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Illinois

INVESTMENT GUIDE

2025-2026

CHICAGOLAND

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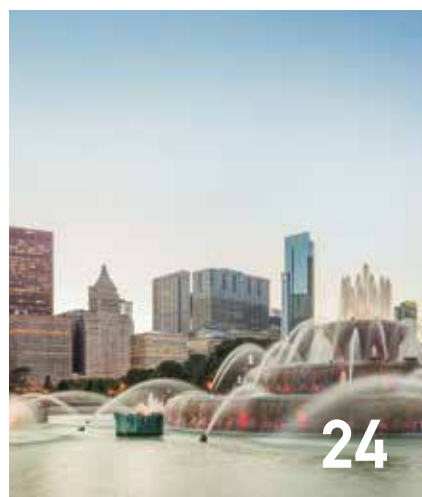


WORLD
BUSINESS
CHICAGO





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This publication is sponsored by Illinois EDC.

The Illinois Investment Guide is published annually by Conway Data Inc., 6625 The Corners Parkway, Suite 200, Peachtree Corners, GA 30092 USA.

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ILLINOIS

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Welcome to the Middle of Everything



Photo: Getty Images

Dear Readers,
Time and time again, the State of Illinois reinforces its status as a global economic powerhouse — an ongoing result of our strong workforce, unmatched incentives and unabashed commitment to innovation.

Illinois has surpassed \$1.1 trillion in GDP and attracted billions in private-sector investments while securing nine credit upgrades and topping national economic development rankings as we attract investment, drive innovation and lead in the industries shaping our future. From clean energy to artificial intelligence — where Illinois has one of the fastest growing hubs in the country — our state is proving that future-focused policy and strategic investments deliver real results.

Our strategic location in the “Middle of Everything” makes Illinois a premier destination for visitors from near and far, and we’re showing businesses looking to locate or grow that Illinois is the best place in the nation to live, work and do business. With a central location boasting access to the largest freshwater system and some of the most fertile soils in the world, we have numerous natural advantages to build upon as we strengthen our strategic advantages including massive clean energy production, world-class educational and research institutions, and a talented, highly educated workforce.

We’ve experienced landmark achievements for economic development in Illinois, with infrastructure improvements, job growth and private-sector investments in high-growth industries like quantum, life sciences and advanced manufacturing. Our momentum continues to grow as we demonstrate there is no better place to do business than Illinois.



Today, Illinois is open for business.

I hope you enjoy this year’s Illinois Investment Guide and keep Illinois top of mind for all your business needs.

Governor JB Pritzker



PHOTO: MICHAEL BRADY

LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS:

A Top 10 County

Site Selection Magazine named Lake County, Illinois as a **Top 10 County in the United States.**

- A gateway to global markets
- A highly educated workforce
- World-class healthcare in your backyard
- A first-rate quality of life
- Beautiful and diverse recreational areas
- Global industry leaders
- Top-ranking schools nationwide


Lake County Partners

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by **RON STARNER**

You might not think that a U-Haul truck could be a harbinger of an improving business climate, but dig beneath the numbers and you see a clear pattern emerging.

From January to July of this year, Greater Chicago saw an influx of new residents from places like Milwaukee, Indianapolis and Detroit. According to U-Haul, one-way rental data during the first six months of 2025, these Midwest cities ranked as the top places of origin for these relocating renters.

St. Louis and Dallas also placed in the top five. This new data corroborates a longer-term migration pattern uncovered recently by Hamilton Lombard of the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia. A top demographic researcher, Lombard discovered the places that are attracting the largest numbers of new residents among 25-to-44-year-olds. From 2020 to 2024, the Northern Illinois cities of Pontiac, Rochelle and Rockford all gained new residents among this cohort at a rate of 2% or greater.

When significant pockets of your state gain the most coveted workforce demographic in sizable numbers, it shows that what you are doing in economic development is making a positive difference. For Illinois, this new wave of talent in-migration indicates that growing employers are attracting the kind of workers that most places want to hire. And in Illinois, corporations are adding new workplace facilities faster than any place in America other than Texas. With 664 corporate facility investment deals in 2024,

In keeping with Illinois' forward-thinking approach, a brand-new stadium is being built on the shore of Lake Michigan for Chicago Fire FC of Major League Soccer. Renderings courtesy of Chicago Fire FC



It's a Fact: Natural gas drives clean energy and tech growth in Illinois

Our clean, safe, reliable and affordable energy delivery provides Illinois and our customers a competitive advantage, even in extreme weather. Natural gas is key for industrial, manufacturing, computing and data center operations in Illinois. It supports production, keeps costs manageable, creates jobs and sustains local economies.

Our energy efficiency solutions reduce costs and emissions, while combined heating and power (co-generation) meets large energy demands and timelines. With eight underground storage facilities, we ensure winter resilience. Additionally, our innovation in renewable and low-carbon fuels helps customers plan for a cleaner energy future, maintaining affordability and reliability.

Attractive meeting places are common in Illinois, and the new Chicago Fire stadium will be no different.



Illinois outpaced 48 other states in this key economic development performance metric — and this was the third year in a row that the Land of Lincoln achieved this lofty milestone.

Paulina San Millan, senior vice president of business development for the Illinois Economic Development Corporation, says that a key factor in her state's sustained run of success is the fact that “no one industry dominates. We support all sectors. The state's investment in workforce keeps attracting companies. They can come to Illinois knowing that the worker training programs will be here and that we have already trained and equipped a ready workforce. We have one of the highest rates of

workers with a college degree or higher in the nation. That makes a big difference.”

