blog? Uh, no. We settled on listing those essentially local sites we thought would be most useful or interesting to people who live right here. (And we left off the most obvious, such as ChicagoTribune.com and SunTimes.com.) Of course, there's no way we could ever have checked out everything. What'd we miss? Tell us in the comments below.

THE LIST >>

171 Chicago Web sites we love—and why—divided into categories including news, sports, arts & culture, shopping, real estate, music, parenting, and more.

MY FAVORITE SITES >>

Four local experts on music, politics, food, and design share the Web sites that keep them up to date in their fields.

TIME LESS WELL SPENT >>

Besides the useful sites listed in this article, local Web culture offers several others that are just good for leisurely browsing.

GET WIRED >>

Six spots that we think vie for the title of perfect neighborhood Wi-Fi café

JUST THE LINKS, PLEASE >>

A downloadable bookmark for quick access to all of these sites! PLUS: a list of just the links

NET PIX >>

Almost two million photos on Flickr have a Chicago connection. From an earthbound angel to an eerie nocturnal landscape, here are 13 local pix that click.

The List

The best the Web has to offer Chicago: hyperlocal news, where they towed your car, who delivers to your home, all about your house (and your neighbor's), and much more

ART & CULTURE

Former Chicago gallery owner Paul Kline holds forth at [ArtLetter.com](#) on the museums, galleries, and artists that make up Chicago's art scene.



Prolific local art podcasters (and bloggers), the writers of [BadAtSports.com](#) focus on the professional art world, especially in Chicago.

[ChicagoArt.net](#), a repository of Chicago gallery news and press releases since 2000, allows those who sign up to customize e-mail alerts for individual galleries of their choice.

[Edward Lifson](#)—well known to Chicagoans as the former host of Chicago Public Radio's Hello Beautiful!—blogs at [EdwardLifson.com](#) on modern architecture, design, and anything else that catches his eye in Chicago.

[ChicagoGalleryNews.com](#) tells visitors what's going on at individual galleries and sorts them into geographical clusters for planning an afternoon of gallery-hopping. Openings are announced on a calendar page.

Run by the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, [ChicagoArtistsResource.org](#) fashions itself as a one-stop shop for all things the working Chicago artist needs.

Local writer Claire Zulkey posts a thorough interview or a clever essay almost every day at [Zulkey.com](#). Her archive of past writing could consume your whole morning, if you're not careful.

Chicago-focused but national in scope, [SharkForum.org](#) presents short opinion pieces on arts-and-culture topics by a passel of artists who can also write. The site is usually updated with new posts five times a week or so.

[WearDuringOrangeAlert.Blogspot.com](#), a snappily designed and frequently updated music and art blog—steers readers to little-known bands, writers, and musicians and often features extensive interviews of the artists. Because the bloggers are from the Chicago area, many of their subjects have a local connection.

BOOKS

At [Chipublib.org](#), you can find out about upcoming lectures, search the catalog, use proprietary research databases (if you've got a library card), and browse historical information. And don't miss the selection of 3,000-plus digital audio books available at [Overdrive.Chipub lib.org](#) for downloading and listening. All you need is a library card, a Windows PC, and software from the library's site (free).

[Literago.org](#) keeps a calendar of local literary events and a blog (labeled "Bulletins") on reading, writing, and writers. Essays and write-ups of events appear less frequently but present a clear and well-written perspective.

Since 2002, Chicago-based [BookSlut.com](#) has been the URL where book lovers go to get busy. The site offers Q&As of major and minor authors, book reviews, blogs, and columns, and hosts a monthly reading series.

Bringing the world-renowned Chicago Manual of Style into the 21st century, [ChicagoManualOfStyle.org](#) has a subscription service and a free ongoing Q&A with the über-editors in Hyde Park.

BUSINESS

At [ChicagoBusiness.com](#), Crain's Chicago Business's site, full-time online reporters break business news, the week's print edition is free (the archives are fee-based), and multimedia features enhance the print content.

