

## Q&A with T.R. Carr, Dept. Chairman, Public Administration and Policy Analysis Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

### IBJ: What is Vision 2020?

**Carr:** The U.S. Department of Labor provided grants to various regions across the country so that they could make plans for strengthening their economic base for the future. In Southwestern Illinois, we called our plan Vision 2020.

### IBJ: What was the purpose of the Vision 2020 project?

**Carr:** I'd say there were three purposes for the project: One was to identify where



Carr

the region is currently - what are our strengths, what are our assets. The second general purpose was to decide where we want to go and where

### IBJ: Was it specific to workforce, or more generally economic development oriented?

**Carr:** The actual grant itself dealt with

economic development. Of course, one of the specific interests is workforce development. By the time the grant was received, the economy had sort of shifted. When the grant was applied for, ConocoPhillips was in the process of investing \$4 billion in the refinery. We had another \$4 billion investment in the Prairie State Energy Campus. The area was on the upswing. But then we had some significant unemployment issues beginning in late '08 or early '09 and climbing to the 10 percent range today. We've had a general economic downturn, and that kind of shifted the focus.

### IBJ: What was the conclusion relative to where we are?

**Carr:** The region has incredible strengths. If you were to compare us to other regions in the country, we have a population base at around a half million people, we have an oil refinery, we have a steel mill, we have new generation electric power plant, we have an ethanol research center, we have two ethanol plants, we have a strong K-12 education system, we have both public and private universities. We have assets such as a highly trained, highly capable workforce, river ports on both the Mississippi and the Kaskaskia Rivers and the convergence of five class-one railroads here in Southwest Illinois. The resources are, in fact, really significant. The challenge for the region is able to mobilize our resources so that we can compete on a global basis.

### IBJ: What do you mean by mobilize our resources?

**Carr:** Let's look at freight logistics, for example. We have the port facility on the Mississippi, then the ports over on the Kaskaskia River. We have three regional airports and the rail. Panama is building a new, larger canal and that's going to be a game changer. If we're going to be a player in global trade, it involves building relationships so we can exploit our proximity to the Port of New Orleans and the barge traffic coming up the Mississippi. With the three airports that we have here, the issue is how we use them to expand our air freight role in the greater St. Louis region. We need to work collectively to link our rail systems, our airports, the barge systems and our interstate transport system.

### IBJ: So, in what direction should we be going?

**Carr:** I think if you look at the strengths of the region, one area that's very clear is the idea of logistics freight. That's got some real strong possibilities for us. Another area - it's kind of interesting to think about - is the whole concept of some kind of initiative relating to energy. We have petroleum, we have coal, we have alternative fuels like ethanol. This is an opportune time for the entrepreneurial

spirit to kick in and maybe look at energy as kind of a crux of that scenario for increasing interests nationwide. We're uniquely positioned to have a role in that. I think another area that the region may want to look at deals with what I call allied health. If you look at the region, we have major hospitals on this side of the river. We have excellent training facilities with nursing programs at the community colleges, at Lewis & Clark, at SWIC, McKendree University and at SIUE we have the school of pharmacy. We have the school of dental medicine. If you look at the healthcare delivery systems that are in place, that's something that offers a significant opportunity for this region. So we're looking at it as a kind of multi-pronged approach.

### IBJ: Is this report the end of the process?

**Carr:** In many respects it is a launching, because our task was to identify some potential strategies that the region may want to follow. One of the things that we do not want to do is to generate a report that sits on the shelf. This is not something that SIUE is doing. It's not a process that we're telling municipalities and counties what they have to do; we're just identifying a range of strategies. The key is to develop a coordinated effort to move this region forward.

## IBJ Business News

### Local National Alliance on Mental Illness expands service area

The National Alliance on Mental Illness Madison County announces a name change and an expansion of its service area. The organization's new name is the National Alliance on Mental Illness Southwestern Illinois and is affiliated with the National and Statewide Illinois NAMIS. The agency is dedicated to providing support, education and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and others whose lives are affected by these diseases.

Board president Rob Roennigke says the new name was adopted to reflect that the alliance's new service area now includes Madison, Jersey, Montgomery, Greene, Calhoun, Bond, St. Clair, Monroe, Randolph, Washington and Clinton counties.