Assets Abound in Illinois

Elizabeth Gichana, vice president of life sciences business development for the Illinois EDC, adds that “our infrastructure is a major factor. We have two major airports in Chicago in O'Hare and Midway. We have sufficient water and other essential utilities. We have top-tier research institutions, national labs and a top-rated community college system.”

John Boyd Jr., principal of The Boyd Company Inc., a national site selection consulting firm with offices in Florida and New Jersey, put it this way: “Chicago remains

a compelling city for national corporate headquarters for a number of reasons. I would first point to the role that O'Hare plays in connecting Chicago-based companies to the national and global marketplace. Added to O'Hare's role is Chicago's fundamental advantage of its mid-continent location. Also, Chicago has a long pedigree as a leading U.S. head office city which has engendered a deep pool of head office support services in fields like accounting, finance, management consulting, engineering, advertising and public relations.”

State government works hard to make Illinois affordable, he adds. “Chicago has a generous incentive program tailored to attracting a corporate headquarters,” Boyd

“The state's investment in workforce keeps attracting companies. They can come to Illinois knowing that the worker training programs will be here and that we have already trained and equipped a ready workforce. We have one of the highest rates of workers with a college degree or higher in the nation. That makes a big difference.”

— Paulina San Millan, Senior Vice President, Illinois EDC



says. “On the operating cost front, we have always characterized Chicago as not overpriced.”

In fact, when The Boyd Company's BizCosts recently ranked the top 20 headquarters markets in the U.S. on their annual operating costs, the Chicago Central Loop district came in at No. 5 among the least-expensive office markets in the nation.

As Boyd notes, Illinois has always maintained a competitive edge when it comes to incentivizing businesses to locate or expand in the state. The new balanced-budget package passed in Illinois advances the state incentives programs even further. Among other key measures, the legislation included the following: The Advanced Innovative Manufacturing for Illinois (AIM) Tax Credit offers tax incentives to companies investing heavily in facilities and equipment, and is especially geared to benefit small and mid-sized firms. A new CapX Tax Credit rewards existing manufacturers in Illinois by offering a tax credit ranging from 3% to 7% based on the size of their investment.

The most important capital investment program in the FY26 Budget was the State's Surplus to

Success Program (\$300M) and the targeted site readiness funding (\$200M). This paragraph should be reworked to reflect the state's investment in site readiness.

As one leader at the Great River Economic Development Foundation said, “This is a forward-thinking Economic Development Package that brings targeted incentives and strategic investments aimed at strengthening Illinois' business community.”

Illinois maintains other advantages as well. For example:

- The state boasts five international airports and seven additional commercial airports. O'Hare in Chicago offers the most flights of any U.S. airport.
- Illinois is the only state that has all seven Class I freight railroads.
- Chicago is home to the third largest intermodal port in the world.
- Illinois has the third largest Interstate Highway System in the U.S.
- Illinois has two major inland ports and 14 waterway ports.

A Leader in Innovation

Beyond these assets, Illinois is known across the world for the way

it supports research, innovation and entrepreneurship. More than 200 spaces are now available to innovators across Illinois at places like incubators, coworking centers, accelerators, research centers and technology parks.

San Millan notes that “We have put \$500 million into this sector [in the last fiscal year]. We understand quantum; and we know how fast these industries move in their decision making. We are seeing a lot of interest [from companies] domestically and from other countries who want to be part of the Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park on Lake Michigan in Chicago. These companies need places to go and they want to be in Illinois.”

San Millan adds that “having two national labs is key for us. That attracts interest from a lot of companies.” The Argonne National Laboratory in Lemont and the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia are both attracting global interest and inquiries, according to San Millan. Argonne specializes in advanced energy research, while Fermilab is devoted to research in particle physics.

As Elizabeth Gichana of Illinois EDC says, “We like to focus on what keeps us on the competitive edge.” 🍷

The new AIM Tax Credit rewards existing and new manufacturers when they grow in Illinois, providing a tax credit of 3-7% based on the size of their investment.

Source: Illinois EDC



Joggers and cyclists enjoy Chicago's Lakefront Trail as the sun rises over Lake Michigan. Photo courtesy of Illinois Office of Tourism

When Christy George was named president and CEO of the Illinois Economic Development Corporation last September, she came to the job with considerable experience in leading large-scale efforts for the state. Among many other accomplishments on her resume were serving as executive director of the Chicago 2024 Host Committee for the Democratic National Convention and serving as the First Assistant Deputy Governor for Budget and Economy under Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker.

A graduate of the Loyola University Chicago School of Law, George is also known for her work in guiding the landmark Reimagining Energy and Vehicles in Illinois (REV Illinois) into law and overseeing multiple key initiatives during her time with the City of Chicago.

Now, she has another job: leading Illinois' economic development efforts and ensuring growth and prosperity for all pockets of the state. In my recent interview with George, she made it clear that she intends to keep Illinois performing as a top three state in economic development — and hinted that she has her sights set on an even loftier goal.

When you worked in the Governor's Office, you crafted the Reimagining Energy and Vehicles in Illinois (REV Illinois). How has this legislation aided the Illinois economy, and what were some of the state's biggest project wins as a result of it?

CHRISTY GEORGE: That bill was a labor of love. It was probably the largest piece of legislation that I was able to work on besides the general budget bills. It was a companion to the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act. That set Illinois on a path to attain 100% clean energy by 2050. We enacted provisions to increase our solar and wind production throughout the state and to maximize the efficient use of our nuclear fleet.

The main part of REV Illinois was incentivizing decarbonization of the automotive sector. Companies came to us and said that we were not as competitive as other states in this area, so we passed REV Illinois. It was a bipartisan, bicameral effort. Only two members of our legislature voted against it. We had a tremendous amount of support. We considered the needs of electric vehicle manufacturers, and the legislators just

got it. Both Democrats and Republicans in Illinois supported it.