Representing more than 32,000 Chicago Latino professionals, [ChicagoLatinoNetwork.com](#) publicizes activities of the organization, which holds parties, networking and cultural events, and job fairs. A new blog allows frank discussion of issues facing local Latinos.

[FreshwaterVenture.com](#) profiles Chicago's tech start-ups and the venture capitalists and entrepreneurs who are working to build the Silicon Prairie.

[MidwestBusiness.com](#) (formerly [ePrairie.com](#)) runs Q&As of local execs, weekly columns by biz consultants and pros, and boozy photos of Chicago's tech community cutting loose at industry soirees. Use it as a regional tech news aggregator and for its business events listings.

CARS

[DriveChicago.com](#) lists new and used cars for sale in the Chicago area, sorted by proximity to your ZIP Code. Vehicle reviews from local columnists and ways to link up with fellow car nuts give the site a couple of advantages over its competitors.

Chicago-based [Cars.com](#)'s search tool includes not only new and used cars at dealerships but also private-party sales nearby. KickingTires, the site's blog, gets updates on new cars, safety, and other automotive issues multiple times daily.

CIVIC

At [CivicFed.org](#), the 113-year-old nonpartisan Chicago Civic Federation provides budget analyses covering city and county agencies, research papers explaining dense financial issues, position papers spelling out opinions, and more. An invaluable and free online resource for policy wonks.

Online arm of the well-known statewide philanthropy center, [DonorsForum.org](#) offers Philanthropy 101-type training for grant makers and grant applicants, in addition to reports, links, and access to resources from its real-world library.

Grassroots organizations need grassroots publicity. The Columbia College-based Community Media Workshop at [NewsTips.org](#) trains area nonprofits in how to court the media and hosts networking events that bring these two groups together. The site also offers a free e-mail and snail-mail newsletter to more than 1,200 journalists.

COMEDY

Seekers of a good laugh should know [TheBastion.org](#), the news site that covers Chicago comedy with posts, news, and videos, as well as a long list of links to Chicago comics, venues, and groups.

TheBastion.org editor and comedian Elizabeth McQuern keeps a personal blog at [Bellarossa.Blogspot.com](#). She posts comedy videos and engagingly written bloggy musings about life.

The List

CRIME AND POLICE

An online pioneer in crime mapping,

ChicagoCrime.org allows you to see reports of crime in your neighborhood and when and where it

happened. (This link has been updated since we first published the story)



Greed, public corruption, and murder always have a home at

TheOutfitCollective.blogspot.com, a blog started in July 2006 featuring seven crime fiction writers who discuss writing and Chicago crime, and occasionally go off topic. A new post appears every two or three days, on topics as varied as the brutal murder of dermatologist David Cornbleet and dealing with a 24-year-old Barry Bonds as an intern in 1989.

Branded as "sarcasm and silliness from a Windy City cop,"

SecondCityCop.Blogspot.com is published from behind a cloak of secrecy that allows for snarky commentary about gun issues, shootings, department issues, and police brutality.

Gangsta Chicago meets virtual Chicago at ChicagoGangs.org. The site, authored by a few Chicagoans (who don't want their names known for fear of retaliation), has grown from a collection of graffiti photographs to include maps delineating gang turf across the city, lists of active gangs, photos of hand signs and tattoos, a chatroom, and history on how gangs actually function.

DANCE

The best Web guide to Chicago's professional dance scene comes from

SeeChicagoDance.com, which highlights more than 120 dance groups—from the Joffrey Ballet to flamenco and hip-hop. The site offers discounts on tickets for more than 60 venues in the city and suburbs.

FASHION

With fashion event listings, articles on the latest trends, and a very active and visual blog,

SecondCityStyle.com is one of those sites on which it's

almost impossible to read everything. A directory of Chicago shops on the site lists hundreds of addresses and phone numbers.



City-run ChicagoFashionResource.com contains information about more than 250 local fashion designers and boutiques. Neighborhood shopping profiles and store information appear in an (appropriately) sleek visual style.

