

SI NOW HAPPENING

MARCH
2025



LIVE HERE. WORK HERE. DO BUSINESS HERE.



IMA: MAKERS MADNESS

THE COOLEST THING MADE IN ILLINOIS

Time is running out to **nominate your favorite product MADE in Southern Illinois** for this year's Illinois Manufacturers Association's (IMA) Makers' Madness Tournament! **The deadline to nominate a product is March 2.** The contest, often dubbed The Coolest Thing Made in Illinois, invites manufacturers from across the state to showcase their products celebrating the innovation, craftsmanship, and economic impact of Illinois-made products. **Starting March 4, voting begins for the nominations, then the First Round (Round of 16) starts on March 18. Anyone can VOTE in each round for their favorite Illinois-made product.**

Makers' Madness highlights the state's diverse manufacturing sector, which produces everything from car parts and aerospace components to food products and oil spill recovery equipment. Manufacturing supports 662,000 jobs in Illinois, **making it one of the most robust jobs sectors in the state.** In Southern Illinois, manufacturing directly employs over 14,000 people with an average annual wage of over \$63,000 per year. Southern Illinois' manufacturing sector has experienced job growth in each quarter since the height of the pandemic, contributing \$1,783,289,000 to the region's Gross Domestic Product output in 2023.

NOMINATE!



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

by Dr. Deb Barnett



MOMENTUM. A word that I've repeated multiple times over the past several months. Whether it's a new business celebrating a ribbon cutting in one of our communities, our region's port districts moving forward with a renewed excitement and vision, or annual chamber celebrations recognizing the businesses and citizens that are growing their community, momentum abounds in Southern Illinois.

I often say that we are experiencing special times in our region, and I firmly believe that the next few years will set the stage for one of the strongest economies Southern Illinois has ever seen.

The secret? **PARTNERSHIPS.** Southern Illinois has always been community-minded, neighbor helping neighbor. And now we're seeing that spirit extend beyond our neighborhoods to cross community and county lines. The momentum and growth our region is experiencing does not happen in isolation. On page 4 of this newsletter, we highlight just a few of our valuable partners who attended this year's Rural Community Economic Development Conference in Springfield. Growing together! That's Southern Illinois!

BUSINESS GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

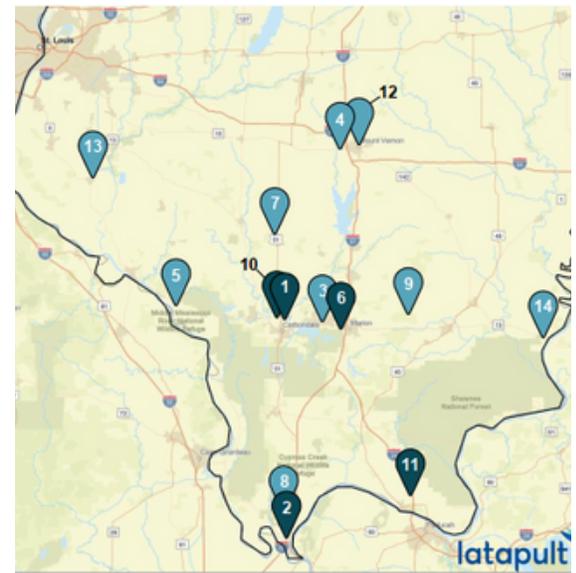
SI Now is excited to announce the completion of its Top 20 Sites project. Funded through a Delta Regional Authority (DRA) Strategic Planning Program Award, the project is a key step in enabling successful competition for new industry attraction and expansion opportunities for our existing businesses.

SI Now worked with Global Location Strategies and Schneider Consulting to perform a high-level overview of our "Top 20" sites, then narrowed down to a "Top 5" for a deep dive assessment. By identifying and preparing key sites for potential investors, we are strengthening our ability to attract new businesses, create jobs, and drive long-term economic growth.

Industrial site development is critical in today's competitive business environment, as companies seek ready-to-build locations with the necessary infrastructure, utilities, and accessibility to support their operations. Having well-prepared sites gives our region a competitive edge, reducing development timelines and making Southern Illinois a more **attractive destination for industries looking to expand or relocate.** Additionally, this project aligns with Intersect Illinois' "Vetted Sites" program, which recognizes the state's top development sites and strategically markets those sites to site selectors and businesses around the world.



