

River Bend Growth Association Expands Business Retention Program to Keep Southwestern Illinois at Work

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In an effort to keep the Southwestern Illinois' labor force at work, the River Bend Growth Association is partnering with county, regional and state agencies to expand the scope and impact of its Business Retention and Expansion Program.

For years, the River Bend Growth Association, which serves as the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development organization for the communities that make up the River Bend, has maintained its own business retention and expansion program. After participating in the year-long Vision 2020 planning initiative spearheaded by the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois and the Madison-Bond Workforce Investment Board, the River Bend Growth Association has decided to join its resources with those in the region already working to create new jobs through business expansion and retain current jobs that may be at risk.

Monica Bristow, President of the River Bend Growth Association, participated in the year-long Vision 2020 planning initiative spearheaded by the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois and the Madison-Bond Workforce Investment Board and sees great benefit in expanding on programs already in place to keep local jobs and assist in business expansions.

Vision 2020 was funded through a Regional Innovation Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. The need to work with allied economic development agencies to establish beneficial relationships within key business sectors was underscored in the planning process.

Jim Pennekamp, Special Assistant to the Chancellor for Regional Economic Development at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, chairs a committee of the Madison-Bond Workforce Investment Board, which is helping to establish sustainable business retention and expansion program throughout the region. He noted that the Growth Association program is an effective model that relies on data collection and direct contact with business representatives to identify opportunities or challenges and provide effective follow up assistance." Pennekamp noted that these are challenging times and all economic development agencies should be working together to assist businesses that are invested in our area and employ our residents.

Agencies that will assist the Growth Association program include, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Madison County Community Development, Madison County Employment and Training, and The Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois. Monica Bristow explained that representatives from these agencies will be accompanying Growth Association staff on visits to area employers. She said, "We are all very interested in finding out as much as we can about our businesses and how we can help them succeed."

The River Bend Growth Association serves the communities of Alton, Bethalto, East Alton, Elsah, Foster Township, Godfrey, Grafton, Hartford, South Roxana, Roxana and Wood River. Its

mission is to provide leadership required to attract, promote and support new and existing enterprise growth throughout the River Bend community.

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