Because of REV Illinois, we landed Gotion — an EV battery maker that is making a \$2 billion investment and adding 2,600 jobs; and electric vehicle manufacturer Rivian expanded. They have over 6,000 jobs now in what used to be a Mitsubishi plant in Normal, Illinois. We also landed an EV bus maker in Peoria, Damera, and an EV battery startup from Boston, Pure Lithium, is now moving to Chicago. We are seeing both small projects and large projects. Altogether, we have had over 20 project wins from REV Illinois since it was passed.

What did you learn from your time spearheading the state's business attraction and engagement efforts that you can apply to your current position as CEO of Illinois Economic Development Corporation?

GEORGE: In that role, I became deeply familiar with the Governor's passion for this state and his passion for economic development. His administration started after years of budget impasses and credit downgrades. He spent the first couple of years creating new revenue streams. He was building the infrastructure of Illinois. Our \$45 billion Rebuild Illinois Capital Plan allowed for more projects to move forward.

The No. 1 thing I had to learn was to listen to the business community and the businesses wanting to expand and listen to the communities wanting to attract businesses. How could we facilitate answering those needs at the state level? Every day, it is important to listen first so that you can understand the company and client needs.

I have also learned how amazing the state is. That has helped me every single day in this role. I have learned so much about downstate Illinois. It has opened my mind to all the incredible assets of this state.

When you hosted the DNC Convention last year in Chicago, what feedback did you receive from the attendees about Illinois and its hospitality?

GEORGE: It helped that we had four days of incredible weather. We really showed off that week. People from around the nation fell in love with our city. My No. 1 goal was to make sure that from the attendees' experience, they could see Chicago through our eyes. This is my chosen home. I was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, but I raised my family and built my career here. Convention attendees felt how welcoming Chicago is. They got to see Chicago in a way that is not portrayed in the news.

This is personal to me. My dad was born and raised in the Chicago suburbs. I have family here. My mom is from Detroit. I went to undergrad in Ohio and law school here in Chicago. Law school brought me here and family kept me here. And the people of Chicago kept me here. It is hard not to love this city.



“ Illinois has performed so well over the last several years, but we will unseat Texas. That is my goal.”

— Christy George, President & CEO, Illinois EDC

Illinois perennially performs as a top three state in total corporate facility project wins. What has enabled Illinois to remain in this top tier, and do you think the state needs to do anything more in this area?

GEORGE: Illinois has performed well over the last several years, but I am looking forward to unseating Texas [in top relocations and expansions]. After righting the fiscal ship in Illinois, there was a huge opportunity to promote our location as the capital of the Midwest and all the transportation assets we have. We are the only state where all of the Class 1 railways meet in two locations. When executives need to go from point A to point B, they do that at O'Hare. We have the largest nuclear reactor fleet in the nation — 11 reactors at six plants. That produces more than 50% of all of the energy in Illinois. We have seen increasing solar throughout the state, and we have seen growing wind production too. We have incredible natural resources. We have access to freshwater through Lake Michigan. We also have the Illinois River

and the Mississippi River and all the aquifers throughout the state.

But the biggest advantage of all in Illinois is the fact that we have a talent pool of 6.5 million workers. Companies need our engineers. The University of Illinois produces 3,500 engineers annually. That is more than Cal Tech, MIT and Stanford combined.

“We call ourselves Team Illinois for a reason. We have amassed a large number of partners. We work together to ensure that growing companies find what they need to achieve their goals and prosper.”

— Christy George, President & CEO, Illinois EDC

We have also built competitive incentives. The question is: How do we continue to stay at the top? We do that by listening to industry and adapting to what they need. Here in Illinois, we are very stable and we have one message for companies. We call ourselves Team Illinois for a reason. We have amassed a large number of partners. We work together to ensure that growing companies find what they need to achieve their goals and prosper.

Chicago has won the Top Metro award from Site Selection for the past dozen years in a row. Why is Chicago annually the best place in America for corporate facility investment deals?

GEORGE: We have an incredibly deep bench of talent in such a small radius. We have incredible, world-class universities at University of Chicago, University of Illinois and Northwestern. Chicago State is building more curricula to connect with quantum and microelectronics. We are a hub for innovation with over 100 incubators and accelerators.

Another reason for our success is that businesses feel so connected to the civic community. We have such a diverse economy in this city. I do not know of any other city in America that can do what we do. I have spent time in New York, San Francisco and other big U.S. cities. Chicago is second to none.

If you were sitting across the table from another CEO, what message would you share with that leader on why they should invest in Illinois?

GEORGE: The first thing I would share with them is that if you are thinking long term, Illinois is the place you want to be. Whether it is climate resilience or natural resources or commitment from the state, we can check all of those boxes and more. We offer a great combination of affordability and abundant resources. We have attractive and livable spaces for your workforce. We have incredible and expansive worker training programs. We have the third-largest community college system in the nation. The community college system in America started in Joliet, Illinois, with the founding of Joliet Junior College in 1901.

A key part of this administration has been education. We are focused on making sure that companies can hire from today and scale for tomorrow. We support all people without exception. We are very inclusive. We are a partner for your people and your business.

What is Illinois' best-kept secret?

GEORGE: I will give you two. The first is a very small Brazilian restaurant that I love to frequent in Chicago. Our culinary scene is so good. We are not just deep-dish pizza and hot dogs. Our eateries really make our city shine.