FINDING STUFF

Based in Chicago, CareerBuilder.com claims to have more than 1.5 million national job listings. A recent search found more than 15,000 jobs in the Chicago area, from tech jobs to warehouse gigs. The site sends customized e-mail job alerts, matches jobs based on the content of résumés, lists upcoming career fairs, offers career testing, and includes a salary calculator for different job titles.

Chicago.Craigslist.org is the local version of the famous online classified site that collects free, full-color, long-form classified ads. Since 2000 it's been helping Chicagoans find Mr. or Ms. Right, get a job, rent an apartment, and buy used bikes, cars, boats, furniture, or just about anything else.

Picture 2,396 Chicagoland bloggers sorted by their nearest public transit station and you understand the concept behind ChicagoBloggers.com. Although it's unclear whether a reader cares which el or Metra stop a blogger lives near, the search function makes the site more useful. A competitor, ChicagoBlogMap.com, which lists 480-plus Chicago blogs (with only partial overlap), sticks to the el map.

Find the cheapest gas in town at ChicagoGasPrices.com. All prices are posted by locals who scour the city for the cheapest fill-up and in the process earn points for free gas and other prizes.

Hotspotr.com/wifi/map/5-chicago-il provides Google maps of Chicago-area Wi-Fi hot spots with user reviews on quality of connection and number of outlets. Everything a wireless vagabond needs to get connected in unknown neighborhoods (assuming you can get online to check it).

The entire Not for Tourists guidebook of 60-plus Chicago-area neighborhoods is available online at NotForTourists.com, with neighborhood maps and detailed write-ups, just like those in the book.

Use Yelp.com to tune in to people reviewing, grading, and yapping about things and places in Chicago, from boutiques to restaurants to plumbers. The site also allows you to find nearby spots on an easy-to-use map—great for locating a good restaurant before a movie.

Think of GetFave.com as the YouTube yellow pages. Search for businesses by keyword and by address, neighborhood, or town to find listings near you; then view funny and informative videos that businesses pay to post—so you can know the personality of a place before you go.

OpenList.com brings together reviews of Chicago-area restaurants, shops, and more from several sites, including Citysearch, Amazon, and Metromix. Having more reviews together is nice, but the site uses the dubious tactic of giving the percentage of reviews that are positive, meaning storefronts can outrank world-class restaurants.

FOOD

Veggie lovers can shop locally for organic foods at FamilyFarmed.org. The site hooks users up with community-supported agriculture, where local farmers deliver fresh produce to drop-off sites in late spring, summer, and early fall.

Billed as a blog on "Chicago food for those who can barely afford it," GastronomicBypass.com offers thoughts on dining at less expensive places such as Spacca Napoli and Lula Café. The anonymous blog discusses service, presentation of dishes, cost, the scene, and dress code.

GrubHub.com tells you which restaurants deliver to your address. Users rate the choices; many listings contain coupons, and almost all let you order online with no surcharge (GrubHub gets paid by the restaurants).

The Tribune has carved out an informal place for editors and reporters to wax on about food-related hankerings, interests, celebrity chef sightings, and the restaurant biz. Focuses more on downtown, Loop, and South Loop, but throws in reviews of eats in the 'burbs and the 'hoods and occasional newsy items.

(leisureblogs.chicagotribune.com/thestew)

It can be hard to keep tabs on both haute and storefront dining. LTHForum.com, where the city's dedicated local foodies cover every neighborhood in the city, every ethnic cuisine, and every price point, with long reviews by users

(including in some cases photos of dishes), is a true find.

GARDENING

Struggling to figure out how much water to give your shadblow serviceberry?

The Chicago Botanic Garden's Bestplants.org stores a staggering amount of info on keeping plants in Illinois, with pages on almost every plant you can think of.

(Shadblow serviceberries should stay moist.)

GAY

ChicagoPride.com collects events, special offers, news, and columns of interest to the gay community. The site also hosts blogs, personal ads, and party photos with ostentatious costumes.

