

ALTON.....

Continued from Page 1

“In my mind, I had always referred to it as ‘Choosing Alton,’” Lewis added. “The title stuck.”

Debuting on Dec. 23, 2022, *Choosing Alton* is an Alton Main Street production, viewable on the AMS website and as a YouTube series.

Its executive producer: Roger Lewis, himself a hometown transplant, choosing Alton as his permanent home 11 years ago.

Viewers can visit online at <https://DowntownAlton.com/ChoosingAlton> to take in the 12-part series.

Featured now-Alton residents sharing their stories in *Choosing Alton* include:

Damian and Dr. Dee Dee Jones: One is an Alton native returned, the other a Northern Virginian turned Riverbend resident. Husband and wife, they both have one thing in common: They chose Alton. Now 22 years later, they’ve grown to love the town, and even more so -- the people.

Matt and Sandra Anderson: Being from Alton, Matt always knew there was a special charm to the town. But when he and his wife, Sandra, moved back in 2020 after living and teaching overseas, they quickly realized that Alton now boasts a food and drink scene that rivals those that they experienced on their travels. In settling down here, Matt’s intuition was reaffirmed that Alton did in fact hold a charm, and a thriving neighborhood to raise his family.

Matt and Laura Windisch: Matt and Laura didn’t choose Alton; they firmly believe that Alton chose them. Their hearts and families were in Missouri before taking the plunge, but the Riverbend was calling. The two of them now run Alton’s successful food truck park, Flock, in addition to Stacked Burger Bar in St. Louis.

Hugh and Cheryl Halter: The diversity and missional call are core reasons the Halters feel such affection for the town of Alton. Portland natives and long-time Colorado residents, this family chose Alton, having a sense it was “something they were supposed to do.” They now incubate businesses through their nonprofit coffee shop, brunch kitchen and event space called Post Commons.

Jenna Muscarella: Alton springboarded a sense of wonder and creativity for Muscarella as a little girl. From the architecture to the scenery, colors and flavors of the town, she believes the uniqueness of Alton cultivated her own artistic eye as an adult. And while Muscarella believes Alton has experienced a renaissance in recent years, the structural integrity of the city she’s known and loved has remained the same.

Martha Phillips and Kieran McGuane: McGuane and Phillips experienced vastly different environments in the early years of their lives. Kieran, born in Ireland and accustomed to frequent travel through his work in insurance, changed course and found his passion in culinary school. Martha had a career in law and grew up in the Midwest. Their paths crossed years later and as fate would have it, they got married and chose to live in Alton. The two of them now run a successful restaurant, Epicurean Fare, in historic downtown and are among the innovators who are embracing business development and cultural diversity through food.

Shawn and Alison Neace: The Neaces share a deep appreciation for two things: Music and the Alton School District. From the time she was a young student entering the district years back, Alton schools welcomed Alison with opportunities and resources aplenty to express herself through music. Now, years later, the Alton music community has done the same for her own children.

Penny Schmidt: Schmidt was born in New York, grew up in Elsah, and then returned to New York to start a gallery at the ripe age of 26. Years later while visiting her father in Alton after 9/11, Penny and her husband came to a transitional point in their lives and began to rethink their paths. With a renewed lens of the Riverbend, Penny restored an old building that is now known as residential living space, Mississippi Landing.

Sage Macklay and David Nadolsky: From farming in Europe to working in a science museum in Charlotte, to eventually opening Funky Planet Toys in Alton, Sage and David have spent time in many different cultures. Their experiences were ultimately building blocks that lead them to their forever home. With the desire to start a family, own a house and start a business, Alton checked all their boxes.

Michael Snider: Local artist and maker, Michael Snider -- commonly known for his brainchild, the “Kooliverse” -- is a self-proclaimed Deadhead from Indiana. After years of touring with the Grateful Dead, he discovered the joy of like-mindedness that he now experiences in the Alton community. Although homelessness led him here, he’s found a home in this town for 18 years, surrounded by genuine people and an emerging art scene.

Leo Portal: A national Zillow search led Leo Portal to discover Alton and the historic real estate that he was looking for. Originally from Lima, Peru, Portal’s first exposure to the U.S. was the Bay Area -- but the Midwest is where he is now established. What surprised him most about Alton was the sense of interconnectedness among people with different backgrounds and sexual orientations, something that

you don’t often find in small towns.

Kim Hagele and David Zielinski: David and Kim are among those who grew up in Alton, left to get a taste of life in other cities, and then returned to Alton to settle. They believe that individuals who experience the world outside of Alton then come back bring a new flavor to our town -- making this a place that has the ability to change and evolve through its people.

“This is a view of Alton from other people’s eyes,” Lewis emphasized. “The people featured could be anywhere, but they are here. In Alton. And here to stay. They’ve established lives and livelihoods here for the long haul. You’ll see iconic scenes of Alton featured as the series first gets underway, but it’s the 12 stories of the featured Alton immigrants that are the most fascinating stories to know.”

