SI NOW HAPPENING

NOVEMBER 2026

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CONNECTION

TOP NEWS OF THE MONTH

Southern Illinois Leaders Breakfast Unites 155 Leaders from All 17 Counties

> **Lead by example. Culture is a result of what you've created or you've allowed.**
>
> TERRY GWALTNEY
> FEATURED SPREAKER

The second Southern Illinois Leaders Breakfast brought together 155 leaders representing 77 organizations and all 17 counties at SIU Carbondale for a morning of connection, inspiration and regional collaboration. Hosted by Southern Illinois Now (SI Now), the event united representatives from business, education, healthcare, government, nonprofits and community organizations who share a commitment to Southern Illinois' future. Featured speaker Terry Gwaltney delivered a powerful message on leadership and culture, encouraging attendees to **consider how their influence can strengthen their organizations** and the communities they serve.

The morning also honored the legacy of Dennis DeRossett, the original creator of the Leaders Breakfast more than 20 years ago, recognizing his vision for bringing people together to strengthen Southern Illinois. SI Now also celebrated its founding executive director, Deb Barnett, for her leadership, dedication and commitment to advancing the region. **Their contributions helped lay the foundation for the partnerships and spirit of collaboration that continue to move Southern Illinois forward.** Thank you to everyone who attended and to the many leaders working every day to create opportunities across our 17 counties. When we come together as one region, we strengthen our collective future - a win for one is a win for all!

The Material Works (TMW) is investing approximately $35 million to expand its operations in Red Bud, creating 22 jobs and bringing advanced steel processing technology to Southern Illinois. The company's new 104,000-square-foot facility will be located at the Kaskaskia River Port District's #2 industrial park, just south of its existing plant. Expected to begin operations in early 2029, the expansion will bring TMW's total plant space to 515,000 square feet. TMW has operated in Red Bud since 1992, and company leadership credited the area's talented and hardworking workforce for the decision to continue growing locally.



"We were asked to build this new operation in other areas of the country, but we chose the Red Bud area because of the talented and hard-working people who make up Team TMW," said TMW President Kevin Voges. "I am truly honored to be a part of this team. We thank God for His amazing grace."

The new facility will house the world's first integrated steel processing line of its kind, combining several steps into one operation to prepare steel for manufacturers such as John Deere and Caterpillar. The line will feature TMW's Eco Pickled Surface technology, an acid-free process developed and patented in Southern Illinois, and will be manufactured by fellow local company Red Bud Industries. TMW estimates the expansion could increase its steel processing volume by 50 percent. The project also includes an additional $2 million investment in solar energy, building on the company's existing solar investment.

SAVE THE DATE 2027

THREE EVENTS. ONE VISION.

SI Now is building momentum in 2027! Save the dates for the Spring Southern Illinois Leaders Breakfast on **April 6**, our 5th Annual Economic Development Day on **July 22**, and the Fall Southern Illinois Leaders Breakfast, tentatively scheduled for **October 5**. **These gatherings will bring together business, community, and regional leaders to share ideas and explore opportunities for growth.** Each event offers a chance to make connections and be part of the conversations moving our region forward. Join us as we strengthen partnerships and help shape Southern Illinois' future. Registration details are coming soon at **southernillinoisnow.org!**



SOUTHERN ILLINOIS EARNS TWO IEDC EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Southern Illinois is celebrating two international honors! Southern Illinois Now earned a Gold Excellence in Economic Development Award from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) for Best Use of Federal Resources through its Top 20 Sites Project. The Oasis Project in Marion received a Silver Award for Real Estate Development & Reuse, recognizing the transformation of the former Illinois Centre Mall into a growing destination for entertainment, recreation, tourism, and commerce. Southern Illinois University partners **Dr. Gary Kinsel and Melissa Ray Roach** accepted the awards on behalf of the region at IEDC's Annual Conference in New Orleans.



