

SI NOW HAPPENING

JANUARY
2025



LIVE HERE. WORK HERE. DO BUSINESS HERE.

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CARBONDALE AND AISIN ILLINOIS JOIN FORCES FOR NEW TALENT DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP



Southern Illinois University (SIU) Carbondale has developed a partnership with Marion's AISIN Electronics Illinois, LLC (AEIL) that allows AISIN employees to earn a degree in a variety of industrial management and engineering fields of study.

During a recruiting event in November, the first 14 AISIN employees signed up for the program being offered through SIU Carbondale's School of Applied Engineering and Technology in the College of Engineering, Technology and Mathematics.



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The coordination between the organizations will allow AISIN to skill up our workforce, while also providing a career roadmap for our members. This is a true win-win partnership, and it's something we look to extend to our other facilities.

WILLIAM COX
AISIN SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT

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Under the new program, AISIN will pay participants to work five days a week while also covering tuition, books, fees, transportation and parking. The students will work part-time in their specific engineering area at AISIN's plant in Marion, Illinois, while also attending school and maintaining good academic standing. AISIN also asks that participants commit to working for the company for at least two years following their graduations.



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

by Dr. Deb Barnett



As showcased in our current issue of [NOW! magazine](#), SI Now's achievements in its first fiscal year are exciting to share. Recognized by the International Economic Development Council's 2024 economic impact awards, SI Now's **regional partnerships** are what make the organization and its economic development priorities come alive. Now in its second fiscal year, SI Now is making the impact that its original visionaries dreamed of.

As we wrapped up 2024, we looked forward to 2025 and the **strong pipeline of economic opportunity slated to explode throughout the region**. With a small team of three staff members, the success of SI Now and its work in the Southern Illinois region depends heavily on our partners including: 17 board members, 100+ task force members and dozens of partner organizations. Southern Illinois has a lot to be proud, but what had been missing was **the power of a collective, regional, 'rowing in the same direction' approach**. That collaborative spirit is now alive throughout our region's communities from north, south, east, west and everywhere in between. The Time is Now for Southern Illinois, and I consider it a privilege to be part of this work at this point in our region's history. **It's going to be a great 2025!**

ADVANCING SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

SI NOW by the numbers

3 STAFF members

17 BOARD members

23+ PARTNER organizations

100+ Task Force and Business Leaders Council Members

=SI Now
A Regional 17-County SOUTHERN ILLINOIS SUCCESS INITIATIVE

SI NOW FY24 OUTCOMES (April 2023 - March 2024) - the organization's FIRST FULL YEAR!

90 BUSINESS attraction INQUIRIES fielded

1567 EMPLOYMENT INCREASE year-over-year FOUR-QUARTER AVERAGE

2 NOW! MAGAZINE PUBLICATIONS

5 SITE VISITS

33 ACTIVE projects

11 LETTERS OF SUPPORT provided for projects

88 SITES IDENTIFIED

60 site selector connections

FORTY TWO BUSINESS RETENTION AND expansion (BR&E) visits (ALL 17 COUNTIES)

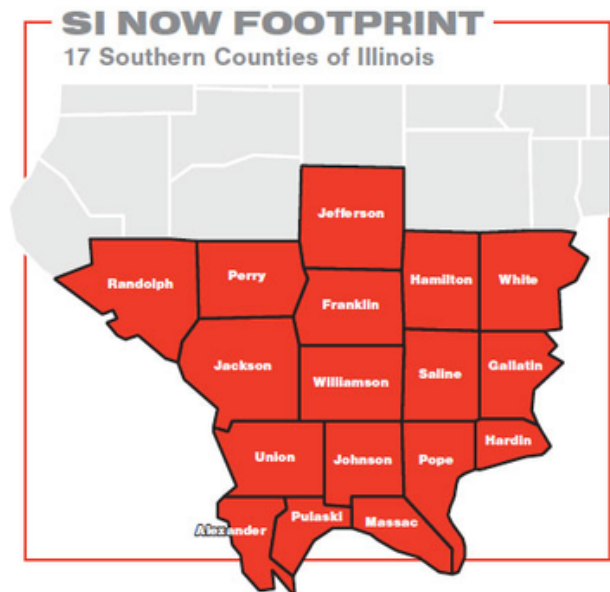
1,023,367 SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSIONS

\$75,277 Supply Chain Analysis USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT AWARDED FOR Southern Illinois

85% INCREASE IN SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

11,924 WEBSITE VIEWS

\$129,000 DRA GRANT AWARDED FOR TOP 20 SITE ASSESSMENT (Delta Regional Authority)



Regional Development

by Nick Holdinghausen



2024 was the year of laying the foundation for Southern Illinois Now, establishing identity for the organization across **ALL 17 counties** as a central point of contact for businesses looking to relocate or expand to the area. Each business inquiry we receive, whether through Intersect Illinois or direct, is a learning experience. Whether that company lands in Southern Illinois or not, the inquiries help us understand where our region stacks up compared to others but also show us areas of needed improvement.

