

# Alton Main Street Launches The Choosing Alton Video Storytelling Series

by Sara McGibany

December 27 2022 9:55 AM



**ALTON** - Alton Main Street is launching a new video storytelling series called Choosing Alton, which shares the tales of why interesting and diverse people have decided to lay down roots in our community.

Choosing Alton was conceived by Roger Lewis, who serves on the Board of Directors for Alton Main Street. “You never know who you are next to in line at the grocery store or who may be filling their gas tank on the other side of the pump,” he shared, adding

“Your neighbor may have a compelling story of where they are from and how they landed next door to you, and it could be a story you never knew. We decided to start telling these stories.”

Lewis served as Producer of the series, which was funded by Executive Producer John Simmons. Local media company Shift Agency was hired to film and edit the episodes which are between 15-20 minutes long. The entire 12-episode series is available for viewing now at [www.DowntownAlton.com/ChoosingAlton](http://www.DowntownAlton.com/ChoosingAlton).

“Our aim with this project is to instill a sense of community pride and introduce or reiterate all of the reasons why Alton is a great place to live,” said Sara McGibany, Executive Director of Alton Main Street, “We have been considering creative ways to turn Alton’s population decline around. We hope that the stories you’ll learn about in Choosing Alton will affect the decisions of residents to stay and persuade anyone who is scouting a move to a new community to keep Alton front of mind.”

Choosing Alton delves into details in casual conversations that focus on the reasons why a diverse and interesting segment of the Alton population has chosen to live here. You will learn of interviewees’ life circumstances, interests, and experiences which led them to choose Alton as a place to live, learn and enjoy.

A brief synopsis of each video is as follows:

From farming in Europe to working in a science museum in Charlotte, to eventually opening Funky Planet Toys in Alton, Sage Macklay and David Nadolsky have spent time in many different cultures. Their experiences were ultimately building blocks that led them to their forever home. With the desire to start a family, own a house and start a business, Alton checked all of their boxes.

Penny Schmidt was born in New York, grew up in Elmhurst, and then returned to New York to start a gallery at the ripe age of 26. Years later while visiting her father in Alton after 9/11, Penny and her husband came to a transitional point in their lives and began to rethink their paths. With a renewed lens of the Riverbend, Penny restored an old building that is now known as a residential living space, Mississippi Landing.

One is an Alton native returned, the other a Northern Virginian turned Riverbend resident. Husband and wife, Damian and Dee Dee Jones, both have one thing in common: They chose Alton. Now 22 years later, they've grown to love the town, and even more so - the people.

Local artist and maker, Michael Snider - commonly known for his brainchild, the Kooliverse - is a self-proclaimed Deadhead from Indiana. After years of touring with the

Grateful Dead, he discovered the joy of like-mindedness that he now experiences in the Alton community. Although homelessness led him here, he's found a home in this town for 18 years, surrounded by genuine people and an emerging art scene.

Kieran McGuane and Martha Phillips experienced vastly different environments in the early years of their lives. Kieran, born in Ireland and accustomed to frequent travel through his work in insurance, changed course and found his passion in culinary school. Martha had a career in law and grew up in the Midwest. Their paths crossed years later and as fate would have it, they got married and chose to live in Alton. The two of them now run a successful restaurant, Epicurean Fare, in historic downtown and are among the innovators who are embracing business development and cultural diversity through food.

Alton springboarded a sense of wonder and creativity for Jenna Muscarella as a little girl. From the architecture to the scenery, colors, and flavors of the town, Jenna believes the uniqueness of Alton cultivated her own artistic eye as an adult. And while she believes Alton has experienced a renaissance in recent years, the structural integrity of the city she's known and loved has remained the same.

Matt and Laura Windisch didn't choose Alton, they firmly believe that Alton chose them. Their hearts and families were in Missouri before taking the plunge, but the Riverbend was calling. The two of them now run Alton's successful food truck park, Flock, in addition to Stacked Burger Bar in St. Louis.

A national Zillow search led Leo Portal to discover Alton and the historic real estate that he was looking for. Originally from Lima, Peru, Leo's first exposure to the U.S. was the Bay Area -- but the Midwest is where he is now established. What surprised him most about Alton was the sense of interconnectedness among people with different backgrounds and sexual orientations, something that you don't often find in small towns.

Being from Alton, Matt Anderson always knew there was a special charm to the town. But when he and his wife, Sandra, moved back in 2020 after living and teaching overseas, they quickly realized that Alton now boasts a food and drink scene that rivals those that they experienced on their travels. In settling down here, Matt's intuition was reaffirmed that Alton did in fact hold a charm, and a thriving neighborhood to raise his family.

Alison and Shawn Neace share a deep appreciation for two things: music and the Alton School District. From the time she was a young student entering the district years back, Alton schools welcomed Alison with opportunities and resources aplenty to express herself through music. Now, years later, the Alton music community has done the same for her own children.

The diversity and missional call are core reasons Hugh & Cheryl Halter feel such affection for the town of Alton. Portland natives and long-time Colorado residents, this family chose Alton, having a sense it was "something they were supposed to do." They now incubate businesses through their nonprofit coffee shop, brunch kitchen, and event space called Post Commons.

David Zielinski and Kim Haegele Labidi are among those who grew up in Alton, left to get a taste of life in other cities, and then returned to Alton to settle. They believe that individuals who experience the world outside of Alton and then come back bring a new flavor to our town - making this a place that has the ability to change and evolve through its people.