

# Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois releases 2014 Market Review and Investment Update

October 2 2015 9:29 AM

*Report shows Southwestern Illinois remains a development hotspot; highlights regional initiatives to foster continued growth*



**EDWARDSVILLE** - The Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois has announced the release of the *2014 Market Review & Investment Update*, presenting a comprehensive overview of the continuing investment activity in Madison and St. Clair counties during 2014 and into 2015. This year's report indicates that Southwestern Illinois remains a development hotspot, with investment occurring across various sectors of the economy and significant activity in core areas such as infrastructure, distribution & logistics, healthcare and more.

"A few projects highlighted in this year's report top \$100 million, but they are projects with significance that goes far beyond their price tags," notes Mike Riley, president of

the Leadership Council. “Among these are the new Stan Musial Veteran’s Memorial Bridge and the upcoming completion of the restoration of the Metro East Levees, both of which will pave the way for tremendous additional investment in our region, while two brand new hospitals indicate that our region is preparing for future growth.”

Multiple investments in additional infrastructure improvements and logistics and distribution centers in both counties underscore Southwestern Illinois’ position as a multimodal hub poised for growth. On the heels of the opening of the new FedEx facility in Sauget, Gateway Commerce Center in Madison County welcomed the largest speculative industrial building the Metro East has ever seen. A second speculative building representing another \$30 million investment is currently under development at Gateway, while a third, planned for nearby Lakeview Commerce Center, was recently announced.

“All this activity is clear evidence of the advantages we offer for those in the logistics and distribution sector,” notes Riley. “With the upcoming grand opening of the new South Harbor at America’s Central Port and other enhancements planned for commodities handling operations along the riverfront in Cahokia, there is great potential for continuing investment related to freight movement in and through our region.”

Concentrated efforts underway to capitalize on the opportunities in this vibrant sector of our economy are summarized in the report, along with highlights from the recent Transportation Freight Study commissioned by the Leadership Council. The study findings provide a clearer picture of how well Southwestern Illinois’ locational advantages position the region in an intensely competitive freight marketplace and reinforce why it already is home to national logistics leaders such as Dial, Hershey’s, Procter and Gamble, FedEx and more. It also provides greater insight into the various opportunities for collaboration to help advance the region as a premiere freight gateway.

Another important infrastructure project highlighted in the Market Review is the new Rieder Road/I-64 Interchange scheduled for completion in 2016. It is expected to create a couple thousand acres of aviation- and defense-related commercial opportunities adjacent to Scott Air Force Base and MidAmerica Airport, while also enhancing St. Clair County’s competitive position as it pursues the new headquarters for the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and the 3,000 jobs it represents. While a decision on that project is still pending, several others representing almost \$100 million in investment are coming on line at the nearby airbase, strengthening Scott’s presence in our region.

The report also spotlights the outstanding continuing regional support provided for the airmen at Scott AFB and their families, the depth of which enabled the region to capture the coveted Abilene Trophy for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in three years, a remarkable achievement.

The considerable investment in the healthcare sector also is featured in this year's Market Review. On the heels of the opening of the \$63 million St. Joseph's hospital in Highland in 2013, the area is preparing to welcome the \$124 million Memorial Hospital East currently under construction in Shiloh, while plans are moving forward for the new \$300 million St. Elizabeth's hospital in O'Fallon. Almost \$60 million in additional expansions and renovations are enhancing a variety of other healthcare facilities in both counties. All of this investment is expected to have a ripple effect of additional growth in the residential and commercial real estate market in the coming years.

Millions of dollars also continue to be invested in the education sector, and the 2014 report includes a sampling of many of these projects, along with an overview of other important regional investments, such as the work underway to provide higher speed rail connections between St. Louis and Chicago. Other projects of note can be found in all sectors of our economy and range from the \$38.8 million Illinois State Police Metro East Forensic Science Lab and the proposed \$66 million mixed use development by the Shrine of our Lady of the Snows, both in Belleville, to the \$40 million expansion at Kraft Food Group Manufacturing Facility in Granite City and the new \$24 million Multi-Modal Transportation Development Project now underway in Alton.

While the *Market Review* has largely focused on brick and mortar investments over the years, the most recent edition spotlights an initiative underway to grow jobs in manufacturing and the trades in our region. The top 50 manufacturers in Southwestern Illinois account for approximately 16,000 jobs, while smaller manufacturers employ many more. Thousands retiring in the coming years will create a wave of hard-to-fill openings based on the existing skills gap. To address the need, regional leaders recently launched a marketing and outreach initiative to link today's high school students to the career opportunities that lie ahead. Being led by the Madison-Bond and MidAmerica workforce investment boards, in collaboration with a variety of partners, the two-pronged campaign theme is ***Manufacture Your Future/Craft Your Future – A Career that Pays in Southwestern Illinois***. The campaign aims to educate high school students, parents, guidance counselors, principals and other influencers about the high-paying jobs that will be available in both sectors, the skills needed for the positions opening up, and the path to follow in order to land one.

Rounding out the report is the latest Top Employers List, details on the positive trends in single family home sales in Madison and St. Clair Counties and various other information pertaining to demographics, labor force and employment, making the publication a valuable resource for community and economic development professional across the region.

The PDF version of the complete *2014 Market Review & Investment Update* is now available online in the resources section at [www.leadershipcouncilswil.com](http://www.leadershipcouncilswil.com).

