

Shaking the appeal of history: SIUE Alum curates local Route 66 exhibit

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE - It was an evening course at an Illinois junior college that first sparked **Sharon Smith's** interest in history. That spark ignited into a flame while Smith went on to achieve both a bachelor's and master's in historical studies from **Southern Illinois University Edwardsville**, and it is still burning brightly today.

Sharon Smith, SIUE alum and curator of civic and personal identity at the Missouri Historical Society.

Smith is curator of civic and personal identity at the **Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis**. She's been with the History Museum in Forest Park for 27 years, after gaining employment within six months of earning her graduate degree at SIUE.

"I believe my time at SIUE was invaluable in preparing me for this work," Smith said. "I learned from some of the best in the field and, to this day, I brag about the history department at SIUE."

In keeping with her current title, Smith conducts research and works with portions of the Library's collection that hold a unique connection to St. Louis, and anything related to how people identify. She works with collections involving the 1904 World's Fair, Charles Lindbergh, the Veiled Prophet, as well as disability rights and LGBT rights, to name a few.

Her latest exhibit, [Route 66: Main Street Through St. Louis](#), is on display at the Missouri History Museum through July 2017.

"This exhibit has a lot of popular appeal," Smith said. "Many people know something about Route 66. It might be the song by Bobby Troupe. It might be that Ted Drewes is an historic landmark on Watson Road or Historic 66. This exhibit is unique in that it mentions the entire road, but focuses a lot on St. Louis and Missouri."

The Route 66 exhibit includes 11 lit neon signs, five vehicles, including a 1963 Corvette, and a drive-in movie experience where visitors can watch a 12-minute video of Route 66 through Missouri.

Smith's passion for historical studies is as strong as ever, and the impact of her research and curation is continuously confirmed as people visit the museum.

"I am most fulfilled when I see folks enjoying our exhibits," Smith said. "I know that I may have helped visitors learn a little bit more about the city they call home or educated visitors who have no knowledge of this area."

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natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 14,000.