Secondly, we as a state are quietly and quickly becoming a leading destination for science and technology. We are leading advanced physics technology. We are landing multimillion-dollar advanced science deals. We are the quantum computing hub for all of North America. In fact, In fact, we recently hosted the Global Quantum Forum. People came from over 20 countries People are coming from 20 countries. We sold it out within days. That is currently our best-kept secret.

What is the biggest misconception about Illinois?

GEORGE: There are two big misconceptions about Illinois. One is our taxes. People look at our corporate income tax and think it is not worth it. Our taxes allow us to have better schools and a stronger social support system.

That is why we have so many assets. Illinois is still affordable. Because of all the incentives we have, we have a number of ways to abate taxes: payroll withholding; an income tax credit; etc. Every single year, we are constantly thinking of new incentives to help companies come here and expand.

The second big misconception is crime. Illinois gets a bad rap. Overall, we have decreased crime. We have less violent crime than many other states. The superintendent has helped deliver the lowest violent crime rate in Chicago since the 1960s. We are seeing improvements. Overall, Illinois is a safe place. You can raise your family here and feel safe.

Downstate Illinois does not attract as much media attention as Greater Chicago and Northern Illinois. What would you like the reader of this publication to know about the downstate region of your state?

GEORGE: There are huge opportunities for affordability downstate. First of all, they have incredible assets — Illinois State University; Bradley; University of Illinois; SIU-Edwardsville; SIU-Carbondale; and many more. We can meet workforce needs anywhere.

Secondly, we have seen some of the best sites in Illinois located downstate. That is the best place to launch a large manufacturing facility. Communities across downstate are interested in investing in more aggressive incentives [to attract large projects]. There are also other assets particularly in the agriculture sector that are attractive. I was just in Carbondale and visited with the National Corn and Ethanol Research Center. Also the iFAB Tech Hub in Decatur, who works on biofermentation projects and other advancements, is a tremendous asset to the state. The bottom line is that Illinois has great assets throughout the state. 📍

Comcast helps keep Illinois connected

Comcast has invested \$1.4 billion in technology and network infrastructure in Illinois over the last three years to deliver an even greater internet and customer experience.

Thinking about relocating or expanding? Contact us at economic_development@comcast.com to learn how we can partner to meet your connectivity needs.



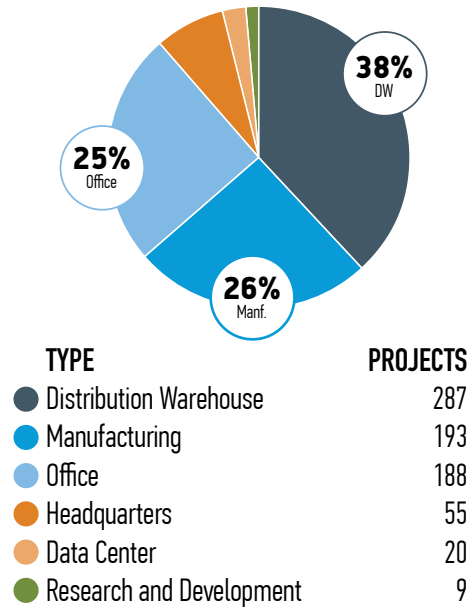
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Illinois by the Numbers

Top 20 Projects, July 2024 - June 2025

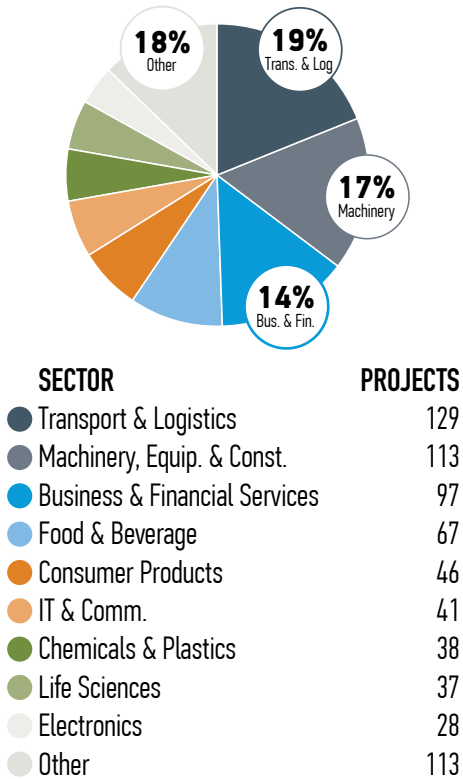
COMPANIES	CITY	SECTOR	CATEGORY	INVESTMENT (IN MILLIONS)	JOB
T5 Data Centers	Grayslake	IT & Comm.	New	10,000	800
Microsoft Corp.	Plano	IT & Comm.	New	2,000	200
Equinix	Elk Grove Village	IT & Comm.	New	2,000	25
CyrusOne	Yorkville	IT & Comm.	New	2,000	50
Aligned Data Centers	Hoffman Estates	IT & Comm.	New	1,000	200
PsiQuantum, Corp.	Chicago	IT & Comm.	New	1,000	150
Avina Clean Hydrogen	Chicago	Chemicals & Plastics	New	820	157
Stack Infrastructure	Elk Grove Village	IT & Comm.	New	400	25
Fuyao Glass Industry Group Co.	Decatur	Machinery, Equip. & Const.	Expansion	400	
CyrusOne	Aurora	IT & Comm.	Expansion	350	
QTS Realty Trust	Chicago	IT & Comm.	Expansion	300	
Vetter CM USA	Des Plaines	Life Sciences	New	285	
Compass Datacenters	Hoffman Estates	IT & Comm.	New	250	25
Endeavour Energy	Aurora	IT & Comm.	New	250	60
TA Realty	Northlake	IT & Comm.	New	250	25
Mars Chocolate North America	Yorkville	Food & Beverage	Expansion	250	110
Edgeconnex	Elk Grove Village	IT & Comm.	New	250	25
Colovore	Aurora	IT & Comm.	New	250	25
Microsoft Corp.	Cherry Valley	IT & Comm.	New	250	300
Stream U.S. Data Centers	Elk Grove Village	IT & Comm.	New	250	50

