

Downtown

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O'Donnell further acknowledged his company's banker for helping make the development projects possible, and for providing access "from dream to finish" for other business owners wanting to come to downtown Wood River or wanting to revitalize their footprint if they're already there.

"Lisa Fowler at First Mid Bank and Trust has been invaluable to me," said O'Donnell. "With her, it's all been about access. Access to her and all the programs she can work with for business owners, and giving back access to the dreams we all have."

A dedication to bringing the good to downtown Wood River can be seen all along Ferguson Avenue and its surrounding blocks. While an overhead canopy might mark the start of the Historic Downtown Wood River renaissance, there's plenty of other evidence that this city is amidst a serious rebirth.

The reinvestment Cleary's Shoes & Boots is making to their historic location at 48 E. Ferguson is an example, along with about another dozen shops and stores that have opened in the past year or soon will. Places like The Burger Bar, 1929 Pizza & Wine, Squeaky Clean Pet Spa, The Sweet Tooth, C&N Licensing and Title Services, Heaterz Hot Chicken, and The Rolling Pin Bakery & Café which will soon become a new Mexican food spot.

C&B Boiled Bagels is also on the scene in downtown Wood River, scheduled to open in April with a \$600,000 investment on-site.



Some of the upgrades in downtown Wood River's streetscapes are evidenced in this photo, including an abundance of street lighting with a unified look and ADA-compliant sidewalks and curbing. (Photo by Melissa Crockett Meske/Illinois Business Journal)

It will not only serve as a local bagel and coffee stop but also operate commercially and produce about 8,000 bagels a week for discussed locations such as Goshen Coffee and SIUE. They are hiring for all positions now. Luxury condominiums are also part of the vision for the building's upper level, O'Donnell further noted.

Wood River Police Chief Brad Wells, who also serves as the city's building and zoning administrator, has implemented new ordinances while also enforcing existing ones. "All of which have helped not only clean up problem areas but have also restored a greater sense of security to the area. People feel safe again," said O'Donnell. "Both Chief

Wells and Steve Palen have really been vital to where we are with the city's development."

Palen said, "There is a solid team approach among the City of Wood River's department head and employees, partnered with phenomenal community support, that is making the progress both possible and continued."

"Without the cooperation between the mayor, city council, and the city manager, none of this would be happening," noted Wells. "I want to stress that this revitalization has not been in any way politically driven. Everyone is working together to make all this happen because they just want what's better for the city."

"Businesses are coming because of the convenience of the City of Wood River. Where it's at. It's the 'bend' in the River-bend. We're 10 to 20 minutes away from most everywhere people need to go or want to otherwise be. The downtown layout and logistics are a further appeal," Wells added.

Wood River Mayor Tom Stalcup said that the city's TIF program continues to be the main mechanism offered to prospective businesses that are looking to set up. "The city's existing appearance guidelines are also being reviewed and finalized into a plan that will help unify the identity of our downtown, as well as the city overall. The whole town is being looked at. The connectivity of Wood River to surrounding towns is also being considered. And the East End Detention Pond Project has opened up development potential even more."

Attaching to the region's bicycle-pedestrian trail soon one day will bring still more travelers into Wood River, and travelers will also soon be able to fuel up at the Midwest Petroleum gas station and convenience store on tap at the site adjacent to Wood River Schnucks.

"For your dollar, it's a good place to live," said Wells. "In Wood River, you're not just living here for a house payment. I want to add that, with our proactive police department, when it comes to quality of life, our goal is that nobody has a bad neighbor. There's great support throughout the community for what's happening here."

Military

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Col. Chris Robinson, the 375th AMW and Installation commander, leads the 3,600-member wing and is responsible for the daily operations of the base, providing support to other units assigned to Scott AFB, and maintaining the combat readiness of assigned Airmen. One of the most visible missions to the public is Scott Air Force Base's executive airlift. This worldwide mission advances U.S. diplomatic and national security interests. The two aircraft used for this are the C-21A Lear Jet flown by 375th AMW active-duty personnel and the C-40 aircraft flown by the 932nd Airlift Wing (Air Force Reserve Command) along with active-duty Airmen, who are integrated into the Reserve Wing as a Total Force. Passengers authorized to travel on the C-40 include senior military leaders, members of the President's Cabinet, and members of Congress. The blue and white paint scheme is similar to Air Force One and the aircraft serves as an "office in the sky" with airborne communications capabilities.