Since its inception, SI Now has worked with economic developers throughout Southern Illinois at the local level to identify sites, which is our product to offer to potential businesses.

The SI Ready: Top 20 Project is a big step in taking these sites to the next level to compete on a national level for projects. Working with Global Location Strategies (GLS) and Schneider Strategy Consulting, we can identify potential limitations for each site and strategize with the community on how to address them. I'm excited to see the end results, which will be out in later January, providing a comprehensive report for five of the top sites, including detailed recommendations to enhance the site's competitiveness. The ultimate goal is to position each site to attract new businesses and contribute to regional economic growth.

2024 was a **big year** for Southern Illinois, but 2025 is promising to be even bigger, pushing Southern Illinois forward and continuing the area's historic momentum.

Marketing the Region

ROUND TRIP with Colleen Kelly

Travel expert Colleen Kelly invites viewers to explore captivating destinations near and far with her show, **Round Trip with Colleen Kelly**. On the December 22nd episode, Southern Illinois took the spotlight in an interview featuring SI Now's Executive Director Deb Barnett. Deb highlighted the region's unique charm and easy accessibility, now enhanced by **Contour Airlines' round trip jet service from Chicago's O'Hare Airport to Marion's Veterans Airport of Southern Illinois**, creating travel opportunities for residents, visitors, and business travelers alike.

Deb discussed Colleen's recent visit to Southern Illinois and showcased the variety of lodging options—from rustic cabins, quaint bed-and-breakfasts, and luxury homes to contemporary hotels—ensuring something for every traveler. She shined a light on Southern Illinois' vibrant brewery and winery scene, local orchards, exceptional dining options, and eclectic shopping experiences. To top it off, Deb shared a preview of the exciting events lined up for 2025, offering visitors a perfect blend of adventure, culture, and hospitality. Southern Illinois: Where charm meets adventure, just a round trip away!



Education and Workforce Development

Partnering Industry and Education for Student Success

Putting together the puzzle pieces of workforce and talent development to ensure a strong pipeline is not always an easy task. A recent asset mapping workshop hosted by SI Now in collaboration with the Illinois Education and Career Success Network and ISAC, invited stakeholders to weigh in on regional solutions. As a result, local educators, workforce partners, and industry leaders, identified **employer engagement** as a key priority.



In December 2024, SI Now met with Southern Illinois' Regional Offices of Education to discuss areas in which SI Now and the Southern Illinois Region's Leadership Community might help fill employer engagement gaps in collaboration with workforce partners, industry leaders, and local educators. As a result, plans are underway for the development of a regional industry engagement calendar and scheduling tool for the 2025-2026 school year to streamline and simplify industry engagement opportunities for area high schools. More to come in 2025!

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE: THE STORY OF FARMSTEAD FOODS, LLC

Farmstead Foods, LLC, owned and operated by Michael Gehman, is deeply rooted in Southern Illinois, both geographically and in spirit. Michael grew up in the Benton area, where he was immersed in the intersection of horticulture and agriculture. His mother managed a thriving greenhouse and garden center, while his father operated a hog farm and row crop farming business. This upbringing instilled in him a deep **respect for the land** and the resilience required to sustain farming. After high school, Michael worked alongside his father while taking on landscaping projects, developing a strong foundation in hard work, creativity, and the importance of cultivating both the land and meaningful relationships.

READ MORE at <https://southernillinoisnow.org/why-si/>



AGRICULTURE STATISTICS

174 AGRICULTURE RELATED BUSINESSES IN SI NOW REGION, EMPLOYING **4400+ PEOPLE**

27 MILLION acres are farmed in Illinois

#1 SOYBEANS
#1 HORSERADISH
70% of the U.S. horseradish is grown in Illinois (mainly southwest Illinois)

7865 FARMS in SI Now region farming **2.1+ million acres** (USDA Census of Agriculture 2022)

#SINowYouKnow

#1 PUMPKINS
 ABOUT 40% of all pumpkins grown in the U.S. come from Illinois, with the state producing over 650 million pounds

#2 CORN
#3 PORK
#6 GREENBEANS (BEANS, SNAP)
#7 WHEAT

Source: Illinois Department of Agriculture