

Leadership Council receives Abilene Trophy, recognized for military service contributions

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Kyle Anderson, executive director of the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois, a not-for-profit 501(c)6 member-based economic development corporation headquartered in Glen Carbon, was recently presented with a special award in recognition of its contributions to the betterment of military service operations in our region.

The presentation took place at the annual Airlift/Tanker Association convention held in Grapevine, Texas from Oct. 31 through Nov. 3, also attended by Scott Air Force Base representatives along with St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern.

The Leadership Council was awarded the “Abilene Trophy” based on applicable activities that took place during the 2023 calendar year related to support for the United States Air Force Air Mobility Command located at Scott AFB in St. Clair County.

Originally called the Air Mobility Command Community Support Award, it was established on January 1, 1999, by the Abilene, Texas Chamber of Commerce and other groups in that city which had won it so many times that a determination was made that it can no longer be eligible.

Nomination packets, which were due in

May of this year, included one submitted in support of the Leadership Council by Air Mobility Command officials at Scott Air Force Base.

The traveling trophy, accepted by Anderson on behalf of the Leadership Council, is a bronze sculpture of an American Bald Eagle in flight created by an Abilene artist who became involved in the program through Dyess Air Force Base located there.

Earlier this year, Madison County renewed its annual contract with Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois through June 2025 at \$30,000, with its resolution authorizing the amount while mentioning how the Council’s work “is beneficial to the continued economic development effort” here.

Pursuing what he called a “branding initiative” is a goal of the Leadership Council for the near future, according to Anderson, further explaining the justification for this idea that is new to his agency.

“The way it works right now,” Anderson explained, “let’s say a company finds a site (physical location) that works. Demographics that exist for cities and villages do not adequately capture what the region as a whole may be able to offer those companies or corporations exploring places to locate,” Anderson noted. “All

they see is that city, not the fact that we are a 650,000 population area, that we are 20 minutes away from some of the finest cultural institutions, you know, the art museum, etc., everything that St. Louis has to offer.”

The Leadership Council, he continued, “wants to brand ourselves all together as one collective whole and sell this to other companies so we are searchable, and we want to put us on the map.”

Previous efforts, Anderson added, characterized the southwestern Illinois region as “East County” by utilizing a play on the concepts describing parts of the St. Louis area by the direction it is from the city itself.

“I want people to see us and see our brand and know that we are on the Illinois side of St. Louis,” Anderson said. As much as the St. Louis area and the nearby counties in Illinois see benefit from partnering, those Missouri interests “can’t provide incentives to us,” Anderson said further.

“I feel like we need to brand ourselves higher,” he continued, while also pointing out that southwestern Illinois is the second most populous region in the state.

The Leadership Council’s executive committee has “appropriated a considerable chunk of change for this effort,” Anderson went on, by hiring the

full-service marketing firm of Cork Tree Creative in Edwardsville to coordinate the branding initiative development with the help of input from a number of sources. Cork Tree Creative specializes in digital promotions, website development and videography.

Formed in 1983 with the goal of fostering economic growth in Southwestern Illinois, the Leadership Council developed the first regional economic development agenda, forging and building partnerships to lay a foundation for job growth and retention.

Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois encompasses a nine-county area, which includes Madison, St. Clair, Macoupin, Clinton, Monroe, Jersey, Bond, Washington and Calhoun, and represents over 700,000 individuals and one-fourth of the St. Louis metropolitan statistical area.

The Leadership Council includes over 250 top executives and decision makers and is guided by a 17-member executive committee dedicated to moving the region forward. The organization’s work is supported by three full-time employees – Anderson, as executive director; Weston White, director of marketing and communications; and Susan Chapman, director of member engagement – along with support from numerous volunteers.

SIUE honors 2025 Alumni Hall of Fame inductees

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville has announced the 2025 Alumni Hall of Fame inductees, honoring distinguished alumni who have made exceptional contributions in their careers, communities and to the University.

This year’s Alumni Association honorees are Brian J. Henry; Charles O. Myer; Christopher Larsen, DMD; Jonathan Fowler; Jacquelyn Clement Ph.D., FNP, RN; and posthumous inductee Karen Morris Watkins.

The Alumni Hall of Fame recognizes graduates who exemplify leadership, character, and dedication to their fields. This year marks a special collaboration with SIUE Athletics, which recently announced its own Hall of Fame inductions. Together, they will combine into one festive celebration, marrying excellence in both academics and athletics at SIUE.

The SIUE Hall of Fame Dinner and Awards Ceremony is set to take place at 5:30 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 10 in the Meridian Ballroom of the Morris University Center.

Cathy Taylor, ’15, associate vice chancellor for University Advancement and executive director of Alumni and Donor Relations, elaborated on the honor of being a Hall of Fame inductee.