Top Projects by Type



Source: Conway Projects Database

Top Projects by Sector



OVER **83%** OF THE CONTINENTAL U.S. IS WITHIN TWO-DAY TRUCK DRIVE

30+

30+ FORTUNE 500 HEADQUARTERS, AMONGST THE HIGHEST NUMBER IN THE MIDWEST

5th

5TH LARGEST GDP IN THE NATION, 19TH LARGEST ECONOMY IN THE WORLD

#2

#2 IN THE NATION FOR BUSINESS EXPANSIONS AND RELOCATIONS IN 2024



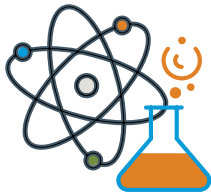
6.3M WORKFORCE

38.3% EDUCATED WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER



#1 CONNECTED AIRPORT IN U.S.

CHICAGO'S O'HARE (TIED) RANKS TOP-10 MOST CONNECTED AIRPORT IN THE WORLD



5 FEDERAL LABORATORIES

USDA Agricultural Research Service, DoD U.S. Transportation Command, DoD Construction Engineering Research Laboratory, Argonne National Laboratory, Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory



242

242 higher education institutions



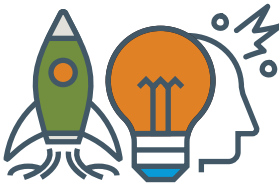
#1

In Sustainable Development in Midwest



80+

Over 80 international Consulates, Consulates General and Honorary Consulates, and 6 international trade offices (in Belgium, Canada, China, Israel, Japan and Mexico)



\$3.64B

OF VENTURE INVESTMENT IN 2024 ALONE, 9TH LARGEST IN THE NATION

Source: Illinois EDC

Photo: Getty Images

How DCEO Helps Make Illinois Work for All



State incentives are designed to lift the boats of all workers in Illinois.

by **RON STARNER**

As director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Kristin Richards oversees DCEO's mission to create a positive economic climate to attract job creators, support Illinois' skilled workforce and bolster communities to provide opportunities for all Illinoisans.

A native of Belleville and a current resident of Chicago, Richards offers her take on a variety of state economic development initiatives in the following interview.

How does the Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program help develop workforce talent statewide?

KRISTIN RICHARDS: All of DCEO's training programs, including Illinois Works, have a

sharp focus on equity — designed to build the pipeline in high-demand industries and eliminate barriers to entry for historically underrepresented communities. The Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program provides training opportunities, expands the talent pipeline and boosts diversity in the construction industry and building trades. Illinois Works is just one example of a state-led initiative that reinforces our belief that pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships can lead to career opportunities. Since the program's inception, Illinois Works has awarded a total of \$75 million serving over 4,000 residents.

Through a variety of pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs throughout the state, DCEO is opening the doors to opportunities to join the state's world-class workforce. Illinois employers offer apprenticeships in a diverse array of fields including health care, manufacturing, information technology, construction, hospitality and more. Illinois boasts nearly 21,000 active registered apprentices, with about 1,700 employers participating in more than 450 programs. As important, in every region of the state dedicated workforce

professionals are in place to set up tailored apprenticeship programs for employers. These workforce professionals, known as Apprenticeship Specialists, are in place to meet employers' needs, and can be accessed through ApprenticeshipIllinois.com.

ApprenticeshipIllinois.com also contains access to information about funding opportunities that may offset apprenticeship program costs. For example, employers can qualify for the Illinois Apprenticeship Education Expense Tax Credit, worth up to \$3,500 per apprentice annually, with an additional \$1,500 for eligible underserved populations, to help offset training costs and incentivize workforce development.

Did Illinois adopt any major new incentives legislation in the past year?

RICHARDS: Yes. Here are some of the key bills we passed:

- **\$500 million in funding for historic site readiness initiatives (Surplus to Success and DCEO Site Readiness Initiative):** The Governor's site readiness initiative, which includes the Surplus to Success program, represents the most significant investment in State history to make more sites across Illinois ready for business. This includes remediation of state-owned sites as well as efforts to market and recruit out-of-state businesses to call Illinois home. These projects are readying sites for new capital investment and job creation to solidify Illinois' reputation as an economic powerhouse that provides companies with access to the infrastructure they need to succeed.
- **Advancing Innovating Manufacturing for Illinois Tax Credit (AIM Illinois):** AIM Illinois is a new incentive program that supports manufacturers — particularly small and medium-sized companies — who are making significant capital investments. The program provides tax incentives to companies making large facility and equipment investments in Illinois — making the state more competitive to win and retain capital-intensive business.

- **Enhancing Key Incentive Programs:** There were several improvements to DCEO's incentive programs based on industry feedback, including EDGE and REV Illinois. EDGE is expanded to provide additional incentives to companies investing \$100 million or more, and REV has been expanded to include additional EV supply chain industries. This will make Illinois even more competitive in its efforts to attract and retain businesses.

- **Capital Investment Programs:** In addition to the site readiness capital initiatives, the FY26 budget funds several capital programs that invest in our workforce such as manufacturing training academies (\$24M); incentive programs that keep Illinois competitive like the Enterprise Fund (\$50M) and Prime Sites Capital Grant Program (\$75M); and funding for the Made in Illinois program (\$1.5M) which supports small and mid-sized manufacturers.

