

SI NOW HAPPENING

MARCH 2024



LIVE HERE. WORK HERE. DO BUSINESS HERE.



TOP NEWS OF THE MONTH

OUTDOOR ECONOMY SUMMIT

On Wednesday, February 21st, Southern Illinois Now, in partnership with SIU's Touch of Nature and Southernmost Tourism Bureau, hosted the first ever Southern Illinois Outdoor Economy Summit. The invitation only event was attended by more than 50 stakeholders in the outdoor economy of Southern Illinois.

From adventures like hiking, biking, and rock climbing to relaxing wineries, cabins, and orchards, the Southern Illinois outdoor economy is a vibrant and diverse sector that thrives on the region's rich natural resources, abundance of activities, and destination food scene. Multiple large-scale projects are set to bring in more visitors to Southern Illinois over the coming years, and this event aimed to make sure our existing businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies in the outdoor industry are informed, prepared, and ready to work together to make the visitor experience the best possible.

Project leaders presented plans for the transformational STAR Bond Project in Marion, Sahara Woods OHV in Carrier Mills, and a new bike trail map detailing nearly 500 miles of bike trails across Southern Illinois. As part of this inaugural event, the group focused on next steps to continue advancing the region's growing outdoor economy. More to come!

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“I THINK PEOPLE WOULD BE REALLY SURPRISED TO SEE THE AMOUNT OF VISITORS WE ALREADY GET WITH THE LOCAL STATE PARKS, THE SHAWNEE NATIONAL FOREST, THE LOCAL AIR BNBS, THE WINE TRAILS. WE ARE A TOURIST DESTINATION AND I THINK IT'S ONLY GOING TO GET BIGGER AND BETTER.”

**BRIAN CROFT
DIRECTOR, TOUCH OF NATURE**

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

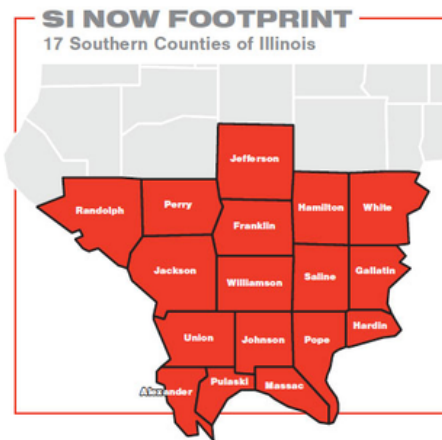
by Dr. Deb Barnett



To say the past few months have been busy for SI Now's team would be an understatement! With nearly 1200 miles traveled throughout the region in the past two months, SI Now has worked with city officials, business owners, and community leaders to continuing building on the tremendous momentum in Southern Illinois. No matter which community we visit, we find a contagious growth mindset that is foundational to our region's future.

The February 21st Outdoor Economy Summit was no exception. The sunny 70-degree winter day at SIU's Touch of Nature provided the perfect environment for attendees from both the public and private sectors to learn about new projects and growth expected to attract hundreds of thousands of new visitors to the region in the coming years. This equates to a significant increase in outside dollars flowing into our local communities and that's GREAT NEWS for Southern Illinois!

In addition, we continually field inquiries from and seek out companies who are discovering Southern Illinois for the first time. Our priority is to successfully demonstrate how our region's R4 advantage, skilled workforce, low cost of living, and central location are the perfect combination for their next expansion or relocation. As we continue to work hard for the 17-county region, we applaud all of you who are dedicated to growing your communities and making Southern Illinois a great place to call home!



WhySI? Throwback to 2022

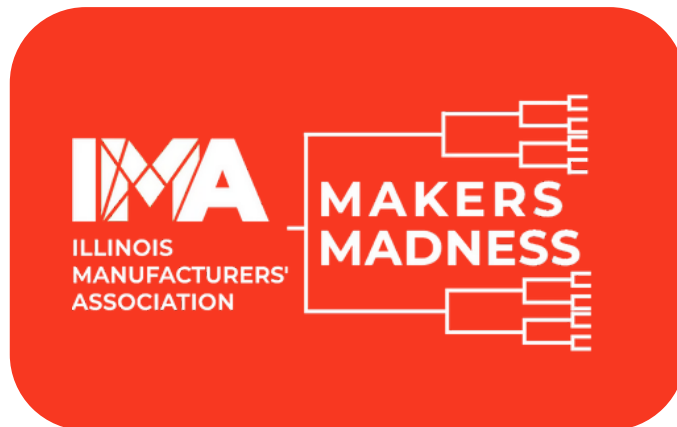
For Brooke Guthman, it all started with a vision to help revitalize her hometown. This month's WhySI is a throwback to a 2022 feature about the work that has become a catalyst for Murphysboro's now thriving downtown. According to Mayor Will Stephens, nearly 80 businesses currently fill Murphysboro's Main Street from 22nd to 5th Street and he credits the individual business owners who have stepped up to invest in their community. Contributing to that growth, all three Main Street buildings that Guthman and her husband purchased in 2018 have now been beautifully renovated and house two Airbnb rentals and three businesses - Cold Blooded Coffee & Roastery, Faction 93 salon, and Handmade Homestead. In the next NOW! Magazine coming in May 2024, we highlight downtown revitalization happening across the region in a special *SI Now Downtowns* feature. Until then, take a look back at why Guthman and others have chosen Southern Illinois to live, work, and do business! [READ MORE...](#)



