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Union, others blast sale and job loss at Granite City steel mill

By MELISSA CROCKETT MESKE

The potential loss of up to 1,500 jobs at Granite City Works as part of a proposed plan has prompted fiery reactions from all corners of the community. With the latest updates, things continue to heat up.

U.S. Steel announced on June 28 that it had signed a Non-Binding Letter of Intent calling for Chicago-based SunCoke Energy Inc. to buy and repurpose two blast furnaces at Granite City Works.

The company further noted that the proposed plan “is not expected to impact intermediate staffing levels at Granite City Works.” U.S. Steel spokesperson Amanda Malkowski later confirmed that as many as 1,500 Granite City steelworker jobs could be affected.

Malkowski stressed, however, that the impact on jobs at the Granite City mill would not be immediate.

“If an agreement is signed, we expect the transition to take approximately two years, during which there would be no impact on staffing,” Malkowski said. Those two years are the predicted timeline it would take for SunCoke Energy to construct a new plant as part of the deal.

If the deal goes through, SunCoke would build its own 2-million-ton facility. This new facility would produce the granulated “pig iron” that serves as the building blocks for steel. SunCoke would provide U.S. Steel access to 100 percent of this pig iron production for 10 years for its growing fleet of EAFs (electric arc furnaces).

“We are working with SunCoke to achieve a mutually advantageous outcome; however, if we are unable to reach an agreement or key contingencies are not met, we will reconsider our options at that time,” Malkowski said further.

“As we’ve said before, we’ll continue to analyze the current footprint to best serve our customers and create value for them while also working to advance our long-term strategy, achieve our sustainability commitments, enhance our capabilities and improve our through-cycle performance,” she added.

Malkowski also noted that, if the deal goes through, U.S. Steel will maintain the galvalume finishing line and its workers. Other employment would be managed by SunCoke.

■ See JOBS, Page 2



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Granite City downtown renaissance ‘vital’ to future economic stability

By MELISSA CROCKETT MESKE

With the potential job loss and shutdown at Granite City Works looming in the city’s future, Mayor Mike Parkinson and community leaders are looking at ways to both diversify revenues and spark more growth.

“The people who are working with me on this should really be called The Dream Team. They are as dedicated and passionate about this as I am,” Parkinson said.

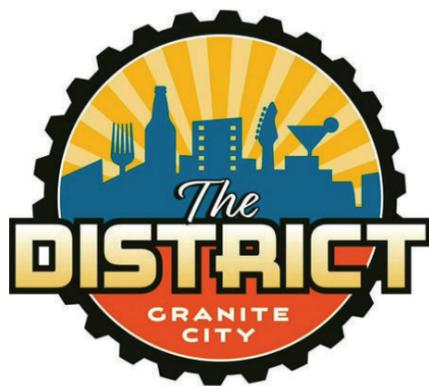
“While we plan to fight to keep the steel mill and its workers here, we also know that we absolutely must be diversified in our revenue streams. We can’t rely on one source, one tax base, to support most of our city’s budget from year to year.”

To that end, Parkinson shared plans for a new event venue as part of a four-block renaissance of Granite City’s downtown into an arts and entertainment district known simply as “The District.”

“Funds through the American Recovery Act, along with existing TIF funding, are what helped make this vision a reality,” he noted.

The new event venue, to be known as “The Mill,” will be quite familiar to Granite City locals and natives. Located at 1311 20th Street, it is the former site of the Niedringhaus United Methodist Church.

“Members of my dream team, the amazing people who work with me, and I were looking for ways to bring entertainment to the city,” said Parkinson.



“The church was no longer functioning, and former Granite City Mayor Ed Hagenauer took the lead in buying the building toward the end of his term.

“This is a \$2.2 million project, and people are excited about it. Outside of the movie theater, there’s really been nothing here for kids or adults to do. We were looking for a way to bring a venue to Granite City that the entire city could enjoy. The old church was ideal,” he added.

Parkinson said that The Mill will be a multi-use community center for Granite City citizens of all ages to enjoy. “It will be a 220-seat venue, designed for concerts and performances, parties, banquets, wedding receptions, birthdays, wedding and baby showers, you name it. It will have more of an ‘outside’ bar, with slide-up garage doors opening to an outside courtyard.”

■ See ECONOMICS, Page 5

Festivals are back, but are they here to stay?

By MELISSA CROCKETT MESKE

There’s little doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic fallout will continue to be felt well into the future. Its impact has left an indelible mark on all our histories, and on our futures.

But now, after nearly three years of pandemic-invoked isolation and social distancing, this summer has become the launch point for people coming together once more.

One critical element for any public event, however, is still missing.

Where are the volunteers? And more specifically, where are the younger volunteers?

Mascoutah Improvement Association President Steve Heizer is one of several event organizers who have noted concerns about the future of community events being successfully hosted as they have in years past.

Heizer serves as a volunteer organizer for the annual Mascoutah Homecoming, taking place annually over the first weekend of August. “We just can’t do this without our volunteers,” said Heizer. “And our city’s parks depend on this event too. There’s no tax money supporting Mascoutah’s parks. The proceeds from our annual Mascoutah Homecoming go to supporting the parks.

“What we’re seeing now with our volunteers is that most of them are older. We have many volunteers who are in their 70s and 80s working the fish stand, for example. That work is hard on the older volunteers, especially when you add in the summer heat,” Heizer added.

“It’s hard to get the younger people to volunteer and help with these events. And when they do, it’s often for an hour or two at a beverage or beer tent,” Heizer said further. “So, our older volunteers, myself included, end up working entire shifts during the event. And we do it because we were raised in a world where we learned that it was our responsibility to give back.

“But it takes its toll,” he added. “I get a total of maybe six hours of sleep all weekend during the Mascoutah Homecoming. And I’m not alone. Our event has become nearly as big as the St. Clair County Fair used to be, and I just don’t know what we can do to get more volunteers – of all ages.”

Linda Hagler, one of the organizers involved with Highland’s annual Kirchenfest hosted by St. Paul Catholic Church, agreed with the need for volunteers, and particularly from the younger generations.

Kirchenfest takes place this summer from Aug. 26 through 28. It first got its start in 1970.

■ See VOLUNTEERS, Page 2