### U.S. Rep. Shimkus announces YouthBuild initiatives

U.S. Rep. John Shimkus (R-Illinois) announces U.S. Department of Labor funding for three YouthBuild programs in Godfrey, Mt. Vernon and Springfield. YouthBuild assists out-of-school young adults by training them in a construction skill at the same time they are working toward their GED or diploma.

Lewis and Clark Community College in Godfrey will be receiving \$303,750. United Methodist Children's Home in Mt. Vernon will be receiving \$387,462. Springfield Urban League will be receiving \$375,000.

The projects the YouthBuild participants work on also have a benefit to the community, in addition to hopefully earning them a job upon completion, Shimkus says.



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# Marion, Illinois STAR bonds commercial development project "like a dream come true"

By ALAN J. ORTBALS

When Gov. Pat Quinn went to Marion, Illinois to sign the STAR (Sales Tax and Revenue) bonds legislation into law in June, the event was met with marching bands, choirs, fire trucks and more than 600 revelers.

It was a very different reception from what met the same developers in Southwestern Illinois.

"It's a big deal for us," said State Rep. John Bradley, a Democrat from Marion and sponsor of the legislation in the Illinois House. "It was a team effort and I was proud to be a part of it. It's one of the biggest things that has happened to our area. We're not used to getting stuff like that. You're talking about an area that's chronically, economically depressed and we've lost a lot of opportunities over the years. For us to have an opportunity like this is just like a dream come true."

Bradley says he supported the original bill that was sponsored by State Rep. Tom Holbrook (D-Belleville), and he couldn't understand the resistance that the University Town Center project was receiving in Southwestern Illinois. When the developers moved their site to Marion, he quickly jumped on board.

"When things completely fell apart up there, they moved the project down here and it's just a godsend for us," Bradley said. "We're excited and it's wonderful."

Bruce Holland, president of Holland Construction Services Inc. and a member of the development team, says the hostility which erupted in response to the project in Glen Carbon was really the work of two people whom he declined to identify. The team spent over a year trying to answer the objections and get the project done in Glen Carbon but

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## State Rep. John Bradley D-Marion

finally gave up and selected the Marion site.

"The legislation was probably passed in a two-week period from when we finally said go," Holland said. "That was because the legislators in the surrounding municipalities and all the economic development groups were all solidly behind it. They all wanted to see it happen."

State Sen. Gary Forby (D-Benton) was another strong supporter and sponsored the bill in the Illinois Senate. He says he could understand the negative reaction the project received in Southwestern Illinois.

"A lot of people don't understand that this thing won't work but just in a very few places in the state of Illinois," said Forby. "Like up there in Metro East, you're competing with a lot of people.

having millions of new people coming to Southern Illinois," Bradley said. "That's what we've been needing for years. We have a lot of resources: Shawnee National Forest, the wine trail, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, but we've never had the thing to bring people to this area and get them to stay. This just seems like a perfect fit for us and our communities. We need the jobs, we need the economic investment. We don't get people coming to our area talking about investing hundreds of millions of dollars," Bradley added.

Holland says the development group has optioned approximately 300 acres at the intersection of Interstate 57 and Illinois Rte. 13, most of it already in the city of Marion. The development team is looking to negotiate options on another 100 to 200 acres. They don't have any tenants committed yet, but Holland says they are familiar with the prospective tenants' requirements and believe the Marion site fits their criteria.

"We just said we're going to wait until we've got the district established and then we're going to go talk to them," Holland said, "because first they want to know if you have enabling legislation passed. The next thing they want to know is if you have the property under control and a district established. Then, at that point, it's something real that you can sell."

Holland estimates it will take two to three months to establish the district. Once tenants are secured, work needs to be done to get the actual project approved which includes feasibility studies, market analysis, etc. Holland says he hopes to be able to start construction during the summer of 2011.

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# UNEMPLOYMENT

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Marc Voegelé owns the local Express franchise and provides services to employers and employees in Southwestern Illinois. Voegelé says his franchise just experienced the fifth-best week in its history in terms of revenues from placements.

"The neat part about that is that we serve all different kinds of companies - big, little, all different kinds of industries...light industrial, office clerical, legal, financial, scientific - it's across the board," Voegelé said. "The thing that makes it even better for us is that our split is probably about 50/50 relative to how many are just in the temporary position versus how many are in a direct hire or an evaluation-hire situation, what some people call temp-to-perm.

