

Anderson takes helm as new executive director of Leadership Council



Anderson

effective Feb. 1. He replaces Dr. Ronda Sauget, who stepped down last October. Anderson was most recently CEO

of the Glen Carbon-based Greater Gateway Association of Realtors, where he oversees and manages the day-to-day operations of the association and its more than 1,000 members.

“Kyle brings a unique mix of passion and dedication, experienced leadership and a rich understanding of the Region’s strategic assets that will be valuable in his role as executive director,” said Richard Mark, chairman of the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois Board of Directors. “We look forward to working closely with Kyle to continue to drive economic growth in this region.”

A Metro East native, Anderson is a graduate of Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville. He has a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Illinois, Springfield and is a graduate of the Institute for Organizational Management at the University of Wisconsin – Madison.

He previously served as the local government affairs director and regional manager of Member Outreach for the Illinois Realtors, where he managed all aspects of member outreach and advocated on behalf of the real estate industry in Illinois at the federal, state and local levels.

"I am excited about this opportunity to lead such a strong organization as the Leadership Council," said Anderson. "I have dedicated most of my life to serving this region, both through my professional and personal affiliations. I look forward to building on the partnerships that have been established over the years to continue creating a healthy business ecosystem for this region."

Anderson was at one time a member of the Wood River City Council and later served as Madison County recorder of deeds.

Tourism investment called key to economic development in '22

Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau President and CEO Cory Jobe says tourism will be the economic engine of the post-pandemic world.

Jobe drove that message home during the bureau's Annual Tourism Summit held Thursday, Jan. 27, at the Gateway Convention Center in Collinsville. More than 240 people were in attendance including elected officials, community partners and regional business leaders.

"It is a green economy with nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation as our welcome mat to the 25 million people who live within a three-hour drive of southwest Illinois," he said. "We have the character to be a regional destination that we can all be proud of. That businesses can thrive in. That neighborhoods can embrace."

Southwest Illinois is home to key tourism drivers that can't be replicated anywhere else, Jobe noted. It is home to the confluence of the nation's three great rivers – the Mississippi, Illinois and Missouri. It is also home to two national byways – The Meeting of the Great Rivers National Scenic Byway and Illinois Route 66. All are key draws for

increased tourism in southwest Illinois. “Embracing a regional approach in developing a regional destination is key creating a livable future for entrepreneurs, retirees and young families,” Jobe said. “Tourism is an investment – not an expense. For every dollar we spend in destination marketing, the region receives \$9 in economic spending – a 9 to 1 ratio. That’s a solid investment.”

The annual summit was sponsored by Alton Works, Carrollton Bank, the City of Collinsville and Phillips 66 Wood River Refinery.

Featured speaker Cathy Ritter, former Illinois and Colorado Office of Tourism State Travel Director and the founder of Better Destinations LLC, echoed Jobe’s remarks. “The keys to a successful destination lies in the community – in the hearts and minds of the residents,” Ritter noted. “Tourism has to start with an authentic expression of what the destination is. We need to make our communities the places people not only want to visit but where people want to live.”

During the Summit, Jobe pointed out

the Tourism Bureau's 2021 accomplishments created a strong foundation for 2022 economic growth in the region. Those accomplishments included:

- A 240 percent increase in Group Travel specifically in motor coach travel with 4,451 delegates visiting and regional sporting events which brought in 18,992 delegates.
- A surge in Mississippi River cruise ship dockings in Alton resulting in an anticipated 60-plus cruise ships using Alton as their port in 2022
- A 92 percent increase in paid media with a focus on digital media generating 30 million impressions with an 8.8 percent click through rate
- A 24 percent increase in visits to the RiversandRoutes.com website
- A 450 percent increase in earned media

The debut of Epic Food Weeks which involved more than 100 different businesses throughout the region and everyone enjoying a summer of food fun.

Fireworks each Thursday night along the Great River Road from June through September resulted

in a 30 percent increase in sales and hotel/motel tax revenues

Partnered with Zartico, a visitor intelligence platform, which identifies industry impacts on jobs, tax revenues, hotel stays and the visitor economy in the region

Looking ahead to growth in 2022, Jobe noted the addition of a new entertainment development in downtown Collinsville, the new Aerie's Alpine Coaster, the NASCAR Cup Series race at World Wide Technology Raceway, a new Fall Colors Shuttle Tour, the reopening of Doc's Soda Fountain and Pharmacy Lounge off Route 66 in Girard, a new food truck experience in Alton when the new Flock Food Truck Park opens in the spring, the addition of a new monster slide at Ragging Rivers Water Park in Grafton and the planning for the Centennial celebration of Route 66 will all help create a must-see destination among travelers.

"At the end of the day, we have a once in a generation opportunity to be transformational in our planning and thinking to build the destination we want which embraces the outdoor recreation industry for the future," Jobe said.

State targets dollars to homeowners facing pandemic mortgage distress

By GRACE KINNICUTT
Capitol News Illinois

SPRINGFIELD – Beginning this spring, the Illinois Housing Development Authority will start accepting applications for homeowners experiencing financial hardship.

The Illinois Emergency Homeowner Assistance Fund overseen by IHDA is a federally-funded program that is dedicated to assist Illinois homeowners that have struggled to pay their mortgage due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I know we’ve been waiting for these funds for a while and it’s really been a holdup from the U.S. Treasury (of) being able to get this money out the door,” House Housing Committee Chair Delia Ramirez, D-Chicago, said during a hearing in January.

Funded through the American Rescue Plan Act that passed Congress in March 2021, \$387 million will be available through the emergency assistance fund for homeowners.

The ARPA funds provided assistance for rent and utilities, as well as \$387 million for the soon-to-launch mortgage assistance program.

Homeowners will be able to apply for a grant of up to \$30,000 that will eliminate or reduce arrearages associated with homeownership.

Funds can also be used to prevent mortgage delinquencies and defaults, foreclosures, loss of utilities or home energy services and displacement

of homeowners experiencing financial hardship after Jan. 21, 2020.

Homeowners must contact their mortgage servicer or a housing counseling agency to ask for help and then, depending on the outcome, can apply for assistance through IHDA.

“These are requirements that the federal government and Treasury are imparting to us,” IHDA Executive Director Kristin Faust said. “The homeowner assistance fund is meant to be a fund of last resort.”

Faust said IHDA will begin a public relations and information campaign to start educating homeowners about how to reach out to housing counseling agencies or their mortgage provider to start preparing the necessary paperwork for when the application process opens.

“Our goal will be to get all the dollars out the door,” Faust said.

Homeowners are recommended to begin the process now to reach out to their service provider and housing counseling agencies so when the applications do open, they’ll be eligible for financial assistance.

IHDA also allocated \$75 million in COVID-19 Affordable Housing Grant Program funds created by the American Rescue Plan. Chrissy Moran, IHDA managing director of multifamily financing, said the funds help de-

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