

## ALTON WORKS

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Plans are to keep as much of the historic and iconic appearance of the Wedge structure as possible since first built in 1904 and opened as the former Alton Bank & Trust Co. The technology and design options for the functional space will encompass state-of-the-art innovations throughout.

It is estimated that the construction of the Wedge Innovation Center will bring with it over 100 full-time jobs to the area. The construction includes a commitment by AltonWorks and BSI Constructors to use 25 percent Minority and 6 percent Female workers on this project.

The Wedge will support early-stage, growth-driven companies through education, mentorship, and financing. It will house startups, space for individuals or teams, and more established companies that want to accelerate their businesses or develop new technologies, products, or systems.

Once open, it is expected that the Wedge would create 249 permanent full-time and 62 permanent part-time jobs, with an average wage over \$43,000 per year. A projected 84 percent of the permanent jobs created would be at a living wage, 20 percent would be accessible to persons without a four-year

college degree, and 90 percent would be hired from the surrounding community.

By developing this innovation center, AltonWorks hopes to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem for the region that attracts businesses, investors, seed- and early-stage financing, and media attention, all of which will help both the local and regional economies.

"We are determined to work with public and private partners to revitalize Alton into the type of city in which people want to live, start a business, and be included in the fabric of the community," said AltonWorks President Jayne Simmons. "The pandemic has revealed a need and urgency to focus on the type of innovation that will make downstate Illinois a preferred relocation destination."

AltonWorks is further engaged in dialogue of collaboration with Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) to operate the Wedge and develop programs and services that meet the needs of the entrepreneur and business community.

SIUE's expertise in applied science, research, and data analysis, as well as its many outstanding academic programs fits well with AltonWorks' desire to catalyze transformational

change for Alton and the region.

"SIUE shares a commitment to Alton, the Metro-North, Metro-East, and Illinois, recognizing the tremendous power of our university to transform lives. We are proud to collaborate as an anchor partner and serve the workforce development, research and innovation needs that are central to a brighter future," said SIUE Chancellor James T. Minor, PhD. "We look forward to defining our partnership with the Wedge Innovation Center."

Other special guests were on hand to share in the announcement and offer their words of support for the AltonWorks vision and its development of the Wedge Innovation Center.

Among them was Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) Director Sylvia Garcia, who emphatically noted during her remarks, "We have an infrastructure Governor," while further sharing support for the development of innovative business incubators like the Wedge.

State Sen. Kris Tharp (D-Bethalto) touched on the positive developments happening throughout the Metro East region, and further noted, "To put it simply, great things are happening in Alton."

State Rep. Katie Stuart (D-Edwardsville), joining in on what Sen. Tharp had highlighted, said, "Edwardsville and Collinsville both have amazing opportunities ahead of them, and this Rebuild Illinois grant sets them up for success. I couldn't think of a better use of grant dollars than investing them in high-traffic areas used by all."

"This is a real testament to the real leadership we have," Stuart added.

As a part of his remarks in support of the Wedge Innovation Center announcement and of all the funding slated for projects from the Rebuild Illinois initiative, state Sen. Christopher Belt (D-Swansea) said, "If you rehab it, they will come. If you reinvest in it, they will come."

State Rep. Jay Hoffman (D-Swansea) talked about the vibrancy AltonWorks and this project brings back to downtown Alton, while Alton Mayor David Goins expressed his enthusiasm about the opportunities that will come from it, including jobs, economic growth, revenue generation, and a renewed sense of entrepreneurialism.

Goins further noted, "Regionally, we are not in a competition. We will rise together."

## THE CAVE

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"SkillsUSA is taught in our carpentry programs," Mentzer said, "and two of the three possible ASE certifications are possible through our automotive program, which is a dual-credit offering through Lewis and Clark Community College. Dual credit for all of our other programs here is offered through Southwestern Illinois College."

Funding for The CAVE has come from several sources, and by avoiding a referendum thanks to a \$1.25 million grant secured by State Rep. Jay Hoffman (D-Swansea) to purchase the site, Mentzer explained. "Title I, ESSER, all types of funding have helped make The CAVE come to life. We are further fortunate to have a \$25,000 annual grant from the Southern Illinois Builders Association."

Belleville 201 has partnered with local businesses, the Belleville Chamber of Commerce, the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois, Southwestern Illinois College, local trade unions, community leaders and state agencies, all with a focus on local workforce development and expansion.

