

# SI NOW HAPPENING

JANUARY  
2024



LIVE HERE. WORK HERE. DO BUSINESS HERE.

## TOP NEWS OF THE MONTH



### SI NOW YOU KNOW! ILLINOIS TOPS 2023 RANKINGS

**ILLINOIS IS #1 IN THE MIDWEST FOR BUSINESS CREATION**  
**ILLINOIS IS #1 IN THE MIDWEST FOR WORKFORCE**

“

**“OFFERING WORLD-CLASS  
INFRASTRUCTURE, UNMATCHED  
WORKFORCE AND A PRIME LOCATION IN  
THE MIDDLE OF EVERYTHING, ILLINOIS IS  
AN ESTABLISHED ECONOMIC  
POWERHOUSE OFFERING MORE  
INCENTIVES THAN EVER BEFORE.  
THERE’S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO  
DO BUSINESS IN THE LAND OF LINCOLN.”**

**KRISTIN RICHARDS, DIRECTOR  
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

”

Did you now that Illinois consistently topped 2023 rankings by leading publications including Site Selection Magazine and CNBC’s Top States for Business? Well, if you didn’t, now you know! In fact, Illinois has ranked in Site Selection Magazine’s Top 5 for new business expansions and relocations for several years, moving from 3rd in 2021 to 2nd in the nation in 2022. Now that’s something to be proud of!

With additional recognitions for workforce, infrastructure, and education, Illinois is well-positioned for continued growth and success in 2024 and beyond. SI Now is proud to partner in this work to be sure Southern Illinois is a big part of that success.

**Illinois is #2 in the nation for new business expansions and relocations**  
**Illinois is #2 in the nation for both infrastructure and education**  
**Illinois is the 4th largest manufacturing state by output**  
**Illinois is the 5th largest manufacturing workforce in the nation**  
**Illinois has the 18th largest economy in the world**



**A WIN FOR ONE IS A WIN FOR ALL OF SOUTHERN ILLINOIS !**

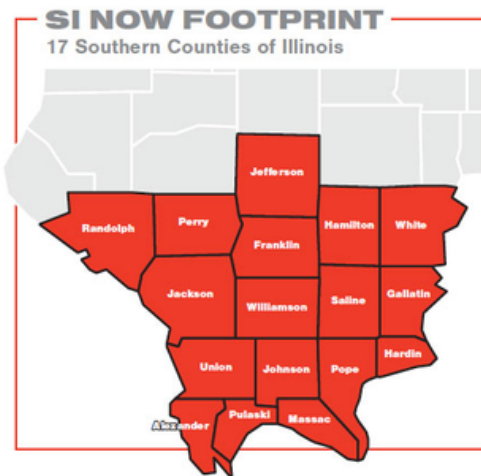
# A Note from SI Now's Executive Director

by Dr. Deb Barnett



**HAPPY NEW YEAR!** 2023 was an exciting year and we expect the momentum to continue in 2024! I've said many times that there is something special happening in our region - something we have not experienced in quite some time. No matter where we travel throughout Southern Illinois, we see a spirit of optimism, collaboration, and vision. We have so much to be proud of, so many dedicated people rowing in the same direction, and so many assets that many of us have taken for granted in the past - myself included. Sometimes appreciating what we have requires taking a step back, seeing with a fresh set of eyes, and gaining a new perspective.

As we kick off 2024, I challenge you to do just that. Take an inventory of the natural resources we get to enjoy and that visitors are discovering for the first time. Learn about a new business in your area and be intentional about supporting them. Thank your employees or fellow co-workers for a job well done. And appreciate those around you with a kind word - you just never know if the person you are talking to might become your newest community member or business owner because you made them feel so welcome with a big dose of Southern Illinois hospitality! Happy 2024 to you and yours!



