

# **Route 66 Projects in Southwest Illinois Receive Grants Totaling \$850,000**

by James Lesch

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ALTON - New Route 66 experiences will be added along the Last 100 Miles of Route 66 in Illinois with the announcement of over \$850,000 in grants from the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau in partnership with the Illinois Office of Tourism and the Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity.

The grants will fund five different projects along the Mother Road in anticipation of the 2026 celebration of the famed highway's 100th anniversary. Among the projects is a new RV Park and Campground at the Pink Elephant Antique Mall; a new Route 66 mural at the Skyview Drive-In; a drive-through Route 66 Shield, and a new neon sign park planned for Granite City.

“We want to be ready for the 100th anniversary of the Mother Road with top-notch service and quality experiences along the Last 100 Miles of Route 66 in southwest Illinois,” Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau President & CEO Cory Jobe noted. “The interest in the Mother Road, both from domestic and international travelers, is increasing annually and we see first-hand the need to create strong attractions and experiences.”



A total of \$300,000 in grant funds will be used to create the Area 66 Campground and RV Park at the Pink Elephant in Livingston. The project will also include Electric Vehicle Charging Stations at the facility.

“As travel continues to increase, the need for diverse overnight accommodations is important,” Mr. Jobe noted.

Grant funds will also be used to create an electric experience in Granite City as the city's ghost neon signs are brought back to life. A block of The District will be transformed into a new experience called “It's Electric on Route 66” and will include replicas of Route 66 neon signs, a music bandstand and EV Charging Stations. The project will be paid for with \$425,000 in grant funds.

Grants funds are also earmarked for the following Route 66 projects:

- \$45,000 for a drive-through Route 66 Shield at Country Classic Cars.
- Interior and exterior upgrades to the Ariston Café in honor of its 100th birthday in 2024.
- \$25,000 for a 20-foot by 60-foot mural at the Skyview Drive-In in Litchfield.
- \$20,000 for near gateway entry signs for the City of Girard in partnership with the city and the Girard Chamber of Commerce.

“Together we are creating memorable experiences, with incredible partnerships at the local and state level to make all of this happen,” Mr. Jobe said.

*(The Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau is a certified Destination Marketing Organization serving Madison, Jersey, Calhoun, Macoupin, Montgomery and Greene counties and 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.)*