

Greater St. Louis, Inc. strives to strengthen region’s business districts, corridors of commerce

Organization tours downtown Alton, hosts roundtable discussion as part of GSL initiative

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As part of its initiative to strengthen the region’s local business districts and corridors of commerce, Greater St. Louis, Inc. recently visited Alton, Ill., to tour its downtown district and to hear directly from business owners and local leaders about how its regional initiative can provide support to Alton’s continued growth and progress.

“The STL 2030 Jobs Plan calls for the development of this initiative to strengthen and grow local centers of business across the metro,” said Jason Hall, CEO of Greater St. Louis, Inc. “Revitalizing and supporting these key business districts while maintaining the distinct character that makes them so special will help stabilize local communities, revive small businesses, and create new jobs.”

The STL 2030 Jobs Plan notes that areas like downtown Alton are not just hubs of local business activ-

ity, but that in many local communities, they also act as centers of civic life. “At AltonWorks, we are committed to regional growth and believe downtown Alton is an important part of the region’s future,” said John Simmons, CEO of AltonWorks. “We are excited about our ongoing discussions with Greater St. Louis, Inc.”

Hall joined Alton Mayor David Goins, economic development officials, and local leaders and business owners for a tour of downtown Alton businesses, followed by a roundtable discussion at AltonWorks to learn what is working and what challenges local businesses face.

Alton Main Street Executive Director Sara McGibany said, “It was great to hear an emphasis on the importance of historic commercial corridors at the roundtable. Creating a thriving downtown is a good investment, because the small businesses and community gatherings there give your communities their sense of place. We are excited to work with Greater St. Louis, Inc. to bridge the gap between the bi-state area and work as a region-



Greater St. Louis, Inc. CEO Jason Hall, shown at the far right in the photo, gestures as he takes part in a dialogue hosted at AltonWorks on May 10 among regional business owners and community leaders with hopes of strengthening local business districts and corridors of commerce. (Courtesy Greater St. Louis, Inc.)

al team to attract employers and residents.” “We appreciate community leaders and business owners who came out today to share their thoughts with us about how to strengthen their community,” added Hall. “We’d like to take some of what we learned today and use that knowledge to help other communities across the St. Louis metro.” Greater St. Louis, Inc. brings together

business and civic leaders to create jobs, expand inclusive economic growth, and improve St. Louis’ global competitiveness. “We speak with a unified voice, lead with a bold agenda, and act as one metro anchored by a vibrant urban core,” the organization noted. View the full STL 2030 Jobs Plan online at <https://greaterstlinc.com/our-work/job-growth/stl-2030-jobs-plan>.

Fueling.....

Continued from Page 1 “Years later, when the opportunity arose for me to take over and lead the company, I was excited, but also a bit nervous. I talked to my wife Leslie about it, and she convinced me to go for it. She pointed out that we were still young enough to recover if it didn’t succeed. Now I’m fulfilling my dreams, including financially, and the company continues its success,” Eversmann added.

As president of MSSC, Eversmann also lends his expertise as a member of the Southwest Illinois Trade & Investment Council. He has been an active supporter of the SIUE SBDC and its International Trade Center for many years now and is always willing to help advance the missions of these organizations in whatever method or manner he can.

Eversmann credits much of their success to their long standing relationship with the ITC saying, “[The] ITC has been so supportive in growing our international presence.” He described how they provided MSSC marketing research, funding for international trade shows participation, translation support, new distribution vetting, and product certification.

Karen Tinsley-Sroka is the founder and CEO of My Scratch Offs, LLC. Her company prints custom scratch-off cards, stickers, cards and envelopes. As a small business, the company is certified as a woman-owned and veteran-owned business, both nationally and worldwide.

Based out of Maryville, Tinsley-Sroka’s company started up in 2008 and currently employs 4, with an additional half-time staffer being her daughter. She has been partnering with the SBDC and its International Trade Center for the past eight years.

“At the time I got started, no one else was doing what I’m doing,” she noted. “There were those out there doing DIY kits, but not large-scale manufacturing. My instinct told me this could work, and I backed that up with intensive, conclusive research.”

Tinsley-Sroka said that the SBDC and ITC have helped her with business development and introduced her to Export Now, an educational program teaching businesses about exporting requirements and best practices.

The SBDC and ITC also helped her raise her business profile through social media. As a result, Tinsley-Sroka’s company has seen a significant increase in revenue sales in Canada. And with continued assistance and guidance from the SBDC and ITC, My Scratch Offs is working toward establishing its presence in additional international markets.

Tinsley-Sroka recommends that other local businesses looking at exporting reach out to the SBDC and ITC to help ensure that proper procedures are followed, and success is maximized. “Make sure you reach out to make sure you’re doing it right,” she said. “You don’t want to find out later you’re doing things wrong.”