How is REV Illinois working?

RICHARDS: The Reimagining Energy and Vehicles in Illinois (REV Illinois) offers the most competitive clean energy incentives in the country. This first-in-class incentive program continues to improve year after year to address industry needs and increase its effectiveness at attracting businesses considering Illinois.

REV Illinois offers competitive incentives to expand in or relocate to Illinois for companies that manufacture or are engaged in the research and development of electric vehicles or aircraft, associated battery, charging infrastructure and recycling products, as well as renewables including solar, hydrogen, wind, energy storage and green steel manufacturing. Program benefits can last 20 to 30 years, and include provisions to retain income tax withholding, exemptions on utilities taxes, tax credits, training credits, grants and equipment/capital cost exemptions. Local jurisdictions can also provide property tax abatement for the life of the agreement.

Guided by Illinois' Economic Growth Plan, the REV Illinois program supports a targeted industry for the state — clean energy production and advanced manufacturing

“During 2024, the number of jobs retained by EDGE and REV — the state’s most active incentive programs — more than quadrupled, from approximately 3,000 to 12,800, with 4,100 new jobs created by the programs.”

— Kristin Richards, Director, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

— which continues to expand because of strong state leadership and a commitment to fostering innovation, sustainability and long-term economic competitiveness. Illinois is committed to supporting companies that invest in our communities while contributing to our vibrant clean energy ecosystem. Tying the reduction in carbon emissions to large investments in the clean energy sector represents a generational opportunity for Illinois.

During 2024, the number of jobs retained by EDGE and REV Illinois — the state’s most active incentive programs — more than quadrupled, from approximately 3,000 to 12,800, with 4,100 new jobs created by the programs. By comparison, prior to the pandemic in 2019, company investments from EDGE totaled \$348 million, new jobs totaled approximately 1,700, and REV Illinois did not yet exist. REV Illinois investments more than doubled from \$2 billion in 2023 to \$4 billion in 2024.

Major agreements from 2024 include EV manufacturer Rivian investing \$1.5 billion in Central Illinois to produce its highly anticipated R2 model, Avina Clean Hydrogen’s \$820 million sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) investment in Southwest Illinois, Wiegel Tool Works, Inc.’s Wood Dale headquarters expansion to grow production for EV and renewable energy markets, EV manufacturer Ymer Technology opening its U.S. headquarters in Buffalo Grove, EV battery material supplier Bedrock Materials locating its research and development headquarters in Chicago, and EV component manufacturer Wieland Rolled Products North America investing \$500 million — reinforcing

its long-term commitment to six facilities across the state and the future of advanced manufacturing in Illinois.



REV Illinois agreements have continued to make waves in 2025, including Rivian solidifying its commitment to Illinois with a \$120 million investment in a supplier park in Normal, electric bus company Damera opening its first U.S. assembly plant in Illinois, next-generation battery technology company Pure Lithium Corporation relocating its company operations to Illinois, and global automotive seating supplier Adient establishing its facility in Normal.

How is the Illinois New Stores in Food Deserts Program working?

RICHARDS: Through the Illinois Grocery Initiative, the State of Illinois has made progress in our continued effort to combat food insecurity. We’re changing lives and livelihoods by making it easier to put fresh food on the table. The grantees will make a significant impact on their communities, ensuring residents have access to quality and affordable food while also strengthening their local economies.

The New Stores in Food Deserts Program awards are supporting the establishment of new grocery stores in food deserts. This funding is supporting construction and renovation costs for new stores, as well as many first-year operations costs, such as employee wages, utility costs and initial inventory of food. DCEO provided approximately \$6.9 million through Round I of the Illinois Grocery Initiative New Stores Grants and recently awarded \$9.6 million through Round II.

The Equipment Upgrades Grant Program backs energy-efficient equipment upgrades for existing stores, with priority given to those located in food insecure communities across the state. This program is designed to strengthen existing grocery stores and preserve access to fresh food in food-insecure communities, in an effort to stop the formation of new food deserts. After providing \$1 million through Round I of the Illinois Grocery Initiative Equipment Upgrades Grant Program, DCEO opened Round II in January 2025.

What are your agency’s top priorities for the next 12 months?

