

Tourism Bureau Awarded New \$493,000 Route 66 Grant

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ALTON - The Last 100 Miles of Route 66 is receiving another financial boost thanks to a new \$493,000 Route 66 Grant for projects designed to increase tourism by highlighting the history and diversity of communities that line the historic Mother Road in southwest Illinois.

The grant funds will expand the existing Route 66 Monument Trail and the new Post Card Mural Trail in addition to providing interpretive panels for historically significant sites along the Last 100 Miles of Route 66 in southwest Illinois. Projects in Hamel – a new outdoor concert and event space – and Edwardsville – a Route 66 Highway Exhibit at the Edwardsville Children’s Museum and parking lot improvements at Route 66 sites in the City of Edwardsville – are also part of the grant funds.

The Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau, which oversees the Last 100 Miles of Route 66 in Illinois, applied for the funds under the Route 66 Grant Program administered by DCEO and the Illinois Office of Tourism. The grant funds were available to Destination Marketing Organizations in Illinois who represent and promote the Mother Road.

“As we get closer to the national 100th anniversary of Route 66, it’s important that we continue to showcase the amazing Americana experiences of the Mother Road available in the Great Rivers & Routes region of southwest Illinois,” Cory Jobe, President/CEO of the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau said. “We represent one-third of the total statewide span of this historic roadway and providing new and exciting tourism experiences is key to bringing more travelers to the region to discover our Last 100 Miles of Route 66.”

The Last 100 Miles of Route 66 in Illinois meanders from Virden at the northern end to the Old Chain of Rocks Bridge to East St. Louis before crossing the Mississippi River into Missouri.

Route 66 projects in southwest Illinois funded with the grant include:

- **Route 66 Monument Trail Expansion:** Two new monuments will be installed in Gillespie and Girard. They will join the existing six monuments which were placed in 2022. The monuments are 12-feet tall replicas of the Route 66 shield and are a great place for travelers to stop and capture a photo and explore the host cities. The monuments also feature QR codes to direct people to the Great Rivers & Routes website for more information.
- **Expansion of the Route 66 Post Card Mural Trail:** Two new murals will be painted in the Route 66 communities of Mt. Olive and Worden. Each mural highlights Route 66 facts and unique information about the city where the mural is located. The new mural expands the existing 12 Post Card mural trail to a total of 14 murals.
- **Interpretive Panels:** Historically significant sites on Route 66 will receive new interpretive panels to expand the traveler experience.
- **Edwardsville Children’s Museum Route 66 American’s Highway Exhibit:** This new exhibit at the museum will bring the Mother Road to life in an interactive, hands-on experience for young children. The exhibit will feature a replica Route 66

road that children will travel in classic peddle cars around the Discovery Garden Expansion. It will also include a replica filling station where children can learn about the history of Route 66 while ‘filling’ up their gas tanks.

- **Route 66 Creamery Outdoor Concert & Event Space, Hamel:** A new outdoor event space for concerts and other similar events will be constructed at the Route 66 Creamery located along Route 66 in Hamel.
- **West End Station Parking, Edwardsville:** Improvements to two parking lots which directly serve Route 66 assets including the West End Station at 620 St. Louis Street, and the Route 66 Monument at the corner of Illinois Route 157 and Schwarz Street will be completed. Improvements include expanding and resurfacing, ADA Accessibility, curbs, landscaping, lighting, wayfinding and additional interpretive signage and displays.

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. The Last 100 Miles of Route 66 is a great example of regional tourism and the need to work together. 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.”