

Party with the Piasa Bird: An Op-Ed on #OurAlton

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - We did it.

Alton came together as a massive family, reached out to everyone we knew, told them to reach out to everyone they knew and then got the great news yesterday afternoon we won. Over the summer, Alton will host the production crew of a show available worldwide and truly be able to shine. After hundreds of people crowded into Old Bakery Beer Company Tuesday afternoon to be surprised by *Small Business Revolution* host

Amanda Brinkman walking through the door and delivering the good news, we knew it was going to be a night. Season three of the show will take place in our historic, little river town.

And what can be written about that effort? My former colleague, always friend and current competitor Nathan Grimm, the editor of the Telegraph, coined #OurAlton through the press. That sentiment beat Bastrop, Texas's call for #MyTexas - an effort to get the entire state to back their town. The governor of Texas even echoed that call. The governor of Massachusetts pushed for #MyAmesbury, but they couldn't beat the push of #OurAlton.

So, as a journalist and a newly-minted official Altonian, I was compelled to investigate our new cry of #OurAlton. So, I had my girlfriend paint me as the same Piasa Bird who kidnapped Alton Mayor Brant Walker, and I embarked with my co-worker and photographer Steven Spencer to party with the Piasa Bird - quite possibly the most Alton thing I could think of doing.

Our first stop was the roof of the Riverbender.com building where some members of the Piasa Palisades Sierra Club were toasting to the town from one of its most beautiful vantages. As I looked out into the city, side-by-side with some of its most conscientious and loving citizens, I was able to see nearly the entire area covered by *The Small Business Revolution's* requirements for businesses to apply. They must be within 1.5 miles of the historic downtown area, and can apply any time between now and March 6.

While that view was admittedly hard to leave, I knew I had to pay a visit to some of those businesses likely to apply and see how Alton was responding to our shared victory.

State Street Market, which has gone through some amazing renovations, welcomed the Piasa with a round of applause and free drinks. Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick and his wife, Cookie Factory owner Linda McCormick were a part of the celebration, each agreeing a victory for Alton was a victory for the entire region.

After posing for several selfies, I made my way to Mayor Walker and his wife, Shannon Walker. Each shared high-fives, hugs and hoots of celebration. The Walkers informed me the crew of the show was dining at Morrison's Irish Pub – the same place they went when they visited us for the top 10.

As soon as I walked into the establishment, Amanda Brinkman addressed me by name and wanted me to kidnap her like I did the mayor. That's when it hit me – they saw everything.

They saw our heartfelt love of Alton. They saw Rory Morse's collection of old photos of our town growing. They saw you hold hands in the rain to make a chain of solidarity – even when there was lightning. They saw Laura Blair make #MyAlton yarn creations at superhuman speeds and hang them throughout the town, and yes, they saw me pick up Mayor Walker and ride the ladder bucket of a fire truck to near the top of the grain mill and demand snacks and votes. They even saw those suspicious of the attention and money voice their concerns.

In summation: They saw our love for Alton. They saw every form of it. Brinkman said the campaign made more than 164 million Facebook impressions, and each one of those left an impression on someone. I moved here from Godfrey before this #MyAlton wave came, but I knew we were going to have a renaissance. I just did not realize our small business revolution would be televised.

Finally, I would like to thank Lauren Patton, James Rogalsky, and the entire staff at Old Bakery Beer Company for getting the ball rolling on this beautiful opportunity. They have helped put Alton on the map by making excellent and unique products, hosting great events and supporting the community as a whole. That brewery's founding was one of the many events, which made me feel like Alton was a place worth living with a bright future.

We did it, fam.

[Steven Spencer also contributed to this story.](#)