



Illinois Business Journal

Vol. 22 No. 4 • January 2023



Damian and Dr. Dee Dee Jones talk about their “why” with host Kris Larson in the newly debuted video series *Choosing Alton*, an Alton Main Street production. (Courtesy Alton Main Street)

Choosing Alton, But why?

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Have you ever wondered how we wound up here? Not the kind of “God-created” versus “evolution” debate, but rather how someone you just walked by ended up in the same place as you. A kind of thinking like: “Out of all the places in all the world you could be, *why here?*”

It was a deep-seeded curiosity inside Alton resident Roger Lewis that prompted him to dig deeper, to ask others just that:

Why here? Why Alton?

It is also the seed that, once planted and nourished, led to an Alton Main Street production debuting right before

Christmas in December 2022 and titled, quite appropriately, *Choosing Alton*.

Lewis said that *Choosing Alton* was an idea initially originating from two stories he had heard that paralleled yet a third; stories that included one of a young couple that had moved into Lewis’s historic Alton neighborhood from south St. Louis.

“Very south,” Lewis noted. “I thought: How could they have come to know Alton well enough to move here and make it their home?”

The couple, now among Lewis’s neighbors, had been searching online for their next home at that time when they found the one they loved. “But it was in Alton. Still, they fell in love with it. They

saw it online, decided to visit Alton and tour it, and fell in love,” Lewis explained.

That couple is Matt and Laura Windisch, who now manage Flock Food Truck Park in Alton. They lived a full life in St. Louis, but chose to make Alton their new hometown, also eventually bringing their siblings (and spouses) to Alton. Matt later enticed his best friend to Alton as well.

The second story Lewis heard was of another couple who bought a home down the street from him after discovering Alton a bit by surprise while traveling “the back way” from St. Charles on Route 94.

Mulling over these stories brought to Lewis the idea of telling the stories of *why here* – why people were choosing

Alton over anywhere else they could be.

It was during the COVID pandemic that the third story paralleling the other two came to life. Lewis was at an Alton post office branch, and as he was exiting, he held the door open for another post office patron.

“This was not an uncommon action,” said Lewis. “Yet the lady surprisingly said to me, ‘that’s the nicest thing that’s happened to me in the last nine months.’ And I thought, if her words were true, they were just too sad.”

That compelled Lewis to pay it forward, to try and restore a sense of hope and community in his hometown somehow.

His initial action was to buy a couple of \$250 gift cards, one from The Post Commons and one for Germania Brew Haus, then give them back to the respective establishment to pay for customers’ purchases throughout the day.

In retrospect, however, Lewis said, “It just didn’t reach enough. I still needed to do something more.”

That’s when the idea of *Choosing Alton* moved from inside Lewis’s head to reality.

Lewis shared his idea with his fellow board members at Alton Main Street, asking if they would have any interest in producing a video series that told the stories of *why here, why Alton*.

“I pitched the idea of producing a video series about people who moved here from someplace else, or why they came back after moving away. Why they chose Alton. It was a small idea in my mind,” said Lewis. “But one thing was imperative: It had to be focused on creating and sharing positivity. I thought maybe it could then be something simply shared on Alton Main Street’s website for promotional purposes.” Alton Main Street board members said yes.

Then Lewis found himself sharing the idea with Alton-based attorney John Simmons, a friend and colleague for more than two decades. Lewis had retired from the Simmons Hanly Conroy firm where he had served as Simmons’s executive assistant. Lewis and Simmons remained close friends following Lewis’s retirement, and when he shared his idea for this video series with Simmons, John immediately said he loved it and wanted to fund it.

“If it weren’t for John Simmons, I’d still be looking for funders,” said Lewis. “John said he loved it and wanted to pay for it, but I sat on his endorsement for a few days initially. We talked again, and when I presented him with cost details and a budget, John still said ‘do it.’”

“It was because of John’s backing that I was able to pull in Shift Agency to professionally produce the series and apply their massively creative talents, to hire the incredible Emily Guyan as our makeup artist, and to access talents like those of Kris Larson to serve as the series host.”

Several other St. Louis professionals were also brought into the production as actors and directors, as well as in other critical roles.

MCT board commits \$34 million in capital funding for trails, transit enhancements

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On Dec. 12, 2022, officials with Madison County Transit announced a multi-year capital investment totaling \$34 million in funding for the expansion and enhancement of the MCT Trails and Transit systems.

There are 19 Trails projects in 18 Madison County communities, to be initiated over the course of the next five years. that fall under this major investment by the agency’s board of directors, as outlined by MCT Executive Director SJ Morrison during the recent press conference. Funds will be used to add more than 20 miles of new trails to the system, as well as two

new tunnels and seven new bridges.

“Madison County’s twelve trails have become a magnet for visitors,” Morrison said. “With them, we have 138 miles of Class One bikeways, nearly 1,600 acres of greenspace, with 23 tunnels, 50 bridges, and 7 loops interconnecting 21 communities.”

The connection is further supported by the 93 buses that support the Madison County Transit system, all equipped with bicycle racks.

Funds will be invested throughout the four MCT Trails Zones: Riverbend, Central, Southwest, and East.

In its Riverbend Zone, MCT has committed \$12,150,000 to projects in seven communities. This commitment includes investing in a shared-use path in Downtown Alton, funds to support a Godfrey

trail from LaVista to Glazebrook Park, a trail from the new MCT Eastgate Park & Ride in East Alton to the MCT Confluence Trail, and an extension of the Goshen Trail which will bring the MCT Trails into Roxana, Wood River, Bethalto, and South Roxana.

MCT has committed \$4,350,000 to projects in its Central Zone, including a tunnel under IL-157 for the MCT Schoolhouse Trail in Collinsville, new trail extensions in Edwardsville and Glen Carbon, a bridge for the Schoolhouse Trail in Maryville at Pleasant Ridge Road, and completion of a study to determine the best alignment to extend the MCT Trails from the SIUE campus to the MCT Confluence Trail along the river.

■ See MCT, Page 2

■ See ALTON, Page 2