

SI NOW HAPPENING

MAY 2025



LIVE HERE. WORK HERE. DO BUSINESS HERE.



TOP NEWS OF THE MONTH

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS NOW PARTNER CELEBRATION



From L-R: Woody Thorne, Southern Illinois Healthcare's Chief Development Executive and SI Now Board Chair; Christy George, Intersect Illinois' President and CEO; Dan Mahony, PhD, SIU System President; Deb Barnett, PhD, SI Now Executive Director

SI Now held a Partnership Celebration on April 24 at SIU Carbondale's Dunn-Richmond Economic Development Center. SI Now's partnerships across the 17-county region are the foundation to continued success across the economic landscape of Southern Illinois. These collaborations bring together local leaders, businesses, and community advocates to unite around a shared vision for regional prosperity where a **win for one, is truly a win for all**. By fostering these strong, strategic alliances, we're able to amplify the region's unique assets, create more opportunities for sustainable growth, and drive long-term success that benefits every community we serve.

The Partner Celebration was our opportunity to honor the powerful impact of these connections and the progress we've made together. We were especially honored to have welcomed Southern Illinois University System President Dan Mahony and Intersect Illinois CEO Christy George as presenters at this year's event. Their leadership reflects the statewide and institutional commitment to building a stronger, more competitive Southern Illinois. President Mahony's dedication to innovation in education and community engagement, combined with CEO George's expertise in attracting investment and driving economic development, highlights the importance of collaboration across sectors. Their participation underscores the vital role partnerships play in shaping a vibrant future for our region.



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

by Dr. Deb Barnett



Last month I shared an invitation to SI Now's April 24th Partner Celebration and, as I write this month's column, I'm still flying high with excitement. The event brought together more than 100 stakeholders throughout the region in celebration of the partnerships that are driving unprecedented economic growth! Attendees commented that the energy in the room was palpable because there is so much to be proud of and celebrate in our region.

If you hear anyone say that rural regions are in decline, or specifically that Southern Illinois is in decline, let me be clear and set the record straight...

In the past 18 months, more than \$500 MILLION in business expansion investment has been made by our partners right here in our region, with more than \$2 BILLION (yes, that's billion with a B) in the pipeline!

What does that mean? It means good-paying JOBS and meaningful careers for Southern Illinois families, and it means a bright economic future for Southern Illinois. We are proud to be contributing to this strong pipeline and thank our early partners who believed in SI Now and its regional economic development priorities before it even had a name. We thank you and we celebrate you!



ADVANCING SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

PRIORITY ONE: BUSINESS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT



“

Being recognized alongside major cities and global brands like Boeing, Meta, Toyota, and Google is a tremendous honor. This award affirms the impact of Crucial MRO's investment and the City of Murphysboro's commitment to economic development and innovation.”

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Crucial CEO Marc Burton

Crucial MRO, in partnership with the City of Murphysboro, has been named one of only 15 recipients nationwide of the **2025 Community Impact Award by Trade & Industry Development magazine** as part of its prestigious Corporate Investment/Community Impact (CiCi) Awards. Now in its 19th year, the CiCi Awards recognize transformational economic development projects across the U.S. that generate significant capital investment or deliver lasting community benefits—or both. With hundreds of applications submitted from across the country, Crucial MRO's selection places Murphysboro among an elite group of communities recognized for their innovation, partnership, and long-term vision.

Regional Development

by Nick Holdinghausen



Downtown resurgence is reshaping the identity of many places in Southern Illinois as communities continue to refocus downtown redevelopment towards entertainment and experiences. From historic building restorations to new restaurants, coffee shops, boutiques, ice cream parlors, concert venues, and green spaces, these downtowns are gradually becoming destinations once again in many parts of Southern Illinois—places where people gather to have a meal, to take a walk, or to enjoy time with friends. This isn't a top-down movement; it's fueled by residents that have a passion for their community and want to see it thrive once again.