The List

GOING OUT

[Chi.FlavorPill.net](#) suggests local happenings that hip, arty types would like in a well-culled calendar of art, film, music, theatre, and book events—including many free ones. Event pages carry short, informative write-ups and buttons to e-mail the listing or send it to a mobile device.



If you're looking for free (or almost free) drinks, [Chi.MyOpenBar.com](#) irreverently describes three or four daily specials—more on weekends. Events are rated from one to five martini glasses, with five being so can't-miss you should be ready to write off the next morning.

Check out [Chicago.Going.com](#) for a hipster, Evite-style site that helps you find people with similar interests and let them know where you'll be. Tickets to concerts, art openings, and clubs are sold on the site, which also sends weekly newsletters with weekend event picks and party photos.

The repository of going-out info at [CenterstageChicago.com](#) supplements an ever-growing collection of articles slicing up the scene in creative ways. Recommended events and performances are easy to find and clearly presented.



The big-tent approach practiced at [Metromix.com](#) means almost every going-out destination you can think of scores its own page, complete with a short summary, vital information, and a map. The downside is that such a huge amount of information can be overwhelming. It's perfect when you want to look up a specific place or you already have an inkling of what you want to do.

GOVERNMENT

The 20-year-old independent Chicago Recycling Coalition takes the fight online at [ChicagoRecycling.org](#), with resources and how-tos on disposing of everything from computer monitors to shoes in an earth-happy way. Check out the organization's online crusade against the city's notorious blue bag program.

[BetterGov.org](#), an anticorruption organization founded during the Capone era, offers news and online tools to keep tabs on public officials.

At [ChiCityClerk.com](#), you can watch live video of Chicago City Council meetings, get a city sticker, renew a passport or a business license, and more.

Property research and tax assessment information, searchable and mappable (with satellite photos!), is at [CookCountyAssessor.com](#).

[CookCountyTreasurer.com](#) allows you to pay your property tax, check on refunds, download forms, and get more information on the subject all county residents want to know about: how much the new Cook County budget will cost them.

If one reader can avoid the excruciating trip to the Secretary of State's office to renew a driver's license or license plates, which you can do at [CyberDriveIllinois.com](#), this whole article will have been worth it.

HEALTH

The Tribune's Julie Deardorff gives alternative and mainstream health advice at Julie's Health Club ([featuresblogs.chicagotribune.com/features_julieshealthclub](#)). Topics range from advice on healthy eating to announcements of Chicago-area studies and seminars.

You can get healthy by staring at a computer screen. The Chicago Department of Public Health's site (go to [egov.cityofchicago.org](#); then click on "City Departments," then "Health") carries helpful information on where to get a flu shot, restaurant inspections, food recalls, and local public health initiatives.

HISTORY

The entire text of the Encyclopedia of Chicago is at [Encyclopedia.ChicagoHistory.org](#), along with online-only zoomable historical maps, photos, video, news articles, and much more—all searchable and free.

The Chicago architecture reference at [Ci.chi.il.us/Landmarks/](#) supplies an updated, searchable database of more than 250 designated landmarks, from the Tribune Tower to Hull-House, detailing each structure's history and architectural distinction.

Chicago's haunted hot spots are described at [ChicagoHauntings.com](#), with spooky local legends such as the vanishing hitchhiker and ghosts of the Prairie Avenue massacre.

Curious histories of streets, parks, and buildings in Chicago that you pass by every day without a thought are published sporadically with moody photography at [ForgottenChicago.com](#).

HOME

[Chicago.apartmenttherapy.com](#), a blog about urban living, homelife, and design, offers 15 daily posts. Visitors can view Chicago home tour videos and get suggestions on how to organize, beautify, and make homes more environmentally friendly.

MOVIES

The archive of reviews available at [RogerEbert.com](#) dates back to 1967. Every week, Ebert reviews all the major new releases (and most of the minor ones, too), writes a new "Answer Man" column, and identifies a new movie cliché, usually suggested by one of his readers. A showtime search tool rounds out the site.

The List

MUSIC

Pitchfork rose from nothing in the mid-1990s to become one of the primary ways 21st-century indie music fans hear about new artists and tunes. Based in a loft in Logan Square, PitchforkMedia.com is considered a leading tastemaker online or off.



