SI NOW HAPPENING

SEPTEMBER 2026

LIVE HERE. WORK HERE. DO BUSINESS HERE.



TOP NEWS OF THE MONTH

Southern Illinois Earns Two International Economic Development Excellence Awards

Southern Illinois is earning international recognition as two regional initiatives have received 2026 Excellence in Economic Development Awards from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC). Southern Illinois Now (SI Now) received a Gold Excellence Award for Best Use of Federal Resources for its Top 20 Sites Project, while The Oasis Project in Marion received a Silver Excellence Award for Real Estate Development & Reuse. The honors showcase two very different projects with a shared goal: bringing partners and resources together to create new opportunities and position Southern Illinois for long-term growth.

SI Now's Top 20 Sites Project began with a $129,000 Delta Regional Authority grant to evaluate industrial sites across the region and identify priority locations for future investment. Since its completion, participating communities and projects have secured nearly $10 million in additional site-readiness funding, representing roughly a 70-to-1 return on the original federal investment. Meanwhile, The Oasis is transforming the former Illinois Centre Mall property into a growing destination for entertainment, recreation, tourism, hospitality, and commerce, with combined public and private investments tied to the district now exceeding $200 million. Together, the awards highlight the momentum building across Southern Illinois through collaboration, strategic investment, and innovative redevelopment. **READ MORE...**

PRIORITY ONE: BUSINESS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Southern Illinois continues to build on its momentum as a destination for industrial investment with another major round of Site Readiness funding from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. More than $2 million in new funding has been awarded to projects across the region, adding to the nearly $5 million announced earlier this year for the Metropolis Industrial Park and bringing total recent Site Readiness investments in Southern Illinois to more than $7 million.



This latest funding will support critical electric infrastructure upgrades, including increased capacity for approximately 125 acres of industrial property just west of Marion through REDCO, helping ensure the site is prepared to meet the growing demands of advanced manufacturing and other energy-intensive industries. Southern Illinois Now has also been awarded a Planning Grant that will fund surveys and Phase I environmental studies on industrial land east of Harrisburg, master planning for the continued expansion of the Metropolis Industrial Park, and the hiring of a consultant to establish a Foreign Trade Zone serving Southern Illinois. Together, these investments represent far more than infrastructure improvements. They create a stronger inventory of development-ready sites, reduce risk and uncertainty for prospective employers, and position Southern Illinois to compete for the high-quality manufacturing, logistics, and technology projects that are shaping today's economy. By making these strategic investments now, the region is ensuring it is ready when the next opportunity arrives. **READ MORE...**

CONTINENTAL TIRE BREAKS GROUND ON $76 MILLION HIGHLY AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE IN MT. VERNON



Ground Breaking Ceremony in Mt. Vernon on August 20, 2026

Continental has officially broken ground on its new $76 million highly automated finished-goods warehouse in Mount Vernon, building on an operation that already produces millions of tires each year, employs thousands of people and spans roughly 100 acres under roof. It is Continental's largest tire manufacturing facility in the United States.

"When the question was asked, 'how and where will Continental put the second company owned distribution'. The answer was easy, right here in the community that's made us successful for five decades."

- Wes Garber, *Chief Financial Officer*
Continental Tire the Americas

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS
LEADERS BREAKFAST
Where Decision Makers Move Southern Illinois Forward

October 6, 2026
7:30 am - 9:00 am

Register Today!

Following a successful relaunch earlier this year, the Southern Illinois Leaders Breakfast will return this fall, continuing a regional tradition built around leadership, conversation and connection. The next Southern Illinois Leaders Breakfast will be held **Tuesday, October 6, from 7:30 to 9:00 a.m. at the new SIU Tedrick Welcome Center in Carbondale.**

The Southern Illinois Leaders Breakfast brings together decision makers from business, healthcare, education and communities across the region for a focused morning of insight, conversation and connection. The October event builds on the momentum of the Leaders Breakfast relaunch and its mission of creating a place where people from across Southern Illinois can meet, exchange ideas and develop relationships that help move the region forward. **LEARN MORE...**

BARNETT: THE NEXT CHAPTER IN SERVING SOUTHERN ILLINOIS



I am honored to share that I have accepted the role of Vice President of Community Affairs and Chief Development Officer at Southern Illinois Healthcare (SIH), a longstanding foundational partner of SI Now. As I begin this new chapter, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to have helped build Southern Illinois Now from its inception into the respected, high-performing organization it is today.

What started as a shared vision has grown into a powerful regional partnership, supported by an outstanding team, dedicated board members, committed partners, and nearly 100 task force members working together to advance Southern Illinois. I could not be more proud of what we have accomplished or more confident in SI Now's future.

While my role is changing, this is not goodbye. Through a collaborative transition plan between SIH and SI Now, I will remain engaged in an advisory and staff support capacity, continuing to support the mission and relationships that mean so much to me.

Thank you for your trust, partnership, and friendship. It has been a privilege to serve alongside you, and I look forward to continuing our work together to create new opportunities for Southern Illinois.

With gratitude,
Deb

SI NOW IN FOCUS

Regional Development

by Nick Holdinghausen



SI Now is in a time of transition, but our focus on the work at hand hasn't changed. In fact, some of the biggest announcements we've seen are the result of work that has been underway for years, which means the **real work is just getting started**. Across Southern Illinois, we're advancing site readiness, putting millions of dollars in state investment to work, planning for the infrastructure our region will need in the future, and positioning our communities to attract new investment while supporting the businesses that already call Southern Illinois home. There is a lot happening behind the scenes, and each project is another step toward making our region more competitive for the opportunities ahead.

One of the biggest adjustments in my career has been going from projects that might take a day or a week to complete to projects that can take years before you see the fruits of that labor. Economic development **requires patience, persistence, and a willingness to keep moving the ball forward** even when the finish line may still be years away. We're continuing to work with our communities, partners, businesses, and state leaders to prepare Southern Illinois for what's next and make this an even better place to live, work, invest, and do business.

Marketing the Region

Southern Illinois Now recently welcomed members of Illinois EDC for a fast-paced tour of the region through the **Regional Research Pilot Program (R2P2**). The visit showcased the diversity of Southern Illinois' economy, with stops at Pepsi MidAmerica's headquarters in Marion, Southern Illinois University Carbondale's Gower Translational Research Center, Rock City near Valmeyer, and conversations with local agricultural businesses.



R2P2 Team Touring Pepsi MidAmerica in Marion

SI Now is one of just eight economic development organizations statewide selected to participate in R2P2. The visit provided an opportunity to give state economic development leaders a firsthand look at the businesses, workforce, research capabilities and unique assets that make Southern Illinois a competitive place for investment and growth.

WORKFORCE SUMMIT
Employer-Driven Solutions

Register Today!

Education and Workforce Development

Southern Illinois Now is proud to support the 2026 Southern Illinois Workforce Summit, coming up **October 1 at John A. Logan College**. The event brings together employers, educators and community leaders from across the region to discuss workforce challenges, share ideas and strengthen the talent pipeline that supports our existing businesses and helps Southern Illinois compete for new investment.