

Be in Illinois: Where business and industry intersect with success



Illinois Governor JB Pritzker joined Tyson Foods representatives, as well as state and local officials, in an August 2022 groundbreaking ceremony to announce the expansion of Tyson’s Caseyville facility. (Courtesy Tyson Foods)

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Intersect Illinois released its 2022 annual report in mid-November of last year. The report highlighted businesses the organization had helped relocate or expand (more than 357) during the year, with the results accounting for \$402 million in investment and 1,884 new jobs throughout the state.

After reporting these shared highlights in the December 2022 Illinois Business Journal, the IBJ decided it wanted to take a deeper dive into the report’s highlights and look at what this Illinois not-for-profit economic development organization had planned for the new year ahead, focusing on the impacts to the Southwestern Illinois region.

The IBJ also wanted to follow up on stories we published previously, including one in July 2022, and see where Intersect Illinois and Southwestern Illinois were continuing to cross paths. We reached out to Intersect Illinois spokesperson Karley Sweet for more details.

First up: “Be in Illinois.”

“The Be in Illinois campaign aims to generate awareness of Illinois, a premier global business destination, by focusing on our key target sectors,” said Sweet. “To date, this campaign has reached decision-makers through its website, BeInIllinois.org, and through both paid and earned media.”

On the BeInIllinois.org website, there are 21 “insights,” or original stories, from those who fit within each target audience reach. “Since March 2022, we’ve had over 23,850 sessions with website visitors,” Sweet noted.

In terms of the Be in Illinois campaign’s paid and earned media reach, there have been 3.9 million impressions in key verticals; 7,000 Google ad clicks to Be in Illinois website; 63,000 LinkedIn impressions with priority audiences; and 470,000 impressions with corporate real estate executives.

Those are some impressive numbers.

When the discussion moved to business development, Sweet shared highlights regarding more recent downstate Illinois “wins,” one of which sits right here in the Southwestern Illinois region.

Tyson Foods, Inc., announced the expansion of its Caseyville facility, producing Hillshire Farm® and Jimmy Dean® products. The company’s commitment to expanding the Caseyville facility was initially expected to bring a \$180 million investment and create 250 new jobs – it has since increased its job projections to 400. The new facility is expected to be completed in the summer of 2023.

Next, Sweet shared that Intersect Illinois has continued to see an increase in the number of project opportunities downstate and expanded interest in being a part of the organization’s mission.

Bussey Bank recently filled a seat on the nonprofit’s board, and other downstate

members include representatives from ADM, A. Lucas & Sons, Ameren, Carle Health, Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center, Illinois REALTORS, OSF Healthcare, and the University of Illinois System.

Southern Illinois Builders Association also recently came on board as an Intersect Illinois partner.

Looking ahead, Sweet said Intersect Illinois will be working with communities across the state on actively marketing some of Illinois’ most desirable sites and megasites. To that end, the organization is developing a new site readiness campaign to identify significant sites that are “ready to go.” As Sweet pointed out, “That is a big need in today’s market.”

One of those sites is the Hartford Industrial Center. It is a flat, 500-plus acre, heavy industrial-zoned property located in a TIF District and Enterprise Zone. It can be serviced directly by the Union Pacific, Kansas City Southern, Canadian Pacific, and BNSF lines and is located approximately one mile from the Mississippi River with potential barge dock access. The property is close to Interstates 255, 270, 55, 70, 64, and 40, as well as America’s Central Port, the 1,200-acre multi-modal business and industrial campus providing exceptional access to river, rail, and road freight transportation. The Hartford Industrial Center site is close to fresh water, wastewater, natural gas, and electric infrastructure.

Another site is the Jerseyville Industrial Park, formerly known as the Mid-America International Gateway Business Park. It is a 1,600-acre rail-served logistics park in Jerseyville, Ill., in close proximity to Highway 16 and Interstate 255, and 40 minutes from St. Louis Lambert International Airport. It also is close to a significant pool of available and talented workforce (15 minutes to Lewis and Clark Community College in Godfrey, 30 minutes to Southern Illinois University Edwardsville).

More details on these two sites, and others throughout the state, are available online at the Intersect Illinois searchable portal, properties.intersectillinois.org.

Sweet further pointed out that the Illinois legislature has passed substantial new incentives to help attract businesses. “These include a new closing fund to help lure major job creators to Illinois, new provisions to EDGE incentives that make them more accessible to companies, and expanding the Reimagining Energy and Vehicles Act to enable more companies to be eligible and to include solar, renewables and energy storage companies.”

CEO Dan Seals took the lead at Intersect Illinois in September 2021. At the same time, Intersect Illinois hired its first Vice President of Downstate Relations, Robert Stephan. Since its inception in 2016, Intersect Illinois has catalyzed a 112 percent increase in jobs and a 137 percent increase in investment over yearly averages. For more information, visit online at intersectillinois.org.

