Jobe, Legislators, React To Decision To Give Tourism Bureau $919,000 Route 66 Grant

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ALTON – Revitalizing the Last 100 Miles of Route 66 in southwest Illinois is no longer a dream but a reality, thanks to a $919,000 Route 66 Grant awarded to the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau by the state.



The grant will fund community murals, a new Route 66 Interpretative Visitor Center in Edwardsville, Mother Road monuments in several communities, and the reopening of the historic Cannonball Jail in Carlinville. Those projects are all interlocking pieces of a revitalized Route 66 envisioned by the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau of Southwest Illinois.

The Tourism Bureau applied for a grant under the Route 66 Grant Program administered by DCEO and the Illinois Office of Tourism. The grant funds are available to certified Destination Marketing Organizations in Illinois that represent and promote the Mother Road.

“We have to thank the Illinois Office of Tourism, DCEO, and our local state elected officials including State Senator Rachelle Crowe, State Senator Doris Turner, and State Representative Katie Stuart for their foresight in funding and approving this grant application,” Cory Jobe, President/CEO of the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau said. “In four years, Route 66 will celebrate its centennial birthday. We want to be part

of the Illinois and national celebration with a new and exciting stretch of the Mother Road in southwest Illinois. This grant will enable us to do that and help communities along the Last 100 Miles of Route 66 in Illinois.

Route 66 projects include:

- The West End Service Station, 620 St. Louis St., Edwardsville, retrofitted into a new interpretative and educational museum and Route 66 Visitor Center. The building was once a service station along Edwardsville's portion of Route 66 and served as a stop for travelers to re-fuel and make small purchases. When Route 66 bypassed Edwardsville in 1965, the building was transformed into a dental office until it was sold to the Illinois Department of Transportation in 2021.
- Development of a Mural Trail to create 12 postcard-style, matching murals that highlight Route 66 facts. These would be placed in 12 southwestern Illinois communities including Virden, Girard, Gillespie, Carlinville, Litchfield, Staunton, Hamel, Edwardsville, Collinsville, Livingston, Granite City, and East St. Louis.
- "Six on 66" Monuments. These monument attractions will be unique metal structures clearly visible on Route 66 and designed to draw visitors into the communities. The monuments will serve as a photography waypoint in each town and will be a beacon for instate social media sharing. Monuments would be placed in Carlinville, Litchfield, Edwardsville, Collinsville, Granite City, and Hamel.
- Historic Macoupin County "Cannonball Jail". Grant funds would be used to complete structural updates and parking lot repairs needed to reopen the historic jail to Route 66 visitors. The jail, located across from the famed "Million Dollar Courthouse", was constructed after the American Civil War with surplus cannonballs placed between stones to make prisoner escape impossible.

The interlinking projects support the regional approach to tourism the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau has promoted over the years. The project also includes sites strategically located in small-town business districts which will, in turn, drive visitors to restaurants and retail storefronts. It is also designed to increase the amount of time and dollars travelers spend in Illinois communities prior to crossing the state line to Missouri.

"Regionalism is the key to success with tourism campaigns," Jobe said. "No single town can win on its own. Regional destination marketing and development highlights the charm, appeal, and recreational opportunities of our communities and creates a destination appealing to the 25 million people located within a three-hour drive of the area.

"We would also like to acknowledge the commitment from area legislators including State Senator Doris Turner, State Senator Rachelle Crowe, and State Representative

Katie Stuart for realizing the importance of preserving Route 66 for generations to come," Jobe added.

The Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau is a certified Destination Marketing Organization serving Madison, Jersey, Calhoun, Macoupin, Montgomery, and Greene Counties, and the City of East St Louis in St Clair County. The bureau is dedicated to educating visitors about the region by providing information regarding the area's history, unique landmarks, recreational opportunities, leisure attractions, special events, and scenic marvels.