

DECEMBER
2024

SI NOW HAPPENING

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SOUTHERN ILLINOIS MANUFACTURING ACADEMY RIBBON CUTTING

Rend Lake College recently celebrated a major achievement with the grand opening of the **Southern Illinois Manufacturing Academy (SIMA)**, marked by a ribbon-cutting ceremony and marketplace showcase. The event gathered community leaders, industry experts, students, and residents to emphasize the academy's critical role in enhancing workforce development and advancing manufacturing education in the region. **Attendees of the ribbon cutting celebration were treated to a sweet surprise - a sample of chocolate made on-site.** SIMA features cutting-edge facilities, including a high bay area designed for maximum flexibility and efficiency. This versatile space **supports various manufacturing processes and training programs**, such as forklift certification, welding, machining, and industrial electronics, with integrated air and power systems. The facility's adaptable design allows for quick reconfiguration to address changing training needs, establishing it as a vibrant hub for both learning and production, set to drive economic growth and new opportunities across Southern Illinois.

"The academy is not just about education; it's about building a skilled workforce that can meet the demands of modern manufacturing," says Chris Sink, Director of SIMA. The curriculum is comprehensive, offering everything from basic mechanical and electrical training to advanced robotics and programmable logic controllers (PLC). In addition to traditional manufacturing programs, the facility will also train students in the confectionery arts while manufacturing chocolate as part of its hands-on curriculum. By providing hands-on experience with industry-standard equipment, SIMA equips students with the skills they need to excel in manufacturing. Visit <https://rlc.edu/southern-illinois-manufacturing-academy> to learn more.



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

by Dr. Deb Barnett



The holidays are a magical time in Southern Illinois. It seems that our communities sparkle a little more brightly and businesses thrive. This holiday season, we invite you to join us in **supporting our local small businesses**. By doing so, you are not only keeping those dollars in our region, but you are supporting families who own and work in those businesses.

So, here's my challenge. What would happen if our local residents made an intentional decision to shop local more than ever before? Maybe it's 50% of your shopping, maybe it's 75% or better yet, what if we committed to keeping 100% of our holiday shopping within Southern Illinois? ***Now that's a game changer!***

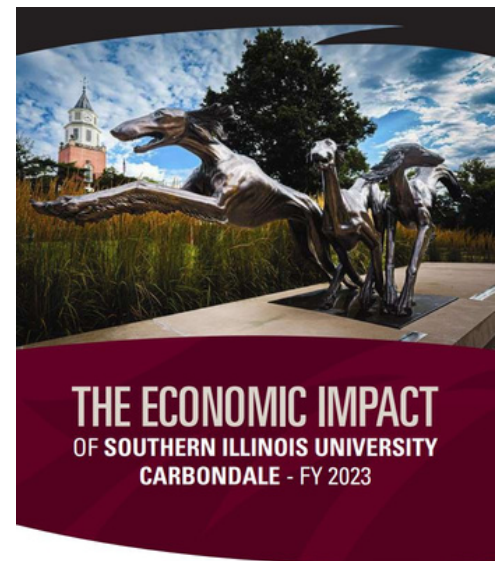
At SI Now, we support our region's businesses 365 days a year and we partner with local chambers and others that do the same. This year we are making a special effort to **boost that partnership by helping to keep the long-standing Southern Illinois Chambers' Shop Local initiative** at the forefront of our minds. As you shop local, we encourage you to share your great finds, share about a new business you discovered, or share about the great service you received. As the song goes, *it's the most wonderful time of the year*. Let's come together and make this year the most wonderful yet. **Happy (local) shopping!**

ADVANCING SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

SIU CARBONDALE: \$4.7 BILLION IN ECONOMIC IMPACT

Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC), the flagship campus of the Southern Illinois University System, is a powerhouse of economic influence throughout Southern Illinois, generating a staggering \$2.7 billion in total economic impact annually through university operations, student expenditures, visitor spending and alumni income. SIUC's economic activity helped support 18,601 jobs directly and indirectly throughout the state of Illinois.

Investing in SIU yields impressive returns for both taxpayers and students. In total, the SIU System's economic impact in fiscal year 2023 reached \$4 billion and supported more than 45,000 direct and indirect jobs in Illinois. **For every dollar taxpayers invest in SIU, the return on investment (ROI) is \$1.81 in public benefits.** This underscores the SIU's role as a force, training the workforce of tomorrow while fueling statewide economic growth.