Fourteen Chicago music organizations pool their resources for concert listings and blogging at ChicagoClassicalMusic.org. Clicking on dates on the calendar leads to concert information and, occasionally, sound samples.

Need an iPod update? Check out the blog of DJ Bill Valenta, a.k.a. D.J. B.V.: Theft Liable to Prosecution, at djbv.net. The indie rock and electronica lover is plugged into the Chicago music scene and writes compellingly about it and the wider music world. An extensive sidebar tells what shows he's planning to attend and links to good music sites.

With an online selection that can only be described as awesome, DustyGroove.com lets anyone, anywhere thumb through the eponymous East Ukrainian Village brick-and-mortar store's extensive collection of funk, blues, jazz, Latin, and other groovy genres on vinyl and CD. Selection is updated daily, so whatever is on the site can be shipped out to you right away.

Marc Geelhoed, the classical music and opera writer for Time Out Chicago, blogs about the local and global art-music scenes on his sparely designed site, DeceptivelySimple.Typepad.com. The ease of Geelhoed's writing will make regular readers experts by assimilation.

NEIGHBORHOODS

The 45-year-old Logan Square Neighborhood Association's site, LSNA.net, offers newsletters, a calendar of local events, job and volunteer listings, and policy papers to keep abreast of this diverse and still changing community.

ChicagoJournal.com offers stories from its print editions, which cover the West Town area and near-Loop neighborhoods. Owned by the Oak Park-based Wednesday Journal, you'll also find links for that, Chicago Parent magazine, and its other local weeklies in Austin, Forest Park, and Riverside.

Blogger Lyletta Robinson started ranting in 2005 about shabby workmanship in her Woodlawn condo. Now, IHateMyDeveloper.blogspot.com contains screeds on Woodlawn, city politics, and unscrupulous real-estate types.

News about North Side neighborhoods from the Loop to Peterson and from the lake to Sacramento is published at InsideOnline.com every Wednesday, with police updates, neighborhood notes, real-estate news, home-improvement suggestions, the occasional travel story, and classified ads.

Many suburbs, including Oak Park and Arlington Heights, get local news coverage from the Pioneer Press newspapers, which also publish online at PioneerLocal.com. High-school sports coverage and feel-good human-interest stories merit a visit.

MarshfieldTattler.blogspot.com narrates the life of a Back of the Yards woman who cares deeply about the community. While it's not updated as often as this list's other blogs, every post is worth reading.

Tom Mannis opines on Rogers Park and the 49th Ward in his fiery blog, RogersParkBench.Blogspot.com. His mix of cynicism and skepticism targets public figures such as Mayor Daley and Alderman Joe Moore.

The anonymous author of UptownUpdate.Blogspot.com, bristling at the lack of mainstream press coverage of Uptown, created the site in May as a community forum and home for photos and short squibs about community news.

Chicago's oldest community newspaper, the Hyde Park Herald (HPHerald.com) reports on its intellectual, stubborn, vocal eponymous neighborhood. Editorials, the police blotter, and local profiles spur angry dissent—but what else would you expect from Hyde Park?

NEWS—OPINION/ANALYSIS

Michael Miner, who started working at the Chicago Reader in 1979, inimitably covers Chicago media through his column "Hot Type" (archived at ChicagoReader.com/features/stories/hottype) and News Bites blog (Blogs.ChicagoReader.com/news-bites) with a gritty mix of criticism and commentary.

A vibrant and playful e-zine on local and national politics, media, and culture, BeachwoodReporter.com is the brainchild of former Chicago magazine staffer Steve Rhodes and friends.

The movies have Ebert and Roeper, and law and economics has Gary S. Becker, a Nobel-winning University of Chicago professor, and Richard A. Posner, a federal appeals court judge and polymath. Becker-Posner-Blog.com produces an impossible number of high-quality essays on heady topics such as whether a bond market is the best predictor of the outcome of a war.

