

SI NOW HAPPENING

APRIL
2025

LIVE HERE. WORK HERE. DO BUSINESS HERE.



3 Years in a Row!
2022, 2023, 2024



ILLINOIS RANKS #2 NATIONALLY FOR CORPORATE RELOCATIONS & EXPANSIONS

Illinois continues to shine as a top destination for business growth, ranking #2 in the nation for corporate relocations and expansions for the third consecutive year according to **Site Selection Magazine**. Illinois saw 664 business expansion or relocation projects in 2024 (up from 552 in 2023) and also placed #2 in projects per capita. The state's strong economic climate, robust infrastructure, and a skilled workforce are the biggest drivers that attracts major investments across multiple industries.

In recent years, Southern Illinois has shared in that growth as several new companies have announced business expansion projects in the region. **Statistically, it's easy to see the momentum in the area as Southern Illinois added 1,277 new jobs, a clear sign of expanding business activity.** Annual average wages in Southern Illinois rose by an impressive \$1,841 year-over-year, bringing the average annual income to \$49,770. Since Q3 2020, wages in Southern Illinois have gone up 20%.

To top it off, December 2024 marked the lowest unemployment rate, 4%, the region has seen in the past five years, reinforcing Southern Illinois' role as a vital contributor to the state's economic upswing.



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

by Dr. Deb Barnett



In SI Now's March 2025 newsletter, we highlighted **PARTNERSHIPS**. The work of our small team of three is multiplied by the support of our partners including our Board of Directors, nearly 100 task force members, and industry partners throughout the region. Although we regularly express our appreciation, this month we are hosting SI Now's first ever **PARTNER CELEBRATION** to recognize those who believed and invested in this regional economic development work even before SI Now had its name.

If you are a current partner, you should have already received a personal invitation to join us on Thursday, April 24th, 4:30 - 6:30 p.m. at SIU's Dunn-Richmond Economic Development Center. If you have not received an invitation and are **interested in learning more about how to join in SI Now's work to advance Southern Illinois, consider this YOUR personal invitation. We look forward to a great celebration! RSVP to tricia@southernillinoisnow.org.**



BUSINESS GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

For the second year, SI Now's team was excited to represent Southern Illinois and connect with colleagues and consultants at the Site Selectors Guild's Annual Conference. The trip provided a great opportunity to build relationships, share about Southern Illinois, and put the region on the radar of some of the world's top site selection professionals. Site selectors are consultants, providing expert corporate location strategy for companies looking to expand or relocate. **As part of a select group of Guild Partners, SI Now had direct, small group access to site selectors at Partner-Only events, elevating the region's visibility and credibility in the competitive world of economic development.**

Additionally, the Site Selectors Guild Annual Conference provided valuable insights into the latest trends, data, and best practices in site selection and economic development. This year, the big topics of conversation were the impacts of tariffs, the nationwide struggle to find adequate energy for many projects across the country, workforce ready strategies, and top ways rural communities can stand out.



Illinois remains a national leader in business attraction, ranking #2 in the U.S. for corporate expansion and relocation for the third year in a row. In 2024, Illinois saw 664 business expansion or relocation projects. Many site selectors SI Now often engages are pleasantly surprised when they hear about Southern Illinois. Our central location, transportation infrastructure, and the regional collaboration are seen as strengths and continue to garner increased attention for potential business expansion and relocation projects for the region.

Regional Development

by Nick Holdinghausen



It's easy to focus on the negatives of where you live when you see the same surroundings every day, the excitement and novelty wear off, making flaws stand out more than positives. Potholes in the roads or a restaurant closing can feel like constant reminders of what's wrong. But in reality, the place you call home is great and **sometimes it just takes a fresh perspective or someone to introduce you to new opportunities to appreciate what's around you.**

My wife and I are not from Southern Illinois originally, but today, it's home. We have found it be a fantastic place to live and raise a family. The thriving sense of community is something I have not seen in other areas. There are a lot of people in Southern Illinois rowing the same direction to make it a better place. Many

downtowns across the region are seeing new gather areas pop up, bringing a fresh, welcoming feel to town centers. Several large business expansions are happening, creating new jobs and boosting the local economy. The region's amenities, including healthcare, are on par with large metro areas. On top of that, Southern Illinois is home to some of the most beautiful scenery in the Midwest and offers a plethora of attractions for everyone to enjoy. With a mix of natural beauty, growing communities, and investment in local improvements, Southern Illinois offers a quality of life that's easy to overlook but hard to beat.

Marketing the Region

Sharing Southern Illinois Nationally & Globally

The Spring 2025 NOW! Magazine, our 4th issue, will be hot off the presses later this month. NOW! has become a sought-after publication in its short existence, telling the stories of the people, businesses, and organizations that call Southern Illinois home.

In this issue, you'll notice an emphasis on the arts and entertainment that make our region unique. From the colorful murals that add vibrant color to the region's downtowns, to the historic theaters that have been welcoming guests to the region for decades.

As a continuation of the R4 Advantage Series, we highlight how Southern Illinois' roads are highways of opportunity and vital to the area's economy. Look for the new issue to hit shelves in early May!



Education and Workforce Development

A Behind-the-Curtain Look at Southern Illinois' Industries

As part of conversations with the region's education and industry partners, we discussed ways to better expose our youth to career opportunities in Southern Illinois. Beyond job postings and career expos, when students (and adults) go 'behind the curtain' to experience a company's day-to-day operations, they are often surprised by the high-tech facilities and range of high-wage occupations.

However, we learned that arranging industry visits can be challenging for businesses and educators due to lack of time, staffing, and connections. SI Now and its Education and Workforce Task Force are working on solutions, including a regional scheduling tool to connect more students with local industries and boost our region's talent pipeline. More details coming soon.



THE IRON WHISK



The Iron Whisk is an upscale, modern-casual brunch bistro serving from-scratch breakfast and lunch options, as well as exceptional cocktails, to both people across the Southern Illinois region and outside tourists from all over the world. The restaurant began in a transformed former auto garage in Cobden, IL, located in the southernmost tip of Illinois along the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail, near the Shawnee National Forest, and just a short drive away from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.

Tara Davis founded The Iron Whisk driven by her deep family roots in the region that span generations. Southern Illinois has always held a special place in her heart, and she is passionate about fostering healthy growth in the area. **READ MORE** at <https://southernillinoisnow.org/why-si/>

OUTDOOR ECONOMY FUELING REGIONAL GROWTH

On March 28, 2025, SIU’s Touch of Nature Outdoor Education Center, in partnership with SI Now and other supporters, hosted the Southern Illinois Outdoor Summit, a gathering of individuals from public and private entities in the outdoor recreation industry to share, learn, and collaborate.

Southern Illinois' outdoor economy is experiencing significant growth, with nearly \$900 million in visitor spending recorded in 2023. The industry also plays a vital role in local employment, supporting **over 8,700 jobs across various sectors**, including hospitality, retail, and adventure tourism. Additionally, outdoor recreation contributes millions to the local tax base, helping fund public services and infrastructure improvements. As interest in nature-based travel continues to rise, Southern Illinois is well-positioned to capitalize on its growing reputation as a premier outdoor destination, fostering long-term economic sustainability for the region.



SI Now team with SIU Touch of Nature Director Brian Croft Southern Illinois Outdoor Summit