SIU Southern Illinois University

SIUC Chancellor Austin Lane noted, "...the State of Illinois and our students are seeing a significant return on the investment of tax dollars and tuition in benefits for the regional economy and long-term impact on Salukis' income - not to mention the great discoveries and wonderful creative works that influence and change lives within and outside Illinois."

Review the economic impact reports at



[SIU System Economic Impact Report](#)
[SIU Carbondale Economic Impact Report](#)



Regional Development

by Nick Holdinghausen



The holiday season is a great time to reflect on what really makes Southern Illinois special. The people. Every community that Deb, Tricia, and I visit is unique in its own way, **but the people seem to all have this renewed sense of pride and compassion for seeing their community thrive.** Many communities in Southern Illinois are seeing a resurgence in their downtowns driven by people with a vision. From river to river and I-64 to Cairo, there are people in Southern Illinois that are working to make a difference.

2025 looks to be a BIG year in Southern Illinois for business growth. There are multiple projects that are inching closer to the finish line with promised investment and job growth. If you've been in Du Quoin recently, you may have seen Prysmian's expansion just across Highway 51 from the fairgrounds. This nearly \$64 million expansion project in Du Quoin is expected to be completed in 2025, adding around **80 new jobs** and increasing the plant's production of insulated medium-voltage transmission cable. Manner Polymers in Mt. Vernon is going up quickly as the construction on the **\$54 million** new polymer compounds manufacturing facility is on track to open in late 2025. Crucial MRO in Murphysboro is working to convert the former Curwood factory into a state-of-the-art aviation component shop and creating **25 jobs**. The Material Works in Red Bud is continuing to expand its operations. SGI River Terminal will begin construction on a fertilizer distribution center in Shawneetown. Marion's transformational Star Bond Project will boost sports tourism and bring **thousands of people to the region**. There is tremendous momentum and I'm excited to see what is to come in 2025.

Marketing the Region

ECON DEV SHOW With Dane Carlson

Check out a recent episode of the **ECON DEV SHOW**, where host Dane Carlson interviews Deb Barnett, Executive Director of SI Now. In this insightful conversation, Barnett discusses SI Now's dedication to fostering long-term economic growth across Southern Illinois. She outlines the organization's strategic approach, which includes **building strong partnerships, driving innovative projects, and prioritizing workforce readiness.**

The interview highlights Barnett's role as co-host of the **Small Town Big Business** podcast, which celebrates the stories of local entrepreneurs and the impact of storytelling on economic development. With many exciting projects underway, Barnett expressed optimism about the future, calling this an inspiring time for Southern Illinois to grow and thrive. Listen at <https://podcast.econdevshow.com/140>



Education and Workforce Development

Success Network Asset Mapping Convening

SI Now's Education and Workforce Taskforce partnered with the **Illinois Education and Career Success Network** in hosting an education and workforce asset mapping meeting focused on the Southern Illinois region. This convening **highlighted key challenges, desired outcomes, scaling needs, and priorities** for advancing career pathways for Southern Illinois students.

SI Now is dedicated to fostering growth and development in our region through its Education and Workforce Initiative. This Initiative is designed to **equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in today's dynamic job market.** By partnering with local educational institutions, businesses, and community organizations, we aim to create a robust pipeline of talent that meets the needs of our local economy.

SHOP LOCAL, SUPPORT SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

It's TIME! It's the most wonderful time of the year, filled with lights, decorations, delectables, family gatherings, parties, and SHOPPING! Local businesses are gearing up by decorating their storefronts, stocking up on seasonal inventory, and planning special promotions to attract customers. Many are also extending their hours and hiring additional staff to handle the increased foot traffic, all in an effort to make the most of the festive season and meet their year-end goals.

As the holiday season unfolds, the Southern Illinois region is once again rallying to encourage residents to shop local. Each year, local chambers of commerce unite to promote the **Shop Southern Illinois initiative**, a community-driven campaign that highlights the importance of keeping holiday spending close to home. Whether you're on the hunt for unique gifts, festive dining experiences, or local services to wrap up the year, shopping locally isn't just convenient—it makes a *profound* difference for our community and economy.



For every dollar spent at a locally owned business, about sixty-eight cents stays within the local economy.

Read more about the Shop Southern Illinois Initiative: [Why SI: Shop Southern Illinois](#)

10 REASONS TO SHOP LOCAL

1. Economic Impact
2. Job Creation
3. Environmental Benefits
4. Community Support
5. Unique Products and Services
6. Enhanced Customer Service
7. Community Investment
8. Shorter Lines and Less STRESS
9. Social Media Campaigns
10. Community Resilience



#SINowYouKnow

#ShopLocal