Chicago Public Radio's new Vocalo.org service mixes on-air (on 89.5 FM) and Web-streamed user-submitted content. Vocalo holds free radio production training (schedules online) and allows users to submit audio stories, to blog, and to record messages or commentary by phone for airing.

The Chicago Tribune's metro columnist Eric Zorn blogs to discuss the issues of the day, explore stories that didn't make it into the print edition, and launch off-or disagree with—Tribune editorials. He also plumbs nostalgia for old TV shows and gripes about his Mac. (blogs.chicagotribune.com/news_columnists_езorn)

NEWS—REPORTING

The lively independent e-zine GapersBlock.com tells you what's happening in Chicago every weekday, providing eight or so links daily to quirky happenings, places, and news stories alongside opinionated commentary and columns on local news and entertainment.

Reporters on MethodsReporter.com, a one-year-old site created by students at Northwestern's Medill journalism school, do something unheard of in the blogosphere: reporting. In an innovative arrangement, their writers don't get paid for stories but share in the revenue generated by ads that run alongside their articles.

Hyperlocal news site outside.in aggregates blogs and news stories based on ZIP Code (or for an entire town). Includes searchable maps, graphs that show how popular news items have been, and e-mail alerts for new content.

At Chicagoist.com, a gaggle of local writers opine on everything from CTA and Metra budgets and fare hikes to the goings-on about town, including art shows, music, new restaurants, and weekend plans. A competitor to GapersBlock and part of a worldwide network of -ist sites.

The combined output of news sites, blogs, and think tanks appears on the Chicago Daily Observer's engrossing news aggregator CDObs.com.

The List

PARENTING

Ideas for inexpensive family fun or a cheap couple's rendezvous romantique (sans enfants) are available at DancingMeatballs.com/Chicago. The site sends out a weekly newsletter with a unique and affordable activity (less than \$20 a person) for each day of the week.



ChicagoKids.com pulls suggestions from child-friendly events listings and links to helpful resources, such as for party planning and shopping.

Parents tired of paying too much for special-occasion kids' clothes can visit Chicago-based Gagas.com, where they can rent them instead. There are more than 1,000 options for children from newborns to early teens, ranging from formal to classic to funky. Clothes are shipped in a few days (or overnight, if need be) and can be kept from three to six weeks. The other plus: no washing. Dirty clothes can be sent back in the prepaid package.

Find the perfect babysitter, pet sitter, nanny, or dog walker at SitterCity.com. Parents can conduct a four-step screening process and background check on sitters, who post a comprehensive profile and video interview findable by ZIP Code. SitterCity users review sitters they've hired.

Moms, unite! A collaborative group of more than 25 moms share their thoughts on pushing strollers on snowy sidewalks, whether girls learn better at girls-only schools, and traveling with kids, among other maternal topics, at SVMomBlog.Typepad.com/Chicago_Moms.

POLITICS

Archpundit.com is Larry Handlin, a 30-something liberal blogger who grew up downstate in Normal and now lives in St. Louis. Even from Missouri, he still can't help but get steamed over issues related to Governor Blago and local U.S. House races, as well as national figures such as conservative columnist Robert Novak.



BlogNetNews.com/Illinois, created by former USA Today editorial writer Dave Mastio, lists the most often clicked, most often linked, most active, and most influential (by its own mathematical metric) blogs in Illinois.

Chicago-based RealClearPolitics.com pulls together links to the biggest national political stories of the day, along with opinion pieces and analysis from major media outlets. Insatiable politics wonks will feel at home here.

A left-leaning blog community with multiple items daily about Illinois politics, PrairieStateBlue.com allows regular users with something to say to write posts, not just comment.

The right-wing bloggers at IllinoisReview.Typepad.com post so often that you have to visit several times a week if you want to see everything before it gets bumped off the bottom of the page and into the archive. Unflinchingly conservative, this site covers state and national political news with subtle acidity.