"Different sectors like manufacturing, retail, professional business services, education, health, leisure, hospitality, they're all showing signs of growth," Voegelé added. "The only one that isn't right now is construction."

Voegelé says a lot of companies use an

employment company to try an employee out for 90 or 120 days before they actually put him or her on their payroll. This is referred to as an evaluation-hire or temp-to-perm hire. The idea is to have the staffing company go through all the work to find the right person.

"A lot of companies may be good at building widgets or providing a service," Voegelé said, "but they're not better at hiring good people than they are at doing their taxes or their legal work. They outsource that to professionals because it makes sense. It saves them money and gives them better results. It's the same thing with us."

Wahlquist says the temp-to-perm process is good for both employer and employee. The company gets to audition the individual for 60 or 90 days and decide whether or not they want to offer a permanent job, thus freeing them from the risk of hiring someone based on a resume and an interview and then concluding that they made a mistake. The employee is able to get to know the company,

supervisors, etc. and come to a conclusion as to whether or not he sees it as a good fit.

"A survey of some 13,000 current and former temporary employees told us that about three quarters of them come to work for companies in the hope and expectation that a temporary assignment will lead to a permanent job," Wahlquist said. "It also told us that 88 percent of them say that their work as a temporary contract employee made them more employable. They picked up some additional skills and added some things on their resume. About 25 percent of the people who come to work for staffing firms do so because they choose not to work in a fixed-schedule, traditional, permanent job. They just don't want to."

The other benefit to using a staffing company is that it provides flexibility to the company. Wahlquist says that traditionally, larger companies would have about 5 percent of their workforce being temporary or contract employees. But this recession may change that

going forward, he adds, with companies carrying a larger percentage of contract employees so that it's easier to shed them when the inevitable recession hits.

Similarly, he says that more employees may look to work through staffing services because this recession has proven that job security isn't a matter of who you work for but what skills you possess.

While employment is trending up, Wahlquist says, he thinks the recovery is going to be slow.

"We need to add about 150,000 new jobs every single month just to keep pace with new entrants into the labor force," said Wahlquist, "let alone cut away at that very high unemployment rate. We're not talking to people who think we're in the midst of a double dip. It's still a U-shaped recovery. It's not a hockey stick. It's not an L. It's a very sloopy looking U and it's kind of got a bumpy bottom. But, we have every reason to believe that we're going to be in a better position 12 months from now in terms of the unemployment rate and in terms of recovery."

## IBJ Business News

### Madison County offers help in appealing property tax assessments

Madison County Treasurer Frank Miles says property owners may have a legitimate complaint on their property assessment if they can support the claim that:

- The assessed market value for the property in question is higher than actual market value;
- The primary assessment of the property is based on inaccurate information, such as an incorrect measurement of a lot, building or other feature of the property; or
- The assessment is higher than those of similar neighboring properties.

Property owners interested in appealing their home assessment should pay close attention to the deadlines for the appeal. Taxpayers have until Sept. 10, 2010 or 30 days after the Chief County Assessor publishes assessment changes in the taxpayer's local newspaper - whichever is later - to file their appeal. Miles says the publication of assessment changes recently appeared in the local newspapers.

If a taxpayer is interested in an appeal, Miles suggests taxpayers follow these steps:

1. Obtain your property record card file from your township assessor or the Chief County Assessor's office. Check the file to make sure the description of your home and property is correct.

2. You might want to set up a meeting with the assessor's office to determine how the assessment on your property was calculated;

3. You should make a determination of the fair market value for the property in question. Property owners will need to find at least three comparable homes in your area that have recently sold or have been recently appraised to utilize when comparing fair market values. A real estate agent or other professional who has access to a multiple listing service can do a comparable market analysis of comparable homes that have recently sold. Owners may want to have an appraisal of their home to provide further evidence of the property's fair market value;

4. You should also determine the prevailing assessment level of homes in your area. The property owner will need to compare the assessment of the property in question to houses in the area that are of equal or greater value, but are assessed substantially lower; and

5. File your written complaint with all evidence collected to the Madison County Board of Review. The complaint forms and more information on Appeals can be found online at the County Assessor's website at: [www.co.madison.il.us/CCAO/CCAO.shtml](http://www.co.madison.il.us/CCAO/CCAO.shtml), or at the Board of Review's website at: <http://www.co.madison.il.us/Borev/Borev.shtml>.



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