## WhySI?

### Blachere Illumination

A Southern Illinois business is not only bringing holiday magic to communities but also actively reducing the environmental footprint by repurposing plastic waste. Very few know the wonder of light displays like Ronnie Brown. **With a client list boasting iconic names like Disney, Sea World, and Hollywood's Rodeo Drive, Brown has elevated Blachere into the premier LED lights display company in the United States.** "Southern Illinois is called the heartland for a reason," Brown notes. "It's practically in the middle of the United States. If we set up in New York, it would have been a fortune, and then it would mean that West Coast customers would have to pay a fortune for shipping. It just made sense." [READ MORE](#)





## Business Growth & Development

Downtown revitalization is happening across the country and Southern Illinois is no exception. For decades, retail business that once made up the majority of city centers have declined, leaving historic buildings falling into disrepair as businesses moved out. Now, community members with a vision and desire to see their town grow are driving a renaissance, with diverse projects that range from boutiques and coffee shops to innovative co-working spaces. This infusion into downtown fosters economic growth but also creates vibrant community gathering spaces and historic preservation. It sparks a sense of community pride and engagement, encouraging younger residents to actively participate in the growth. Although we could cite many examples throughout the region, the recent revitalization on Marion's Tower Square has garnered statewide attention with Landmarks Illinois recognizing Jeff Mayer for his meticulous rehabilitation of the historic Goodall Building. From Carmi, to Carterville, to Red Bud, to Anna, to Murphysboro, downtowns are coming back to life!



Landmarks Illinois November 2023 issue featuring Marion businessman Jeff Mayer in front of the historic Goodall Building

For information on business opportunities in Southern Illinois, visit <https://southernillinoisnow.org/do-business-here/>



## Education & Workforce Development

**Illinois is #1 in the Midwest for Workforce as ranked by Site Selection Magazine and here are a few reasons why.**

Congratulations to the Fall 2023 graduates of the **Highway Construction Careers Training Program (HCCTP)** through **Shawnee Community College in collaboration with John A. Logan College and the Illinois Department of Transportation**. This 12-week program, designed to increase access to highway construction jobs for minorities, women and disadvantaged individuals, is critical to maintaining a strong Southern Illinois workforce. Here is a glimpse into this semester's projects.

Whether you are an employer seeking to add to your skilled workforce or a job seeker looking to train for career opportunities, apprenticeships are a great option to consider. Southern Illinois community colleges have multiple programs to choose from. Simply search *apprenticeships* on your community college district's website or contact them directly for details.

## Marketing the Region

In addition to telling the region's collective story through the NOW! magazine, social media, and other marketing strategies, SI Now places high priority on putting Southern Illinois on the map and in front of decision makers throughout the country and around the world. Most recently, SI Now highlighted recent growth in the region's aviation industry as part of Business Facilities' **Aviation and Airports: Reaching New Heights** feature in its November/December 2023 issue. Check out the article at <https://businessfacilities.com/aviation-industry-airports-reaching-new-heights/>



# AROUND THE REGION

JANUARY 2024

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Ice Skating at Marion's Tower Square  
(Photo by Michael Bruce)

## JANUARY EVENTS

- 15** Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- 15** Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration - Marion
- 15** Carbondale Branch NAACP Scholarship Breakfast - SIU
- 28** The Ice at Tower Square - Marion

## LOOKING AHEAD

- FEB 2-4** Southern Illinois Boat & Fishing Show - Marion
- FEB 23-24** Home & Outdoor Expo - Mt. Vernon
- MAR 23-24** Maple Syrup Festival - Makanda
- APR 8** Total Solar Eclipse

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FOR DETAILS



## FIELD TRIP FRIDAYS - ENTER TO WIN!

Congratulations to Tiffany George of Villa Ridge who correctly identified last month's *Field Trip Friday* location as the African American Museum of Southern Illinois located in Mounds. Tiffany wins four Saluki basketball tickets to cheer on the Dawgs!

Can you guess where we visited in December?

This local airport had 25,800 aircraft operations and an economic impact of over \$40 million in 2022 alone! Stop by and see the planes take off while enjoying a delicious bite to eat right off the runway. Enter the correct answer on our [contest entry form](#) and you'll be added to the drawing for this month's prize.



A Southern Illinois Success Initiative



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