

National representatives tour Southwestern Illinois career, technical programs

By **MELISSA CROCKETT MESKE**
macmeske@ibjonline.com

Representatives from the DC-based Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) trekked through the Southwestern Illinois region in early October with their Illinois counterparts.

Their mission: To visit nine local CTE programs and witness firsthand what – and how – students are learning at the secondary and postsecondary levels that will lead them into rewarding and sustainable careers.

The national and Illinois ACTE representatives were accompanied by state legislators, local policymakers and stakeholders, and members of the media throughout their four-day tour. The program tour gave its participants the chance to learn more about CTE programming options throughout the region while also underscoring the important role career and technical education has in preparing Southwestern Illinois students for careers that exist within the 21st-century workplace.

On Day 1 of the tour, participants first visited O'Fallon High School and learned about their CTE programs including digital marketing and social media, information technology, business and finance, computer programming and cybersecurity, broadcast and video production, early childhood, drafting, engineering and welding.

The tour's next Day 1 stop was at Belleville's newly debuted CAVE (Center for Academic and Vocational Excellence), where participants learned about its culinary, welding, machining, construction and automotive programs. The group then visited the campus of Belleville West.

On Day 2, the tour first stopped at Carbondale High School, featuring their Tech for Success, electrical trades, CNA, multimedia, exterior carpentry, culinary, cooperative education and intro to education programs were. The group then visited Southeastern Illinois College and learned more about the outdoor wildlife management, powersports maintenance, and high school CTE academy programs with diesel and welding certification options.

Mt. Vernon Township and Salem High Schools were the Day 3 tour destinations. Mt. Vernon highlighted its automotive, manufacturing, fire science, construction, agriculture, engineering, CNA, biomedicine, childcare and culinary arts programs. Salem shared its agriculture,



Alton High School students Aleiya Williams, a junior, and Layla Smock, a senior, go live on the air from the soundboard to the airwaves to make a quick promotional announcement during a national tour stop on Oct. 6 with representatives from both the national and state Association of Career and Technical Education accompanied by state legislators, local policymakers and stakeholders, and media members. (Photo by Melissa Crockett Meske/IBJ)

automotive mechanics, business, construction trades, family and consumer sciences, health occupations, industrial technology and manufacturing CTE programs.

On the last day of the tour, participants first visited the Collinsville Area Career Center and learned more about its automotive technology, autobody repair, construction, culinary arts, criminal justice, cybersecurity, early childhood education, engineering, industrial electronics, health science, CNA, machining and welding programs.

The final stop on the four-day tour brought national and Illinois ACTE representatives and other participants to Alton High School. The programs spotlighted through Alton High School students, educators, and administrators included agricultural, food, and natural resources; architecture and engineering; arts, audio/video technology and graphic design; automotive technology; business, management, and administration; computer networking and programming; construction; culinary; textiles; early childhood

education and welding.

A panel of five Alton High School students met with the tour participants and talked about their experiences in the school's CTE programs. One of the student panelists was in the graphic design program and shared a recent project the students in that program had completed. A coloring book with a local, Alton, theme was designed and published by the students, and is now for sale and benefitting the local library.

Another student panelist talked about the benefits of being a part of the CTE programming at Alton High, including a wider range of networking opportunities for mentoring as well as future employment along with getting to learn from those business and industry representatives that come into the school as guest speakers and "who are actually doing the work and hiring the people."

All five Alton High School student panelists

concurred that the one thing they feel is still needed: "Promotion." The students said they see a continued and greater need for promoting the programs available and the positive experiences waiting for others through the CTE programs.

After the tour at Alton High ended, ACTE Media Relations and Advocacy Associate Jori Houck shared some key observations: "The top-notch welding facilities are one of the largest areas in the school, allowing the students to practice skills in a similar space to a professional welding shop. Large drafting tables and construction equipment are housed in the lab next door. The school's outdoor greenhouse produces plants that students care for daily.

"A unique feature of Alton High School is their student-operated radio station, which broadcasts daily and can be heard across Southern Illinois," Houck added. "In addition, Alton boasts a strong environment for CTSOs [career and technical student

organizations] – Alton's FCCLA chapter is the largest in the state of Illinois."

In fact, during the tour stop at Alton High's audio/video technology program area, the participants had the unanticipated chance to witness the duo of radio broadcasting CTE students Aleiya Williams, a junior, and Layla Smock, a senior, go live on the air from the soundboard to the airwaves to make a quick promotional announcement.