In addition, active-duty aircrews are also integrated with the Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Air Refueling Wing to perform aerial refueling missions with the KC-135 Stratotanker. This airplane, despite being more than 60 years old, excels at providing force-projection by extending the range and the time that other combat aircraft can remain in the air. This is a critical capability for national security.

The 375 AMW's motto is "Help From Above," which refers to its aeromedical evacuation, or "AE," mission that has endured since the early 1900s when flight morphed from lighter-than-air balloons to a JN-4H Jenny modified to transport its first patient in 1918. Today, AE crews and Critical Care Air Transport Teams execute patient movement turning cargo aircraft into flying hospital Emergency Rooms. The AE mission is a unique and significant mission set of Air Mobility Command, a major command headquarters of the United States Air Force which is also assigned to Scott Air Force Base.

The most significant mission set at Scott Air Force Base belongs to the United States Transportation Command, or USTRANSCOM. It is one of 11 combatant commands and reports directly to the Secretary of Defense. Established in 1987, USTRANSCOM is responsible for all of the Department of

Defense's global transportation requirements by air, land, or sea. Additionally, they oversee the global household goods movement contract worth an estimated \$6.2 billion. This contract consolidated the relocation process for service members, civilian employees, and their families across the defense department. Two of their subordinate commands are also headquartered at Scott Air Force Base: the Army's Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command responsible for the land resources, and Air Mobility Command, which manages the global airlift, air refueling, AE, and the Global Air Mobility Support Structure requirements.

Many Airmen list Scott Air Force Base as their preferred base for several reasons—location, schools, community support, job opportunities for spouses and personal career opportunities. In fact, many military members serve multiple assignments here as they progress in rank and leadership. Key to supporting our families, veterans and retiree community is the base's Military & Family Readiness Center, or M&FRC. They assist families with their frequent moves, mission-related family separations, and transition out of the military. Additionally, they help family members with special developmental, medical, or educational needs and programs to enhance family and work center communication and resilience. Financial Readiness services are a thread throughout these key programs.

Community support is critical to the mission success of Scott Air Force Base. The inclusion of local Chambers of Commerce in virtual Pre-Arrival seminars ensures inbound families become familiar with their new community. Community support of the Friends of Military Family private organization makes it possible for families of deployed members to enjoy a monthly social activity such as bowling, painting, or a trip to the St. Louis Zoo while creating supportive connections with others experiencing similar circumstances.

Additionally, the M&FRC provides employment assistance services to military members, military spouses, family members, retirees, and DoD civilians through a wide array of programs ranging from resume development, the federal employment application process, leveraging impact and networking through Linked In, mock interview classes, hosting in-person job fairs



Scott AFB hosts summer camps and tours for STEM, innovation, engineering and Junior ROTC students. The base also works with recruiters in the local community to showcase the variety of missions and jobs needed for now and in the future. The positive community support makes Scott AFB a highly sought-after assignment location. (U.S. Air Force photo)

and a virtual community job board. The M&FRC regularly collaborates with the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois to host local employment events and meets regularly to discuss the needs of military members through the Partners for Military

Families subcommittee of the Military Affairs Committee. Outreach is also conducted in the community through the VETWork monthly networking events, managing a network of 94 employment connections in the St. Louis Metro area, as well as fostering connections to national military-focused support organizations to include Vets 2 Industry, Sigma Forces, Veterati, Blue Star Family, Hiring Our Heroes, and the Military Spouse Employment Partnership just to name a few.

"Our military-community partnership is the strongest that I've seen anywhere," said Col. Robinson. "I'm grateful for the support our Airmen and families receive from our local communities. Quite frankly, it's the people who allow Scott Air Force Base to thrive. It's our teachers and coaches investing in our children, local businesses who hire our spouses, churches that welcome us, neighbors who lend a hand when we deploy, cities that sponsor our Airmen's dorms, and local elected officials who engage with us to address our concerns and build or strengthen capabilities. These are just a few of the hundreds of reasons people come to Scott and never want to leave. Just saying 'Thank you,' seems insufficient for all that you do to support us."