

#MyAlton: Community comes together to celebrate Alton pride (and maybe be featured in a show)

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ALTON - The hashtag #MyAlton has been spreading across local social media pages as of late.

For those not in the know, a hashtag denotes a searchable tag for trends. "My Alton" is trending, because the city is one of 10 finalists to be showcased in "Small Business Revolution," a show produced by Deluxe Corporation featured on the online streaming service Hulu. In a release, each of the 10 towns was told to place a hashtag of "My-*your*

town's name here." To accept the challenge of a nationwide competition bringing not only exposure but a \$500,000 investment into the city, many Altonians from all walks of life are increasing their Alton pride.

Alton received attention from Small Business Revolution producers after Lauren Pattan of Old Bakery Beer Company watched it on Hulu and wanted to see if there was time to register a town for season three of the series, which follows local businesses in small towns across America. Luckily for Pattan, and Alton, there were two days left before the deadline.

"I called my friends and family, and asked all the staff to email them," she said. "I don't know if they would respond to towns with one email, so we were hoping we could go critical mass just before the deadline."

Old Bakery Beer Company Head Brewer Eric Weber was the one who received a response, Pattan said. From there, Alton made the list of 20 potential towns to be featured on the show with a \$500,000 investment. Since then, Alton has been upgraded to the top 10 - meaning the producers of the show and its host, Amanda Brinkman, are coming to visit tomorrow, Thursday, Jan. 18, from 5-7 p.m. at Old Bakery Beer Company.

The event will feature a meet-and-greet with those producers, and guests are encouraged to celebrate Alton pride during the event. They will also be treated to fare from Bluff City Grill, Tony's and, of course, Old Bakery Beer Company. Pattan said Duke's Bakery is making a batch of Illinois-shaped cookies with the hashtag #MyAlton in icing atop them.

Along with the reception, local music from Matt Taul will provide ambiance, and local art will also be showcased - including a larger-than-life charcoal sketch of Robert Wadlow, which artist, C. Fleck, said was nearly a foot taller than the actual man from the floor.

Alton Main Street Executive Director Sara McGibany emphasized the need for Altonians to arrive on the scene early if they can in order to give the producers a crowd upon arrival.

"Thursday evening's reception is Alton's big opportunity to make a great impression on the producers of the series," McGibany said in a Facebook message. "They will be working the room to get to know our small business owners and community leaders, so we encourage everyone to share heartfelt stories about what makes our community

special. It would be very helpful for guests to arrive at 4:45 so that we can create a lot of fanfare down the corridor of the brewery when the film crew enters Old Bakery Beer Company."

McGibany will travel down Alton's Broadway Corridor early Friday morning with the producers and Alton Mayor Brant Walker as well as Alton Convention and Visitors Bureau Executive Director Brett Stawar. They will visit local businesses, conduct interviews and allow the crew short tours to show what makes each business special.



Grand Piasa Body Art owner Chris Hinkle and It's Raining Zen co-owner Dave Nunnally are both excited to showcase their businesses, but more importantly, to promote Alton. Each shared their love of the community with Riverbender.com Wednesday afternoon.

"I'm excited for it," Hinkle said. "It's good for Alton to get more exposure. I'm proud to be a part of this next wave of indomitable Alton pride going on around here."

Hinkle, whose proposed tattoo shop was protested and nearly stopped in its tracks by some opponents said the only way he was able to open his shop was from the assistance he received from the community.

"With what happened with me, I did not know all the options I could take," he said. "A lot of people just sort of grabbed the line and pulled it to where it needed to go."

Nunnally, a transplant to the area, said he and his wife, Donna, have fallen in love with the town. Their business, It's Raining Zen, has expanded several times, and is set for even more growth in 2018. He said the growth of their business is a mirror of the greater Alton small business scene.

"We're excited," he said. "This is exactly the kind of opportunity we need to embrace. This is the chance we don't normally have; it's a possible once-in-a-lifetime chance. We've grown and expanded downtown, and we have more growth plans coming in 2018. We have faith in this town, its people and this community. When we work together, good things happen. It's not about our business, it's about the entire community."

That last sentiment was echoed by Germania Brew Haus General Manager Ben Brynildsen, himself a lifetime resident of Alton. Germania was the setting for a recent video of Alton created by Megyme Productions in honor of the #MyAlton trend.

Brynildsen said the video was not made specifically to showcase Germania, but instead focused on the greater Alton culture, which itself is a part of Germania's overall brand, Brynildsen said.

"It's more for Alton than for us," he said. "It's pretty cool we could have it here, but it's definitely more for Alton."

Collaboration between Germania and Megyme Productions has been in the works for awhile both Brynildsen and Megyme Productions founder Megan Fairless said. The video showcases scenic shots of the city collected over the course of the last year by Fairless with the addition of breath-taking drone shots from above the River Road's bluffs by Route 3 Productions.

"It was hard for me not to cry and get emotional when I was reviewing the shots of the bluffs," Fairless said of the video, which has garnered thousands of views.

"I've probably watched it about 100 times myself," Brynildsen said.

The video also features snippets of interviews with many notable Altonians and Germania regulars, who were invited by Brynildsen to share why they love Alton while in front of the lens of Fairless's cameras.

"I told people I knew who loved Alton, and asked them to share why," Brynildsen said.

Fairless said she was pleased with how the video turned out, but was quick to say this was not the final video celebrating Alton being released by her efforts.

"We made a two-minute video, and I had over 30 minutes of solid footage," she said. "There will definitely be more of these."

While both Fairless and Brynildsen said the video was more about Alton pride in itself than bringing the crew of the Small Business Revolution to town, Fairless said she was definitely preparing for when Alton makes the top three.

"I'm wanting to make a bigger one with more people," she said. "We had 12 or 13 this time, but there's still so many more stories to be told around here."

If Alton makes a good enough impression on the producers of Small Business Revolution, it will advance to the top three choices, which will be taken to a national vote.

That video can be seen [here](#).

Megyme Productions can be contacted for video work at www.meganfairless.com or on the [Facebook page](#).