The tour at Alton High School was led by Assistant Principal and CTE Director Mike Brey, with Illinois State Representative Amy Elik and Illinois Board of Education officials taking part as well. During the tour, Kaleb Smith, Madison County CTE director, urged more industry partners to become involved with the county's CTE programs through donations or by helping to educate students about career opportunities available to them.

Smith also shared concerns about the ongoing CTE educator shortage. There are CTE pathways that have been put on hold, such as Alton High's biomedicine program, because of a lack of qualified professionals that are willing to leave a much more financially lucrative private industry setting and move into a teaching career.

For professionals who are willing, however, Smith's office is the first stop for them to make. Alternatives to traditional teaching certifications are available. For more information, visit online at madison-countycte.com or call (618) 656-0415.

The Madison County CTE system coordinates Kindergarten through grade 12 CTE and career exploration programs throughout the county. School districts included in Smith's service region include Alton, Bethalto, Collinsville, East Alton, Wood River High School, Edwardsville, Granite City, Highland, Madison, Roxana, Southwestern and Triad, along with the Collinsville Area Vocational Center, Lewis & Clark Community College and Southwestern Illinois College.

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) is the nation's largest not-for-profit association committed to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for successful careers. It also represents the community of CTE professionals, including educators, administrators, researchers, school counselors, guidance and career development professionals and others at all levels of education.

With a shared mission now officially united, things just got REAL

By **MELISSA CROCKETT MESKE**
macmeske@ibjonline.com

It finally happened. After spending the last few years in an ongoing shared dialogue and with an equally shared passion, two groups of leaders in the real estate industry with a common mission have now officially combined forces for a greater good.

A merger has been approved between the REALTOR® Association of Southwestern Illinois and the Greater Gateway Association of Realtors. The affirmative vote by the members of both groups took place as part of a meeting held on Oct. 12, 2022.

So, what does this mean for the futures of the two previous organizations, their members, and the clients they all serve?

Sam Row, recently installed as the 2022-2023 President of the REALTOR® Association of Southwestern Illinois, shared the merger's immediate impact.

"The vote by both Associations was an overwhelming yes," Row noted. "This



Row



Lewis

is an exciting time, and we are so glad that this has finally happened. I feel very positive about the merger.

Row will become its president-elect.

Lewis will become its president-elect.

is an exciting time, and we are so glad that this has finally happened. I feel very positive about the merger.

"While still pending approval from the National Association of REALTORS, the merged group's proposed new name is Southwestern Illinois Board of REALTORS," he added.

Jean Lewis from the Greater Gateway group will serve

as the merged group's first president.

Row will become its president-elect.

Lewis will become its president-elect.

nacle and is in her 25th year selling real estate. She had been sworn in as the 2022-2023 President of the Greater Gateway Association of Realtors on Sept. 7.

Row is also with Keller Williams Pinnacle. In real estate for 15 years now, he has served as a board member of the REALTOR® Association of Southwestern Illinois (RASI) since 2019, joining RASI in 2007.

"The mission of both associations has always been to empower our Realtors and our affiliates, and to fight for the rights of homeowners. That will remain unchanged," said Row.

And as Row had previously noted in an interview with the Illinois Business Journal, "The pros are continuity, shared services, a more united Southwestern Illinois, a larger voice for our community, more opportunities for greater education, speakers and involvement in our communities."

"The vote happened on October 12; now the hard work will begin," said RASI CEO Deb Frazier. "All the timelines

and processes to move forward will be established, and we deeply appreciate the continued support from both memberships in helping make this happen.

"This has been a huge goal to accomplish," Frazier further noted. "The merger helps our clients and the industry as a whole. We now have a larger voice with legislators to make sure property rights of homeowners are protected." Anyone interested in learning more about the merger may contact Frazier's office at (618) 277-1980.

The former REALTOR® Association of Southwestern Illinois boasts 1,000-plus members. The Greater Gateway Association of Realtors includes more than 1,400 Realtor and affiliate members throughout Southwestern Illinois including Bond, Calhoun, Fayette, Jersey, Macoupin, Madison, Monroe and Montgomery counties.

Now, as a combined force, their impact should be seen more visibly than ever before, with a united voice to be heard even more loudly.