Delta Regional Authority



Top 5 Sites

Previously Evaluated Sites



Regional Development

by Nick Holdinghausen



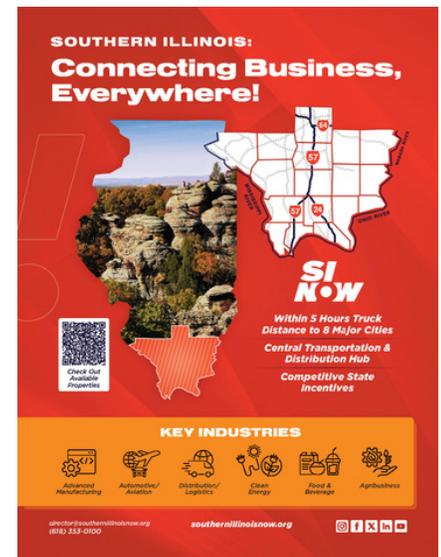
Economic development looks different in each community in Southern Illinois. It's a topic that commonly comes up in the many car rides traveling from one end of the region to the other. We are blessed with a diverse mix of communities big and small. With that diversity, the needs of each community look very different. In some communities a win is a large corporation announcing a multi-million dollar expansion project... meanwhile in smaller communities, a boutique taking over a vacant building on the corner is just as big of a win. In others, it might be upgrade to outdated water and sewer infrastructure. **From big to small, we are all part of what makes up Southern Illinois.**

Southern Illinois collectively must celebrate all of these wins! Recognizing each success, regardless of size, reinforces the idea that a win in any part of Southern Illinois benefits the entire region. This collective acknowledgment not only boosts morale but also encourages collaboration among communities, promoting a unified approach to growth. Moreover, highlighting these accomplishments brings regional, national, and global interest as a region that is experiencing success. By embracing and celebrating every economic milestone, Southern Illinois can build momentum toward sustained prosperity and an improved quality of life for all its residents. A rising tide lifts ALL boats.

Marketing the Region

Sharing Southern Illinois Nationally & Globally

Check out SI Now's latest ad to highlight Southern Illinois as a great place to live, work, and do business! 2025's campaign includes ads in Site Selection Magazine, Business Facilities Magazine, Trade & Industry Development, and digital platforms targeting business executives around the globe. Ads and digital content can showcase Southern Illinois' robust infrastructure, skilled workforce, and access to major transportation routes, positioning it as an ideal hub for manufacturing, logistics, and other businesses. Besides the central location, SI Now feels strongly that the high quality of life sets Southern Illinois apart, which is why we decided to include an iconic image from Garden of the Gods. Although you may not see all of SI Now's ads locally, we want you to know that Southern Illinois is on the map, competing with communities, regions, and states everywhere!



Education and Workforce Development

Creating Workforce Efficiencies

Businesses everywhere are seeking innovative workforce solutions to meet staffing and production needs, and many companies are embracing automation and robotics to help fill gaps and create efficiencies.

On **Wednesday, April 10, 2025, Chester-based Flex-Line Automation is hosting its 2nd Annual Automation Fair** allowing businesses large and small to experience automation technology firsthand, engage with industry experts, and learn how advanced material handling solutions can enhance productivity and efficiency! Learn more about this **FREE** event at



Scan to RSVP



CHRISTINE DESHAZO - SPECTRUM GRAPHICS



While a college student at Southern Illinois University Carbondale from 1976-81, Christine DeShazo studied and received a BS in graphic design, with an additional concentration in fine art and advertising. She also worked for 3.5 years for a local sign company. On April 1st of 1981, she started her own business, Spectrum Graphics. Christine truly enjoyed all aspects of the creative business, and “Spectrum” allowed her to promote her skills to businesses by developing company logos, assisting with advertising, and building/painting signs and vehicles. She was still a senior that spring semester, and by the time she finished her degrees, she already had a list of clients. Christine loved it in Southern Illinois and staying worked!

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

TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

From the very beginning, SI Now was developed with partnerships in mind. The original business leaders who gathered together with a vision to further unite and advance our region started by mapping existing partners and resources so as not to duplicate efforts but fill gaps. Those gaps included a regional approach to business growth and attraction, workforce development, and marketing Southern Illinois both internally and externally.

Our region’s partnerships are strong!

In February 2025, the SI Now team had the opportunity to connect with some of its partners in Springfield at the 36th Annual Rural and Economic Development Conference hosted by the Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs in collaboration with the Governor’s Rural Affairs Council. The theme - Converting Opportunities into Trends. Opportunities abound in Southern Illinois, and we are thankful for the partners who collectively help bring those opportunities to reality!



SI Now team with partners from USDA Rural Development, U of I Extension, Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association, and the Cities of Eldorado, Marion, Mounds, and Murphysboro