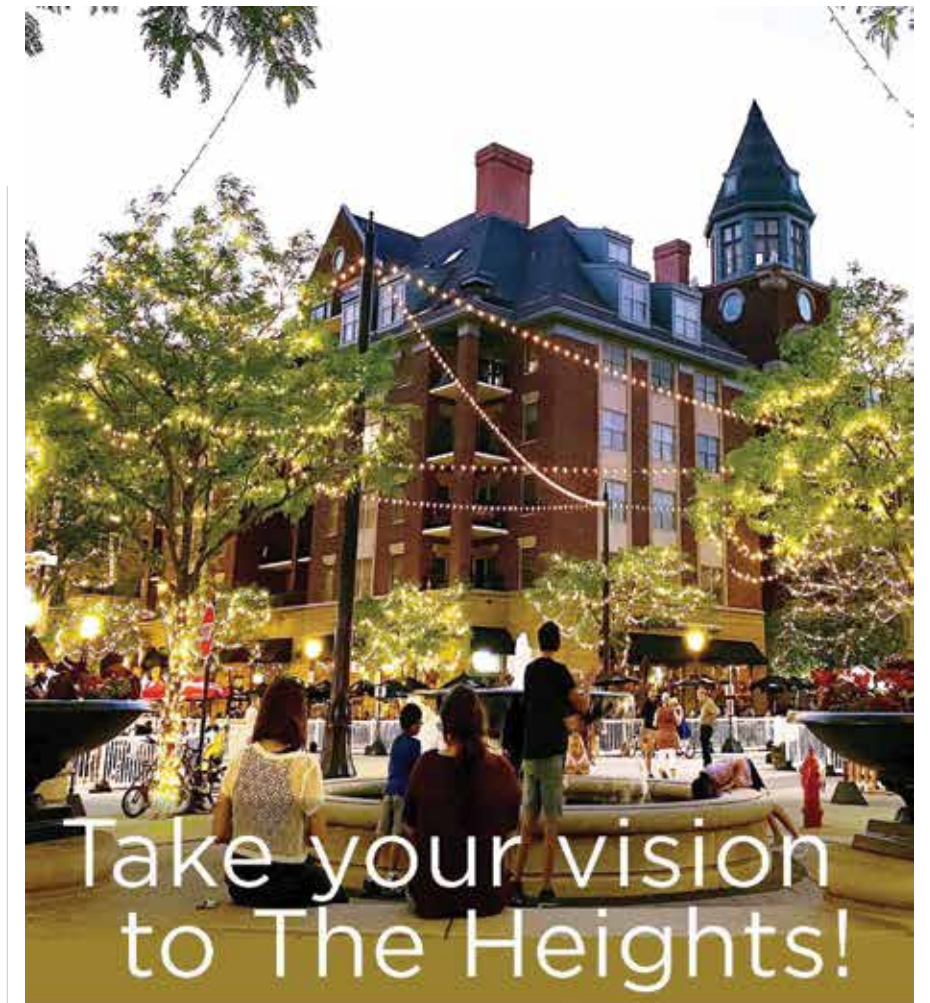
RICHARDS: Guided by Illinois’ Economic Growth Plan, DCEO will continue to work toward economic goals that will have a lasting effect for Illinois families and communities. Our plan is guided by four overarching economic development goals:

- Focus on high-growth sectors and continue overall business climate improvements.
- Advance comprehensive economic development efforts for business growth and attraction.
- Promote equitable growth by empowering workers, entrepreneurs and communities.
- Build out the new clean energy economy.

Illinois has the fifth largest economy in the U.S. What keeps it that way?

RICHARDS: Illinois has a \$1 trillion economy that small businesses in every corner of the state are part of building — one of only five states to reach this milestone. Illinois is proud to be at the forefront of industry, innovation and investment — from clean energy and tech, to manufacturing, logistics, biosciences and countless other sectors.

Our transportation and location in the “Middle of Everything” are unmatched. Our infrastructure is unparalleled, our workforce is among the best in the Midwest and beyond, and our business prospect pipeline is deeper than ever. In 2025, our incentives are stronger, and we’re better positioned to attract large-scale investments. Illinois has established itself as a premier destination to locate and grow a business. And we are just getting started. 📍



- Immediate access to three interstate highways
- 16 million square feet of commercial and industrial space
- Over \$1.5 billion in annual retail sales
- 15 minutes to O’Hare International Airport (ORD) and Chicago Executive Airport (PWK)
- 45 minutes to Downtown Chicago

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CHICAGO

Window & Gateway to the World



World Business Chicago's new president and CEO details the city's many assets.

by **RON STARNER**

When Philip B. Clement was named the new president and CEO of World Business Chicago on July 2024, everyone in the Windy City knew that America's second-largest financial center had found its man.

Words of praise came in immediately from a host of Fortune 500 leaders throughout Illinois and beyond. And with good reason: Clement brings to this job a wealth of experience in guiding growth at some of the world's top companies.

Before joining World Business Chicago (WBC), Clement served as global chief marketing officer at Johnson Controls, a company with 105,000 employees in more than 120 countries and \$26 billion in annual revenue. Before that, he spent 12 years as

global chief marketing officer for Aon, and prior to that he launched a number of tech companies and his own consultancy.

"We are thrilled to welcome Philip B. Clement as the new president and CEO of World Business Chicago," said Charles Smith, vice chair of World Business Chicago. "His proven leadership, strategic vision and commitment to inclusive economic development make him the ideal candidate to lead our organization as we work to drive growth, attract investment and promote Chicago as a global business destination."

In the following discussion, Clement talks about the progress WBC has made over the years and how he intends to lead the organization moving forward.

What factors contribute to the positive business climate in and around Greater Chicago?

PHILIP B. CLEMENT: Several key factors contribute to Greater Chicago's positive business climate, making it a prime location for businesses looking to expand or relocate.

The city boasts a highly educated, diverse workforce, bolstered by strong academic institutions and dynamic diaspora communities, offering global companies not only deep talent but also valuable cross-border connections.

Chicago's strategic location, coupled with its diversified economy, sets the region apart. With a GDP of \$886 billion, Chicago is the third-largest economy in the U.S., home to robust industry clusters across food manufacturing, finance, professional services, TDL and tech. The presence of national labs, including Argonne and Fermilab, strengthens Chicago's innovation ecosystem, supporting cutting-edge research and creating a pipeline of talent in fields like quantum computing and AI.

Chicago's affordability, when compared to other major metros, provides companies with a significant advantage in maximizing their capital. In an era of scarce investment dollars, businesses in Chicago benefit from a lower cost of doing business while still being able to tap into a global customer base. Chicago's strong innovation base — including over 24 corporate R&D centers and world-class research universities — positions the city as a leader in driving growth and scaling companies.

Why do so many companies announce expansion projects annually in Chicago?

CLEMENT: Companies continue to choose Chicago for expansion due to its unmatched combination of economic stability, diverse industry strengths, and a collaborative environment that fosters growth. Chicago's economy is the third-largest in the U.S., and its diverse industry clusters create a robust ecosystem for companies looking to scale.