Flipping.....

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“CTE teachers get to share their passion and expertise with local students and inspire students to find career paths that will lead to successful and rewarding careers,” said Smith. “These teachers also invest in their own communities by helping develop and grow the future workforce. They teach skills that will not only prepare their students for a career, but they also pass on life skills that the students will use no matter what career path they choose.”

“Core content teachers can also come from this alternative path to teaching. A district would need to develop a bridge plan from core content to CTE. The same requirements in terms of education and/or work experience still apply. Time spent teaching ‘skill-level’ CTE courses would now count towards work experience hours spent in the teaching field, however. They would hold a CTE teaching license with short-term approval until they accumulated their 2,000 hours in the teaching field. Once their hours had been accumulated there, they could move into teaching core content,” Smith explained.

And while the pay may not be comparable to that of a large corporation CEO, there are perks of the job that can be quite appealing. “You will follow the school calendar, which means time off for major holidays, winter and spring breaks, and of course, time off in the summer,” Smith also noted.

The critical need to fill classroom vacancies has led schools throughout the country to hire classroom teachers who do not have a “traditional” degree or teaching certification. Many reasons exist for the ongoing nationwide teacher shortage.

One reason for an increase in recruiting from this alternative path to teaching is the decrease in the number of traditional teacher education program graduates. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education reported earlier last year that, from 2009 to 2019, the number of teacher education program completers had declined by nearly a third.

In an interview prior to the beginning of the fall semester, Holly Fales, assistant dean for undergraduate affairs and educator preparation at East Carolina University, said that the university’s College of Education is seeing fewer students enroll in its traditional undergraduate programs. But a growing number of graduates are returning to the university to seek alternative licensure.

As the system director of Madison County’s Career and Technical Education programs, Smith noted that alternative licensure teachers are vital for filling the many CTE positions open in districts throughout the county. An alternative licensure teacher’s workforce experience can provide valuable lessons for students.

Other news headlines have often shared stories about the alarming rate of teachers exiting the profession, either for a second career themselves or through retirement, but a closer look particularly at the nation’s rural schools shows that attracting “second career” teachers from a variety of different backgrounds through an alternative licensure program such as Illinois’ CTE one is starting to pay off.

“In the past six months especially, we’ve noticed a lot of interest from people wanting to do teaching as a second career path,” said Taylor McCabe-Juhnke, executive director of the Illinois-based Rural Schools Collaborative, in a December 2022 interview with The Daily Yonder. “It’s particularly fascinating at a time where the profession gets a lot of criticism, but not only are they choosing to teach, but they’re choosing to do so in rural areas.”

The Daily Yonder’s article further reports that while each teacher has their own reasons for entering the field, their

interviews with the Rural Schools Collaborative show a few are shared: A greater sense of purpose along with a desire to be more engaged in their local community.

Meanwhile, as the demand for teachers continues to grow nationwide, some studies suggest that the teacher shortage has grown worse overall. And the shortage of qualified teachers in the realm of Career Technical Education has only been further magnified.

A recent study cited by The Daily Yonder and completed by Scholaroo indicated that “bad working conditions, low salaries and the pandemic are among the factors contributing to the shortage of teachers.”

Industry professionals who are ready to flip their careers and move into their part two, however, do so in large part because they are searching for purpose, something that their former jobs may no longer provide them. These people were perhaps once corporate CEOs, company presidents, marketing managers, contractors, military veterans, business owners, fashion designers, auto technicians, or chefs at local restaurants with successful careers far away from the world of education.

Yet they choose to make the switch to a second career at a time when the profession is otherwise seeing its “traditional” educators flee at a noticeable rate. Why? Well, more often than not, the salaries offered for teaching positions can become a moot point; they become “enough” when one considers that they can also offer a better work-life balance and a renewed sense of worth. The prospect of a work schedule that matches one’s lifestyle and family better can also be enough of a draw.

To help them learn on the job, school districts also provide these alternative-beginning teachers (CTE or core content) with mentors – more experienced teachers to help show their new colleagues the ropes. There are also multi-classroom and co-teaching opportunities, working with small groups of teachers to help with lesson plans, instruction methods, and classroom management.

While those who completed a traditional teacher-education program might have begun their careers at an advantage, alternative licensure seems like a viable option for filling the vast teacher shortage.

Representatives from the DC-based national Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) and their Illinois counterparts toured the Southwestern Illinois region over four days in October 2022 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. As a part of that tour, Smith 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.

At that time, Smith also expressed serious 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.

Still more is happening at the high school level to ensure a continued flow of teachers into both the CTE and core content pipelines. Read more about those innovative initiatives in the story on page 2: “Grow Your Own: It’s not what you think.”

For more information on how to get started on your second career path, contact Madison County CTE Director Kaleb Smith at (618) 656-0415, kwsmith@ecusd7.org, or visit online at <http://www.madisoncountyncycte.com/>.