REAL ESTATE

Zillow.com gives anyone buying or selling a house access to key information: comparative sales prices and estimates of the value of unsold property. The site also offers searchable listings with Q&A sections to discuss properties with sellers or agents and searchable maps to scour neighborhoods for deals.

If you sign up at CondoPerks.com, then shop at participating businesses through their Web portal, CondoPerks sends rebate checks for a percentage of each sale to your condo association.

The public-records site NewsChicago.org aggregates data on fires, code violations, tax sales, and housing court notices, among other things. You can also snoop into the public records of your neighbors, and your neighborhood as a whole.

YoChicago.com offers not only the standard video tours and search tools for homes for sale but also a blog covering new buildings, real estate-related news, and neighborhood photos.

The lifeblood of Chicago.BlockShopper.com is squibs on real-estate deals in Lincoln Park and Lake View: who bought, who sold, and how much, constructed from public data.

Almost every real-estate site these days lets visitors search property listings from the Multiple Listing Service. The search tool at BairdWarner.com is the best, with a nifty Google Maps mash-up and clear interface.

SCHOOLS

Public school report cards can be downloaded and viewed at ISBE.State.il.us. Click on "Report Card" in the list of links on the left-hand side.

The latest news and rumors about Chicago public schools appear in [District 299: TheChicagoSchoolsBlog](http://District299:TheChicagoSchoolsBlog). Every weekday, freelance journalist Alexander Russo, who is a contributing editor at Catalyst magazine, posts news on school board doings, gang violence, testing, and teacher awards. (This link has been updated since we first published the story)

Basic data about area private schools and their neighborhoods is collected at PrivateSchoolReview.com/state_high_schools/stateid/IL. Enrollments, student-teacher ratios, and profiles appear in an easy-to-read design.

SERVICES

Viewpoints.com aggregates reviews on baby products, electronics, pet products, movies, autos, education, health, home and garden, travel, and more. Reviewers specify their backgrounds so you can judge if your style jibes with theirs.

AngiesList.com is a pay service (\$8.75 a month plus a \$15 sign-up fee) for finding home services, rated and selected by users, with recommendations on which contractors are great and which aren't.

Skokie-based Internet supermarket Peapod.com has a wide selection, an easy-to-use Web interface, and decent veggies. Make your choices and a Peapod truck delivers the next day. Don't expect to save any money, but it will free you from the time-suck that is visiting the local supermarket.

E-mail, online file storage, calendars, and more are free for residents and local businesses from the City of Chicago at SIMChicago.com. Services are accessible through a Web interface or downloadable Windows-only software.

The List

SHOPPING

Use SeeMoreShopping.com to find stores by category of merchandise, shopping mall, retailer, brand name, or city/neighborhood. Street-by-street analysis is available under What You'll Find Here.



The Tribune's "Answer Angel" Ellen Warren's blog covers all things shopping, from puzzling questions about buying fresh flowers to finding a personal shopper. (featuresblogs.chicagotribune.com/shopping_ellen_warren)

Melissa Maynard launched Factio-Magazine.com in 2002 as a way to showcase Chicago boutique openings, local and national designers, and videos of designers. Subscribers to the free e-mail list receive VIP invites to parties.

DailyCandy.com/chicago gives addicts a daily shopping fix in a sassy chick-lit style, with updates every day on what's hot, new, and undiscovered, from fashion and style to gadgets, travel, beauty, dining, and more. Subscribe for free daily e-mails.

Recent launch CheapUncle.com (based in Hoffman Estates) compares prices on the same item at different online stores, as many meta-search tools do, but it also searches for and includes discounts from e-coupons.

SPORTS

The local pro teams' official sites cover stories that don't even make page C16. Check out the progress of Wrigley Field's new drainage system at Chicago.Cubs.MLB.com. Sox middle reliever contracts are dissected at Chicago.WhiteSox.MLB.com. At NBA.com/Bulls, players Ben Gordon and Luol Deng keep blogs. Copious videos of player and coach interviews are available at ChicagoBears.com. Blackhawks.NHL.com runs alternately bitter and hopeful feature stories. All sell tickets to games, keep updated stats, and host discussion forums.

