



Illinois Governor Helps Launch Aggressive and Inspirational Revitalization of Downtown Alton as a Model for Downstate Illinois Economic Development

by Chris Rhodes, Reporter
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ALTON – Governor J.B. Pritzker, along with state, regional and local government and business leaders were in Alton this afternoon for a ribbon-cutting ceremony that will launch an aggressive and inspirational revitalization of downtown Alton. They join Alton residents Jayne and John Simmons along with a community of big dreamers, thinkers, and doers to reimagine the future of downtown Alton to “Transform the City of Alton into the Healthiest and Happiest City on the Mississippi River.”

“We all want to live in a community that provides us with a sense of place, good jobs, affordable housing, quality education, and cultural opportunities,” said John Simmons, Alton resident, CEO of AltonWorks and Chairman of Simmons, Hanly and Conroy, a national law firm headquartered in Alton. “With the erosion of small-town, rural America, too many people are being forced to seek big cities to find these important assets. We believe the City of Alton is perfectly situated to transform one building, one street, and one idea at a time that can attract a diverse set of talented people who want to live and work in a community that values diversity, inclusiveness and a great lifestyle.”

“This project speaks to the power of the public and private sectors to work together to build up competitive, attractive communities in all parts of our state,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Your work is succeeding because you are building on the city’s existing strengths. By focusing on pedestrian-friendly landscapes and an emphasis on rooftop and riverfront development, the AltonWorks vision capitalizes on our state’s natural beauty. The development of distinct cultural districts strengthens a city’s quality of life

but also adds jobs, both in construction and in new businesses and entertainment districts. This kind of community revitalization is exactly the type of work that our capital plan's grant programs look to support all across the state."

"At AltonWorks, we believe we have a choice to self-determine our fate and develop innovative and actionable strategies with defined measures that can model approaches to 'Reinvesting in Community' across the region," said Jayne Simmons, President of AltonWorks. "AltonWorks is ready to stand with state, regional and local capacity builders to reinvigorate Alton's Historic Downtown and Riverfront and serve as a catalytic force toward lifting the region."

As some communities are simply thinking about how to quell the population decline in small, rural cities, the community of Alton believes it can buck that trend. They believe that in today's world, 'talent' is looking for a great place to live, and Alton can be that community.

Jayne and John Simmons have a track record of bringing businesses and jobs to Alton. The Simmons' bought the building on 1 Court Street, renovated it and moved Simmons, Hanly, Conroy law firm here with 250 jobs. They were instrumental in reviving Alton Steel, Inc., which now employs over 250 people. They also purchased and renovated the Millers Mutual building in Alton and brought various employers and over 200 jobs to the community. They purchased and renovated the old US Post Office in Alton, and that building now houses a coffee shop and restaurant that has generated over more than \$700,000 in revenue in just over a year.

"It's great to see the enthusiasm among citizens, business owners and neighbouring mayors," said Representative Monica Bristow." When we will all move in the same direction, we can accomplish so much for the region."

"I want to thank the governor for spending the day with us in the district and making a priority of the Metro East and downstate Illinois," said Senator Rachelle Crowe. "We are proud of our area, and I can't wait to see how we will improve in the future."

Private investment is expected to exceed \$100 million and public investment will be sought to develop projects that would foster Alton's revitalization vision, including public infrastructure (parks, public realm, parking, streetscape, pedestrian and bicycle connectivity), historic district certification, transit connectivity, workforce development, minority workforce training, business attraction/relocation, broadband infrastructure and Clark Bridge roadway infrastructure improvements.

About AltonWorks

AltonWorks is a development company and movement with a vision for the revitalization of downtown Alton, Illinois. The company is driven by the belief that a strong downtown is the foundation of a thriving city. AltonWorks aspires to create a model process for revitalizing downstate Illinois regions by demonstrating how informed planning, collective impact, and leveraged private/public investment in a strategically located community like Alton can lift the region. We hope Alton will serve as a process ‘proof of concept’ for replicable and scalable demonstration of our commitment to downstate revitalization.

The Vision for the City of Alton

The vision of AltonWorks includes three major economic areas that will be the focus of residential, commercial, and office redevelopment. The Jacoby Arts District, the Grand Entertainment District and the Broadway Makers District.

We picture pedestrians enjoying landscaped streets marked with consistent signage and lighting, safe crosswalks, and pocket parks. Small independently-owned boutiques, sidewalk cafés and restaurants, maker workshops, artist studios, and service shops open customer-friendly hours. A place where small businesses and creative types want to be. Residential lofts, beautiful homes, and boutique hotel accommodations populate upper levels and enjoy sparkling river views with easy access on foot or bicycle to shops and services, restaurants and a riverfront park. Respect for the community and a clean environment, safety, and an appreciation for historic architecture define the district. Alton is a place where people choose live; where all types of people feel welcome and a sense of belonging. A city where great journeys begin and the energy of the river conveys a spirit of freedom and optimism.