She further underscored that the resources available through the SBDC and ITC are critical to ensuring that all necessary legal processes are properly executed.

“One piece of advice that I continue to share with the students, and with anyone, is to ‘always stay curious,’” Tinsley-Sroka added. “I’m 62 now, and I’m still curious.”

She further provided some sage advice directed toward small business owners:

“Don’t give up. You have to continue to change and evolve. You just have to adapt to the ever-changing world we live in post COVID-19. And also seek out the resources of your local educational offices, whether that’s SIUE’s SBDC and ITC by you or something else.”

A primary challenge for Tinsley-Sroka and My Scratch Offs has included the never-ending demand for product expansion. “Efforts to go retail continue to be challenging, but we’re working on this as an opportunity. We’re still in the beginning stages,” she said.

Of course, during the Covid-19 pandemic years, “Everyone had to pivot,” she noted. “For our company, this included shifting timelines in some cases, and eventually securing a new shipping partner.

“Our products are 100 percent USA made,” she continued, “and we wanted to retain a local shipping and packaging supplier as well when the one we worked with closed, unable to survive the pandemic strains. Fortunately, we were able to find another local, St. Louis-based packaging company to work with.” Eversmann echoed similar sentiments experienced by his company.

Emerging platforms for product placement presented further challenges and opportunities for My Scratch Offs, as did

the company’s efforts in translating their website to address a global market. Their company increased both online sales and secured 10 new export markets last year by offering Spanish and French website options. Tinsley-Sroka is now in the midst of the company’s legacy planning.

Eversmann is planning to retire in about two years or so and shared that his succession plans are already in place. “My successor will be Mike Strobe. He and his wife will take over the company ownership when I leave. Mike is already a great asset to the company and will continue to be. He is an SIUE alumni with a background in environmental science. He started with our company as an intern and moved his way up. He is now a part owner and executive vice president.”

Regarding the Fueling the Future award, Eversmann noted that the recognition meant a lot to his company. “I was excited to receive recognition for the diversity our company has with its international shipments. We talk about that quite a bit in our business. The logistics – my team does it all so well – it’s amazing. The award sits front and center in our place now.”

Tinsley-Sroka said, “It’s the first-ever award that our company has actually received, and the recognition is very heart-warming.”

To learn more about Eversmann’s company, visit online at <https://ms-sellc.com> or call (618) 343-1006.

For more information about Tinsley-Sroka’s company, visit online at <https://myscratchoffs.com/> or call (618) 416-1623.

As part of the ITC at SIUE for the past 22 years, Director Silvia Torres Bowman was quick to share just how supportive both Eversmann and Tinsley-Sroka have been of the university and its various student projects. “We appreciate all their support,” she said. “Both have been very open to us, and to the students here.

She explained that the Fueling the Future award is the culmination of student project work as a part of the SIUE School of Busi-

ness. “Faculty from the School of Business work with the students in project development and completion for our clients. These projects help the SBDC and the ITC grow, but they also support businesses and the region’s economy. The students nominate business and community leaders for this award based on their interactions and dedication.”

“The criteria looked for includes hard work, determination, resourcefulness, leadership, as well as a non-stop commitment to business and trade and the ability to face and overcome obstacles,” Torres Bowman explained further.

“Craig has helped continuously over the years,” she added, “including by co-leading our roundtables with me during the pandemic over Zoom. Karen has been instrumental in working with the students as a part of their Entrepreneurship class studies, and her involvement has led to even more opportunities.”

At the wrap-up of the Fuel the Future event this year, for example, Torres Bowman said that another local small business owner was so inspired that he reached out to her on the spot and scheduled a meeting just a few days later.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville has hosted both the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the International Trade Center since 1984. The ITC partners with the School of Business, as does the SBDC, in providing services to the Metro East and greater St. Louis market region.

The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) for the Metro East at SIUE provides no-to-low-cost resources and information in advising, research, and advocacy to Southwestern Illinois entrepreneurs, business owners, small business service providers and the University community in the nine-county region they serve.

The Illinois SBDC International Trade Center (ITC) at SIUE serves businesses in the entire southern Illinois region by providing individualized, no-cost export advising, identification of foreign buyers, agents and/or distributors through trade leads, international market analysis, and more.

For nearly four decades, the ITC has been educating, equipping and empowering small businesses to navigate the ever-changing waters of international trade, by delivering no-cost, customized and 100% confidential export advising services to help them grow and succeed globally.

Readers can learn more about the ITC by visiting online at <https://www.siu.edu/business/itc/> or by calling (618) 650-2452.



SIUE ITC Fuel the Future logo