Bocce, baton, and badminton program times, places, and costs are findable with the search tool at ChicagoParkDistrict.com, along with info on city parks, events, and facilities.

Whether you're thinking about running your first 5K or your next marathon, you can find out about road races, training, and safety tips on Chicago Area Runners Association's CARARuns.org.

The full name of the collaboratively written Cubs fan/obsessive blog GoatRiders.org is "Goat Riders of the Apocalypse, bringing you Cubs news, analysis and humor until the end of the world." Is that the day the Cubs win the World Series?

SoxTalk.com/forums gives White Sox fans a sounding board for armchair trade analysis and proclamations of doom. Commentary and news on local and national sports from more than 20 contributors are published at ChicagoSportsReview.com, plus plentiful links to coverage elsewhere.

CSWeekly.com, a free weekly sports magazine run by former Chicago Sports Review editor Chris Sprow, showcases original reporting and features, written by approximately 20 regular contributors.

Curse, banter, and sound off about how this might be the year at The Cub Reporter, MVN.com/MLB-Cubs, featuring Cubs-related news, rumors, updates, and commentary from bloggers like "Arizona Phil," "Transmission," and "Cubnut."

If the time between fall Sundays seems like an eternity, check out Bears blog WindyCityGridiron.com (slogan: "Being Who You Thought We Were Since 2005!"), for game recaps and judiciously quoted links to Bears coverage, along with links to other diehard-NFL-fan blogs.

Truehoop.com's Henry Abbott calls Blogabull.com the "patron saint of basketball blogging." The various diaries sometimes draw 300 or more comments per post.

THEATRE

Half-price tickets for more than 190 local theatres can be found at HotTix.org. Browse the list of shows with tickets available; then buy either from one of the three HotTix storefronts or online for pickup at the box office. A service charge of \$2.25 to \$5 goes to the League of Chicago Theatres, and a \$3 handling fee covers HotTix' expenses.

ChicagoPlays.com features a tool for searching live-theatre performance listings (of members of the League of Chicago Theatres) by title, date, venue, company, and several other criteria. It also promotes Theater Thursdays, performance-plus-reception events.

The List

TRANSPORTATION

ParkWhiz.com allows you to reserve and prepay (with a 10 percent commission tacked on) for parking spots at participating garages in Chicago and lists locations and prices for most nonparticipating garages. To find a spot, type in your destination and the times you plan to park and return to your car. Those who own spare parking spaces can also list them and maybe make a few bucks.



Chicagoland Bicycle Federation's Web site, BikeTraffic.org, is filled with news, events, tips, and educational resources for area cyclists.

CTA-related headlines, in-depth data, and historical photos of trains, maps, stations, and lines that make up the second-largest U.S. transit system. Any CTA addict (you know who you are) will be in utter bliss at chicago-l.org.

CTATattler.com is the place to go to vent some spleen regarding the CTA. The site offers news on individual train delays and analysis of the endless, slow-motion financial problems. Users can also send and receive news alerts by cell phone.

Traffic.com provides traffic reports, congestion maps, and weather in your browser, streamed to your desktop, by an automated phone call, or as text messages to your mobile device.



A great resource for mass transit users, TripsWeb.RTACHicago.com lets you type in your starting address and your destination and find what buses or trains to take and when you'll get there, customized for fewer transfers or less walking.

Reserve a van to O'Hare or Midway online—no hassles with taxis, public transit, or operators. It's cheaper than a cab, and no credit card is required. A downside: They don't pick up everywhere inside Chicago. (Most suburbs are covered.) (airport.express.hudsonltd.net/res)

TRAVEL

For low-planning getaways, EnjoyIllinois.com highlights destinations such as Dickson Mounds Museum, Cave-in-Rock State Park's limestone cave, and the birthplace of Carl Sandburg.

WOMEN'S INTEREST

Blagica Stefanovski's blog GalsGuide.com gives firsthand advice and opinions on news, YouTube videos, saving money, budget shopping, dating, and the lives of Chicago 20-somethings.