Dr. Gary Kinsel, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry, and Melissa Ray Roach, Director of Business Incubator Programs, Southern Illinois University Carbondale *Photo courtesy of IEDC*

These awards celebrate the partnerships and investments moving Southern Illinois forward. Supported by a $129,000 Delta Regional Authority grant, the Top 20 Sites Project helped participating communities secure nearly **$10 million in additional site readiness funding**. Meanwhile, The Oasis Project demonstrates the possibilities of reimagining existing properties to create new economic opportunities. Congratulations to the communities, businesses, and regional partners whose collaboration helped bring this international recognition home!

UPDATE FROM SI NOW BOARD CHAIR: WOODY THORNE



Southern Illinois continues to move forward through a shared commitment to preparing our communities, strengthening our businesses, and creating opportunities. Recent grant awards mark an important win for our region, supporting a major infrastructure investment at **REDCO Industrial Park** in Marion and a **Site Readiness Planning Grant awarded to SI Now**. The planning grant will help prepare future industrial sites in Saline and Massac counties, strengthening our ability to attract businesses and compete for investment. These awards reflect the value of regional collaboration.

Success in economic development cannot always be measured in ribbon cuttings, groundbreakings, or jobs created. Those milestones matter, but the work that makes them possible often begins long before a public announcement. Connecting businesses with resources, preparing sites, and bringing partners together to address challenges represent meaningful progress. Continued conversations, trusted relationships, and consistent follow-through help turn regional priorities into opportunities for action.

The newly available **Fall 2026 issue of NOW! Magazine** helps share that progress. Distributed throughout our 17 counties and mailed to key stakeholders across the nation, the magazine builds awareness of Southern Illinois and showcases what is happening in our own backyard. Its stories highlight the people, investment, and collaboration shaping our region. I encourage you to read it and share it with your networks. Every copy shared can spark a conversation and open a door.

I am grateful for the partners whose commitment makes this work possible. Their willingness to share expertise and work across community boundaries strengthens our region. Together, we are telling Southern Illinois' story and laying the groundwork for its next chapter of growth.

Woody Thorne, *Board Chair*, **Southern Illinois Now**

SI NOW IN FOCUS

Regional Development

by Nick Holdinghausen



"I know a guy." It's a phrase you hear often in Southern Illinois, and I think it speaks to one of our region's greatest strengths. Across our 17 counties, we have a diverse mix of communities, industries, and talents, but we are also closely connected. When someone needs a contractor, a business contact, or help getting an idea off the ground, there is usually someone ready to make an introduction. **Those relationships matter in economic development.** A simple connection can lead to a productive conversation, a new partnership, or an opportunity that might otherwise go undiscovered.

In my role with Southern Illinois Now, I want to help those connections reach across community and county lines. A business owner in one county may find the right resource, supplier, or partner in another. Someone considering an expansion may just need an introduction to get started. If you know a business with room to grow, an entrepreneur with an idea, or someone facing a challenge we might help address, reach out. You don't have to know every answer. **Sometimes, helping Southern Illinois move forward starts with those four familiar words: "I know a guy."**

Marketing the Region

The **Fall 2026 issue of NOW! Magazine is here!** Pick up a copy at coffee shops, banks and community gathering spots throughout Southern Illinois to explore the people, places and progress shaping our region.

Planning is already underway for the Spring 2027 issue, with more stories celebrating Southern Illinois to come.

Thank you to our readers, contributors and community partners for helping bring NOW! Magazine to life!



Exclusive

Woman Pursues Nursing Dream After Heart and Liver Transplants: 'Fighting for Her Life Since the Day She Was Born' (Exclusive)



READ THE FULL STORY HERE!

Education and Workforce Development

After a lifetime of heart problems and a heart and liver transplant in 2024, Alicia Schweickert is pursuing a dream inspired by those who cared for her: becoming a pediatric cardiology nurse. Now featured in ***PEOPLE Magazine***, the John A. Logan College student and recent Logan Academy graduate has earned her GED and a phlebotomy certificate - and is working toward a future helping children facing challenges she knows firsthand. Along the way, she's also encouraged classmates and helped a fellow student get to class, showing that her commitment to caring for others has already begun.