Of course, any forward-looking effort meets resistance. There will always be skeptics—those who dismiss change, as anyone who spends time on social media can attest. The choice is to either sit around and do nothing, hoping that things will naturally improve on their own or take action to at least try something new that might just prove to be successful.

Real community transformation takes time, patience, and a willingness to look beyond short-term noise in pursuit of long-term impact. When you commit to building something better, you're planting seeds that won't bear fruit overnight. Ignore the haters. Keep your eyes on the future. The people who truly care, who are ready to roll up their sleeves and build something meaningful, will walk alongside you—and in time, I hope even the doubters will see the long-term vision and its potential impacts.

Marketing the Region

The Spring 2025 Issue of NOW! Magazine Is Here

The 4th issue of Southern Illinois NOW! Magazine is officially out and ready for delivery! In just four editions, NOW! has become a sought-after publication, celebrating the people, businesses, and organizations that make Southern Illinois such a vibrant place to live, work, and do business.

This spring, we're spotlighting the rich arts and entertainment scene that sets our region apart — from the colorful murals brightening our downtowns to the historic theaters that have welcomed generations of visitors.

We're also continuing the R4 Advantage Series, focusing on how Southern Illinois' roads are more than just transportation routes — they're highways of opportunity, vital to the region's economic strength. Look for copies at advertiser locations or view our digital version online.



Education and Workforce Development



A skilled workforce is critical for any growing business and Volume 4 of NOW! magazine highlights the region's workforce development strategies aimed at strengthening Southern Illinois' talent pipeline. Key initiatives include partnerships between our five community colleges and local businesses to provide **tailored training programs, apprenticeships** through the Southern Illinois Manufacturing Academy to drive business and career growth, and collaborative efforts between SIU Carbondale and Aisin Illinois for **talent development** in industrial management and engineering fields. These strategies focus on equipping individuals with the skills needed for high-demand industries, fostering economic growth, and enhancing the region's competitiveness.

READ MORE AT [HTTPS://SOUTHERNILLINOISNOW.ORG/NOW-MAGAZINE/](https://southernillinoisnow.org/now-magazine/)



WhySI

The Dome at Blueberry Hill



Sarah and Jeremy Farr are the owners of Pecheken Ventures LLC (pronounced Peachy-Keen). They relocated to Southern Illinois from Central Texas in May 2022 after learning about the area from close friends who had moved to Cobden following the pandemic. After just one visit to Southern Illinois in April 2021, they knew they wanted to make it their home and pursue their dream of opening a glamping business. While their vision evolved over time, their goal remained constant: to create a space where people could slow down and enjoy time together.

In November 2024, they opened their first short-term vacation rental - The Dome at Blueberry Hill - located in Cobden, Illinois. This geodesic dome sits on two secluded acres, just two miles northeast of the Village of Cobden and along the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail.

READ MORE... <https://southernillinoisnow.org/why-si-the-dome-at-blueberry-hill/>

Resource Round Up

Illinois Grocery Initiative Equipment Upgrade Round 2

Grants for new energy-efficient equipment upgrades for existing independently owned for-profit grocery stores, cooperative grocery stores, or not-for-profit grocery stores.

Details at <https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities/3295-2956.html>

Illinois Works Bid Credit Program

Contractors or subcontractors that employ apprentices that have completed the Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program on any project (stated or privately funded) are eligible to earn bid credits they can use to make their bids for future state-funded public works projects more competitive.

Learn more at <https://dceo.illinois.gov/illinoisworks/bidcredit.html>

Federal Grant Support Program

Did you know the State of Illinois has a matching grant program for Illinois-based federal grant applications that align with the State's economic development goals? Eligible applicants will apply for this program while they are preparing an application for a federal grant and at least three (3) weeks prior to the associated federal program submission deadline. Eligible applicants include small businesses, for-profit organizations, nonprofit organizations, local governments, and educational organizations.

Learn more at <https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities/3073-2554.html>