This 100,000-square-foot facility at 7645 Magna Drive brought to life a long-held vision of District leaders and their partners from industry and the

trades. Since The CAVE's design and intent was first shared, major employers from throughout the St. Louis Metro region have stepped up to share in the vision. They have also continued in further dialogues for bringing even more skill development opportunities on-site for students and educators alike.

"Our community's appetite for District 201 has changed," said Mentzer. "We continue these daily dialogues with all of our district, community, and regional stakeholders."

The Phase 2 vision encompasses possibilities for graphic art and design, healthcare, cosmetology, robotics and more. Next year, The CAVE plans to add life-guard training and recreational swimming as credit classes to satisfy physical education requirements as well.

"In Fall 2023, we are looking at the possibility of introducing healthcare opportunities for the students,



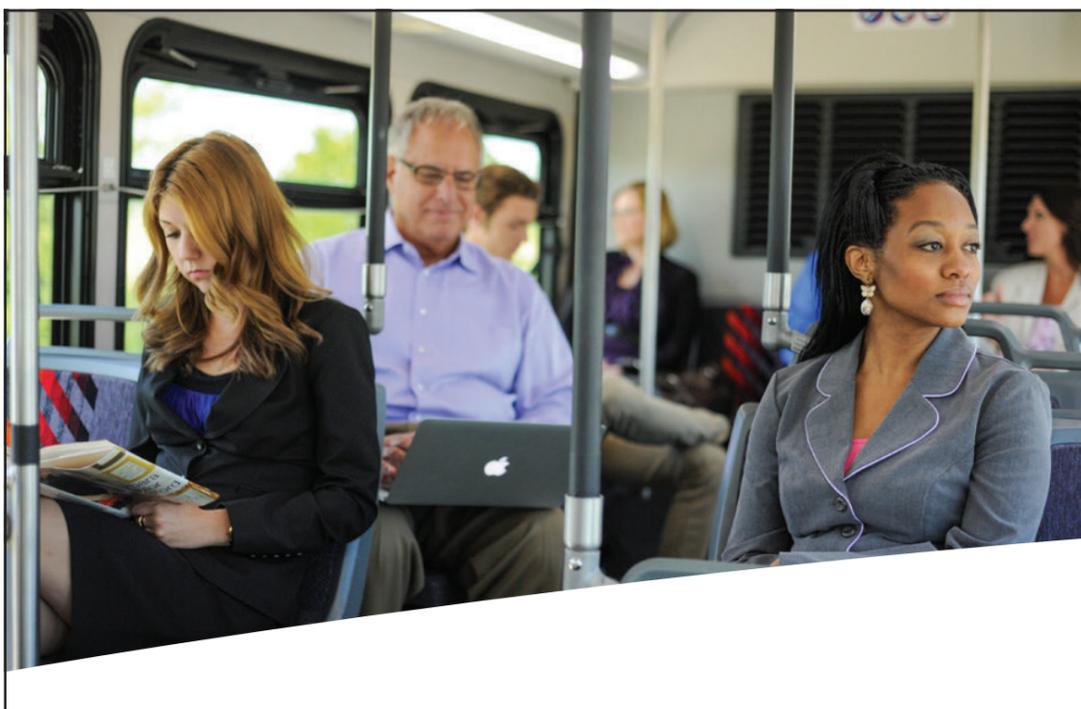
This 10-foot-high sculpture stands in the main lobby of The CAVE, Belleville District 201's new Center for Academic Vocational Excellence.

or perhaps cosmetology. World Wide Technology has asked for a further exploration of tech training opportunities. And SWIC has implemented an e-sports program that might provide opportunities for our students here," said Mentzer.

"We're looking at the spaces we still have undeveloped here, for things like a dance studio, and we're considering the possibilities of suggested programming like that of entry-level avionics mechanics classroom training," Mentzer shared further. "Flexible space could facilitate dance team practice and choreography development for our district's performing arts and theater programs. The possibilities are endless, and so are the ideas pouring in from all our partners."

A community open house will take place from 4 to 8 p.m. on Sept. 13. The public is invited to take in all The CAVE has to offer, starting at the 10-foot-high sculpture in the main lobby. This focal point is symbolic of the vision behind the center's development – designed by art students, with students completing the machining and metalworking before welding students pieced it all together.

As Belleville Mayor Patty Gregory said, "This is a game-changer, for the community and the region."



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