“Storytelling is growing in importance as an impactful method of conveying nuanced information,” said Alton Main Street Executive Director McGibany. “Finding creative ways to tell our story about why Alton is a great place to live and work is the ideal way to address population decline, which continues to be an issue in many small towns across America.

“Our residents’ high quality of life and the rich social network that they experience here were masterfully captured in these episodes. We’re ready and just waiting for Hulu and Netflix to come calling now,” McGibany added.

“A theme that emerged throughout the interviews was the many accolades about Alton’s impressive variety of locally-owned shops and restaurants, and how having access to these small businesses improves the quality of life for our residents,” McGibany said.

“We hope that the videos inspire people to take a close look at moving to Alton. Highlighting Alton’s natural beauty and small-town charm along with its proximity to St. Louis are major selling points. We know people are looking for places to live, and places to work, more often through a virtual lens. This video series will help tell our story,” McGibany added.

“Word has already gotten out about this series, and the enthusiasm has been overwhelming,” Lewis noted. “We have enough stories now to do a Season 2 if it comes to be. The dream now: To expand the series into segments -- such as *Choosing Alton: Business*, *Choosing Alton: Music*, *Choosing Alton: Education*, and so on. To continue telling Alton’s stories.”

Cameron Ahlvers co-owns Shift Agency, the company that pulled the vision Roger Lewis first had into this innovative and creative storytelling series. “I was just moved by Roger’s story,” said Ahlvers. “It touched me, and I could relate to it. That is why I was excited to be a part of this story. And this could be a beautiful template for other cities as well.”

Ahlvers himself moved to Alton roughly two years ago from St. Louis. He bought a house in Alton as well, after falling in love with the community and all it had to offer. When production wrapped, Ahlvers noted, “I didn’t want it to end. It’s been amazing. People have shared their stories of coming here from extraordinary places all over the world. They’ve chosen Alton and stayed.”

Shift Agency’s Nick Bifano added, “*Choosing Alton* is a convergence of time, talent, people, energy and resources of a city in revival. We want people to have hope, and to dream again.”

MCT.....

Continued from Page 1

In the Trails’ Southwest Zone, the MCT board committed \$10,500,000 toward projects including a bridge over IL-111 for the MCT Schoolhouse Trail in Pontoon Beach; a series of trail projects in Granite City to connect the MCT Confluence Trail and MCT Nature Trail to parks, neighborhoods and commercial areas; an extension of the MCT Schoolhouse Trail into Madison; and a trail connection from the MCT Confluence Trail near the McKinley Bridge into Venice and through the community, to connect the trail system and improve pedestrian access.

MCT Trails’ East Zone will benefit from \$6,500,000 in committed investment to projects that include a signature trail bridge over US 40 to connect Troy to the MCT Trails system and an extension of the MCT Silver Creek Trail from Troy to St. Jacob and Highland.

“Bike trails are an investment that will yield dividends,” Morrison noted.

Significant investments in capital projects to enhance the Madison County Transit system were also announced by agency officials, totaling nearly \$11 million. Among them:

- \$4.2 million for a new MCT transfer station in the IL-111 corridor to serve the growing Madison County warehouse districts known as “Logistics Valley.”
- \$2.8 million for a new Col-

linsville Park & Ride lot in the IL-157 corridor to improve transit access throughout Madison County and to employment in St. Louis.

- \$1 million in renovations to the MCT Granite City Station, a project already underway.
- \$3 million for a new Computer Aided Dispatch/Automated Vehicle Location system which will not only create operational efficiencies, and allow for schedule reliability, it will provide the public with real-time next bus information, accessible



on any mobile device.

Systemwide, MCT further committed an investment of \$500,000 toward the development of public art along its trails and transit systems, announcing the launch of its “Arts on the Trails” and “Arts in Transit” campaigns. Over the course of the next several months, MCT will be working with Heartlands Conservancy for assistance with public engagement on these projects and the development of a formal MCT Trails Master Plan.

Morrison also mentioned that MCT is pursuing electric driver relief vehicles and corresponding infrastructure as well as a strategy to right-size the bus fleet by replacing larger buses with smaller shuttle-sized light-duty vehicles.

Elected officials attending the Dec. 16 press conference included Mayors Darren Carlton (East Alton), Art Risavy (Edwardsville), Mike Parkinson (Granite City), Kevin Hemann (Highland), Rich Schiefer (St. Jacob), Tyrone Echols (Venice), John Hamm (Madison), and Tom Stalcup (Wood River); Illinois State Representatives Amy Elik and Katie Stuart; Madison County Administrator Dave Tanzyus, and Madison County Board Members Stacey Pace and Bill Stoutenborough.

To learn more about the MCT Trails and Transit systems, visit www.mct.org or email info@mct.org.