Business Growth & Development

We all look forward to March Madness, but do you know about MAKERS MADNESS? Each year, the Illinois Manufacturers' Association launches its Makers Madness competition to highlight products made right here in Illinois. To make sure Southern Illinois is well represented, nominate a product by March 3, 2024, then remember to vote (up to five times per day per device) to help move a Southern Illinois company up through the brackets to the top spot!

Thanks to our region rallying together in support, two of the last year's Final 4 were Southern Illinois companies! That's impressive. Let's do it again. Nominate then vote, vote, vote!



To nominate a product and vote in this year's Makers Madness, visit <https://makersmadnessil.com/>



Prysmian plant manager Erik Perks explains different cable types to Du Quoin High School students

Education & Workforce Development

Man-Tra-Con is partnering with several local high schools to assist juniors and seniors in career exploration. In mid-February, students from Du Quoin High School had the opportunity to tour Prysmian Group to get a firsthand look at the cable manufacturing process and the different career opportunities at the Du Quoin plant. "The Local Works program, developed from supplemental grant funding, was designed to connect young adults with local employers in the area and raise awareness about potential apprenticeship and local job opportunities available after graduation," said Emily Perks, employer services manager at Man-Tra-Con.

Through Local Works, the goal is to place students into work-based learning programs. Man-Tra-Con then comes alongside to pay wages, provide gas cards, and clothing such as shirts and boots for these students. Murphysboro High School students toured Penn Aluminum and will place five students in this program. More tours are scheduled with Marion High School set to tour Aisin and West Frankfort visiting Continental Tire. Thanks to Man-Tra-Con for working with area high schools and employers to expose students to local companies and careers!

Marketing the Region

We put out the call and you responded! More than 50 entries were received for the NOW! Magazine cover photo contest. Whose photo will be featured? Stay tuned for the big reveal coming soon!

Until then, the NOW! Magazine is designed to tell our region's collective story by sharing the inspiring ways in which individuals, businesses, and communities make Southern Illinois a great place to live, work, and do business. If you missed the last edition, check it out online at <https://southernillinoisnow.org/now-magazine/>



AROUND THE REGION

MARCH EVENTS

- 2** Dirty South Roubaix Bike Race - Alto Pass
- 8-9** Wine & Food Pairing Weekend - Shawnee Hills Wine Trail
- 10** Daylight Saving Time Begins
- 14-17** St. Patrick's Day Celebration - Murphysboro
- 14-17** Spring Kidsignment Expo - Marion
- 16** Buffalo Day at Bison Bluff Farm - Cobden
- 22-23** Du Quoin Pro Rodeo - Du Quoin
- 22-24** Magpie Market Days - Marion
- 23-24** Maple Syrup Festival - Makanda
- 24** Reptile and Exotics Show - Mt. Vernon
- 31** Easter Sunday



Du Quoin Pro Rodeo



Maple Syrup Festival

LOOKING AHEAD

- APR 8** Total Solar Eclipse

Check out the Southern Illinois Crossroads Eclipse Festival hosted by SIU Carbondale in partnership with NASA at eclipse.siu.edu.

FIELD TRIP FRIDAYS - ENTER TO WIN!

Congratulations to **Kim Watson** of Harrisburg who is this month's winner! Kim will receive a Southern Illinois Eats gift card. Our *Field Trip Friday* location featured in the February newsletter was Prysmian Group in Du Quoin. Prysmian manufactures medium voltage cable at its Du Quoin plant, providing transmission cable to some of the largest cities in the U.S. Construction crews are busy building a large expansion at Prysmian, which will double the plant's production capability and add around 80 new jobs!

During a recent *Field Trip Friday*, we came across this welcoming phrase on the side of a long-standing SI business celebrating its 60th year of doing things 'Wright'. If you know where this sign is located, enter the correct answer on our [contest entry form](#) and you'll be added to the drawing for this month's prize, a Made in SI gift box!