“The SIUE Alumni Hall of Fame is a reminder of the impact SIUE graduates continue to make across many industries and communities,” said Taylor. “Our honorees exemplify leadership, integrity, and dedication, carrying the values instilled in them at SIUE into their professional and personal lives. This celebration of their achievements honors their individual contributions and strengthens the pride we all feel as members of the SIUE community.

Induction into the Alumni Hall of Fame is the highest recognition we bestow, and it reflects the legacy of excellence our alumni continue to build.”

Meet the 2025 Alumni Hall of Fame Inductees:

Brian J. Henry

BS Mass Communications ’95, BS Political Science ’95

A senior vice president and chief communications officer at CVS Health, Brian Henry has spent more than three decades as a leading communications executive. His career spans roles at major companies like 3M, Cigna and Medtronic. He is a dedicated supporter of the Department of Mass Communications, and proudly funds the Rising Communicators Scholarship that supports first-in-family students in the program.

Charles O. Myer

BS Business Administration ’90
 Charles “Charlie” Myer took a job as an instructor at the Edwardsville YMCA as a young adult and dedicated the entirety of his professional career to advancing the nonprofit organization’s mission until his retirement in 2021. Myer served YMCA in numerous operations roles at locations across the country before transitioning to financial development where he led efforts to raise millions for the organization. He is committed to supporting his community through numerous service organizations and continues to volunteer at his local YMCA on the east coast.

Christopher Larsen, DMD

Doctor of Dental Medicine ’88
 Christopher Larsen is a prominent figure in the dental community, with leadership roles at the national, state and local levels. Larsen has served as president of the Illinois State Dental Society and has been actively involved in the American Dental Association. Outside of his successful dentistry practice, he and his family own a vineyard and winery—the Old Oaks Winery—in Milan, Ill.

Jonathan Fowler

BS Electrical Engineering ’10
 Edwardsville native and president of J.F. Electric, Jonathan Fowler, has

played a key role in the growth of his family’s business. He has served several organizations and advisory boards and has been recognized both individually and in part with J.F. Electric in the St. Louis Business Journal and in the inaugural class of the St. Louis Titan 100. He and his family are longtime supporters of the School of Engineering and generously aid in its advancement efforts.

Jacquelyn Clement, Ph.D., FNP, RN

MSN Nursing ’80

Jacquelyn Clement has dedicated more than 55 years to advancing nursing education and improving healthcare outcomes. A former assistant dean and graduate program director in SIUE’s School of Nursing, Clement has left an indelible mark on nursing education through her leadership, mentorship and service to the profession.

Karen Morris Watkins

BS Elementary Education ’66 (Posthumous)

Karen Morris Watkins dedicated over 29 years of her career to education both in the classroom and as an administrator. Throughout her career, Watkins was a trailblazer for African American women in both teaching and educational leadership roles. She played a key role in developing innovative curricula and programs and was a charter member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.’s Epsilon Xi Chapter. Watkins passed away in August 2024. She will be remembered for her commitment to making a difference in her students’ lives throughout her remarkable career and extensive community involvement.

The SIUE Hall of Fame Dinner and Awards Ceremony promises to be an inspiring event, highlighting the achievements of these outstanding individuals alongside the honorees from SIUE Athletics.

Tickets are available on Eventbrite at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/siue-hall-of-fame-dinner-and-awards-ceremony-tickets-953468589217?aff=oddtcreator>
<https://www.ibjonline.com/2024/11/05/siue-honors-2025-alumni-hall-of-fame-inductees/>

The Gori Law Firm named 2024 Women-Led Top Workplace

The Gori Law Firm was recently named a 2024 Women-Led Top Workplace, one of several awards within Energage’s Top Workplaces National Culture Excellence Awards revealed in mid-October 2024.

Energage is a Philadelphia-based workplace survey and performance-certified B Corporation. In addition to featuring women-led organizations, the Culture Excellence Awards also recognize winners in DE&I Practices, Employee Appreciation, Employee Well-Being and Professional Development.

The awarded organizations, including The Gori Law Firm, are all recognized for prioritizing people-first cultures and workplace experiences.

“We are incredibly honored to be recognized as a Women-Led

Top Workplace,” said Sara Salger, managing partner of The Gori Law Firm. “We believe this award reflects the supportive and inclusive culture we strive to create for our employees, and it is rewarding to know that our efforts have resulted in an environment where individuals feel safe, valued and inspired.”

Top Workplace awards are based solely on employee feedback from Energage’s workplace survey. Each year, thousands of employee surveys are issued to nominated workplaces nationwide. The Gori Law Firm has been recognized as a regional and national Top Workplace for consecutive years.

<https://www.ibjonline.com/2024/11/13/the-gori-law-firm-named-2024-women-led-top-workplace/>