



The Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois is excited to celebrate its 40th year of advocating for our terrific region. In partnership with the Illinois Business Journal, the Leadership Council presents “Leaders & Legacies” to honor and celebrate the ongoing mission of the Leadership Council and its leaders for all they have accomplished working in unison with local government and business principles.

- Kyle Anderson, Executive Director

40 years of uniting the region for growth

Uniting the region for growth. It was that simple mission that led Earl Lazerson, Ralph Korte, and Carl Mathias to create Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois in 1983. At that time, 30 of the biggest “movers and shakers” in Southwestern Illinois came together as one voice to do whatever was necessary to move the region forward. These leaders in business, industry, government, education, and labor were willing to take off their corporate hats and advocate for what was best for Southwestern Illinois, knowing that as the region grew, their businesses would benefit. Now, four decades later, the mission remains the same – although membership has grown to over 200. What makes the Leadership Council different from most other economic development organizations is that we don’t seek accolades for the work that is done. If it’s what is best for Southwestern Illinois, our members will do whatever we can to get it done, regardless of who we have to work with or who gets credit.

Over the past 40 years the Leadership Council has been able to celebrate numerous accomplishments with our members and partners. Together we have advocated for dozens of regionally significant projects, and at times overcome tremendous obstacles and uncertainties to move the region ahead. From the accreditation of the Metro East Levee System, to helping make the Stan Musial Veterans Memorial Bridge a reality, and perhaps most importantly – ensuring Scott Air Force Base stays open and that the men and women who are stationed here have everything they need to be successful.

Levees

The most recent success was in April of 2022 when FEMA issued its final letter of accreditation for the Metro East Levee System for the 100-year level. The system consists of five levees in Madison, St. Clair, and Monroe Counties, and protects more than 150,000 residents and over 4,000 businesses. In August 2007 FEMA announced it would not re-accredit the system without major improvements, which based on the planned federal funding,

wouldn’t be completed until 2044. If nothing had been done, flood insurance rates for residents and businesses in the area would have likely skyrocketed, local businesses and industry would have stopped virtually all expansions and improvements, and many would have closed. Thankfully local and state leaders came together to fix the problem. In 2009 the Southwestern Illinois Flood Prevention District Council was formed and a ¼¢ sales tax was passed to pay for the necessary improvements to the levee system. The Leadership Council also formed the Levee Issues Alliance to serve as a watchdog group for the project, and to raise awareness about the levee system. Work to bring the entire 65 mile stretch of levees to the 100-year level was completed at less than half of the initially projected cost. The work isn’t done, though. These groups continue to work hand-in-hand with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to bring the Metro East Levee System to the 500-year level to ensure our region is protected for decades to come.

Infrastructure

The Leadership Council has helped advocate for billions of dollars in funding for multi-modal transportation and utility infrastructure projects. Our Southwestern Illinois Transportation Enhancement (SITE) Committee is made up of leaders representing rivers, rails, roads, transit, trucking, runways, and pipeline. The group meets every other month to discuss ongoing and upcoming projects that will have a significant impact on Southwestern Illinois. Some of the projects the group has helped advance includes the Clark Bridge, the I-255 extensions, The I-270 Bridge, the Merchants Bridge restoration, and the Stan Musial Veterans Memorial Bridge.

For many years, the need for a new Mississippi River bridge topped the SITE Committee’s agenda because our members knew it would encourage development, ease traffic flow, and open the area to growth for years to come. The bridge happened thanks to leaders from both Missouri and Illinois working together, including former Congressman Jerry F. Costello, whose dedication and persistence helped secure funding for

the project. While Costello’s leadership role with the new bridge initiative was widely known, longtime Leadership Council member Bruce Holland, head of Holland Construction, was working behind the scenes to ensure the plans for the new bridge came to fruition. Holland has been a leader of the SITE Committee since its inception, and when he learned the bridge was not going to be able to be lit due to funding constraints, he didn’t accept that answer – a true testament of the Southwestern Illinois “we can do it” mantra. Working collaboratively with many like-minded partners in the region, Holland helped raise the necessary funds to make the bridge the lighted beauty that it is today.

Scott Air Force Base

Scott Air Force Base is one of the largest direct employers in the entire St. Louis Region, generating nearly \$4 billion dollars in economic impact each year. The workforce of nearly 13,000 military and civilian employees helps drive consumer demand in housing and retail while making up the backbone of our community and being a beacon of pride for our region. Since 1990 the base has weather four rounds of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and each time our members have rallied to support Scott, which has always emerged with increased mission and strategic importance to our nation’s defense. In a recent visit to the Leadership Council office, Sen. Dick Durbin mentioned that Scott AFB was among the country’s most important bases and assured us they had “learned their lesson” when it comes to including Scott in future rounds of BRAC.

Another way our members have helped support the base has been through license reciprocity for active duty military servicemembers and their spouses. With bi-partisan support from our local legislators, Gov. Pritzker signed a bill into law (public act 101-0240) in August of 2019 that impacts approximately 110 professional licenses administered by the Illinois Department of Finance and Professional Regulation (IDFPR). This enhanced IDFPR process helps military members and spouses serving at Illinois bases to obtain reciprocity for their profes-

sional licenses to start work faster in Illinois. This bill not only impacts Scott AFB, but also Great Lakes Naval Air Station, Rock Island Army Arsenal, and the Illinois National Guard.

The support for Scott AFB doesn’t stop there. The Leadership Council has a Military Affairs Committee that was formed in 1984 to preserve, advocate for, and enhance Scott Air Force Base through education of the public and interface with elected officials, military leaders, and surrounding communities to identify core needs and develop mutually beneficial strategies. That work has been ongoing and has even been recognized on a national scale. Each year the Abilene Military Affairs Committee in Abilene, Texas gives an award to the community that is most supportive of its local Air Force Base. The Leadership Council has been awarded the Air Mobility Command Community Support Award, better known as the “Abilene Trophy,” on three separate occasions – in 2012, 2014, and 2019. Those awards are thanks to the tireless efforts of all the communities, chambers, mayors, groups, and businesses who go above and beyond to show their support for the Scott AFB airmen, their spouses, and families.

Looking ahead to the next 40 years

While the Leadership Council has been busy for the past 40 years, we are working harder than ever to ensure our region grows for the next 40 years and beyond. Our organization recently worked with Steadfast City to complete a Regional Economic Development plan that will serve as a guide as we move forward. Southwestern Illinois is made up of a nine-county area, which includes Madison, St. Clair, Monroe, Macoupin, Clinton, Bond, Jersey, Washington, and Calhoun counties. We can’t succeed unless leaders and businesses from all nine counties are on board – and that is our mission. Over the next several months our members will be working with leaders from each county to lay the groundwork for what needs to be done. If we can put aside our differences and work together, we can continue to be one voice – uniting the region for growth.