In 2024 alone, Pro-Chicagoland Decisions (PCD) generated 14,800 jobs, \$1.32 billion in earnings, and the acquisition of more than 12.6 million square feet. Manufacturing continues to be a dominant industry, representing 40% of PCD projects, followed by professional services and transportation, which further illustrates the city's strength across core sectors. Nearly 60% of 2024 PCDs were located in the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership (GCEP) counties, underscoring the power of the seven-

county region in attracting business, talent and investment.

Additionally, Chicago's leadership in emerging technologies, including quantum computing and AI, is further solidifying its position as an innovation hub. The University of Chicago's top ranking in quantum physics research and the city's recognition as an AI Star Hub are key factors in attracting global investment in these high-growth areas.

“Chicago's affordability, when compared to other major metros, provides companies with a significant advantage in maximizing their capital. In an era of scarce investment dollars, businesses in Chicago benefit from a lower cost of doing business while still being able to tap into a global customer base.”

— Philip B. Clement, *President & CEO, World Business Chicago*

With a population of 9.4 million, Chicago offers a vast local consumer market, making it an ideal testbed for new products and services that can scale nationally. The city's strategic location, diverse economy and continued focus on innovation make it a clear choice for companies looking to expand and thrive.

Is space getting tight in the market for office and industrial users?

CLEMENT: While Chicago's office market continues to experience fluctuating vacancy rates, with both CBD and suburban office spaces seeing a steady increase in availability, the industrial market remains relatively tight with a lower vacancy rate.

In the Chicago CBD office market, vacancy rates have steadily increased, rising from 19.8% in Q1 2023 to an estimated 25.5% by Q2 2025. Suburban office vacancy rates are also rising, with rates hovering around 27% over the past year, indicating that office space availability is still relatively high.

However, in the industrial sector, the situation is markedly different. Vacancy



World Business Chicago Vice President of Research Hannah Loftus and President and CEO Phil Clement

Photo courtesy of World Business Chicago.

rates for industrial space have remained low, with a slight uptick in recent quarters, reaching around 5.5% by Q2 2025. This still reflects a competitive market where demand for industrial space, particularly for logistics and distribution, remains robust due to Chicago's strategic location and the continued growth in e-commerce and supply chain sectors.

While there is more available office space, the industrial market continues to face tighter conditions, driven by Chicago's role as a critical hub for warehousing, transportation, and logistics. Businesses seeking industrial space should anticipate continued competition for prime locations.

Describe a few big projects announced recently.

CLEMENT: RJW Logistics recently expanded into a 977,000-square-foot distribution center in Joliet and secured another 640,000-square-foot industrial lease in the same area, reinforcing Chicago's role as a key hub for transportation and warehousing.

Universal Destinations & Experiences is investing approximately \$100 million to launch Universal Horror Unleashed, a year-round immersive experience. This project will transform a 114,000-square-foot building and is expected to generate over \$1 billion in economic impact for the city, along with creating over 400 jobs.

Abbott Laboratories is expanding its manufacturing and R&D operations in Lake County, adding up to 200 new jobs. This follows the company's 2022 announcement of leasing more than 100,000 square feet in the Willis Tower, further bolstering Chicago's strength in manufacturing and life sciences.

Pure Lithium Corporation is relocating its operations from Boston to Chicago, investing \$46 million to manufacture Illinois' first commercially viable lithium metal battery, creating 50 new jobs and contributing to the state's growing clean energy sector.

In finance, we're also excited to share that BlackRock is expanding its Chicago presence with a new office on Monroe Street. With over \$178 billion invested in Illinois public companies and pension funds benefiting 1.2 million Illinoisans, this expansion is a strong vote of confidence in Chicago's business climate.

Do you still have plenty of available sites?

CLEMENT: Greater Chicago continues to have a healthy supply of available sites across key markets, offering opportunities for businesses looking to expand or relocate. In the industrial market, the Chicago MSA has an availability rate of 8.8%, with over 126 million square feet of available space, and more than 12.6 million square feet currently under construction, signaling continued growth and capacity to meet demand.

For the office market, the availability rate is 19.3%, with nearly 99 million square feet of available space. While office demand has been impacted by shifts in remote work, there remains a substantial inventory with new construction underway to meet evolving market needs.

In the retail market, availability stands at 5.9%, with more than 33 million square feet available. This space, along with ongoing retail development, offers excellent opportunities for businesses looking to enter or expand within the region.

Overall, Chicago continues to offer a range of available sites across industrial, office and retail sectors, backed by strong infrastructure and ongoing construction to support future growth. 📍



Joliet, Illinois is a Great Place to Start and Grow a Business:

Joliet's business community is thriving.

- **Business-friendly environment**, with resources such as the Joliet City Center Partnership and the Will County Center for Economic Development providing marketing, advice, grants, and support. Businesses are attracted by low taxes and fees, affordable real estate, and the ease of doing business in Will County.
- **Incentives for businesses**, including Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Historic District Tax Credits, and more.
- **Strategic location** along major transportation routes, making it ideal for logistics, distribution, and manufacturing businesses.
- **Educational resources** like Joliet Junior College's Entrepreneurial & Business Center and the University of St. Francis business incubator, which offer advising services and support for startups.
- **Strong business network**, with local organizations such as the Joliet Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry, fostering collaboration among businesses.

Thriving Business Community:

Joliet's economy is diverse, with key industries such as transportation, healthcare, retail, and manufacturing driving its growth. The city provides a range of resources for entrepreneurs, including:

- **Access to a skilled workforce**
- **Support for startups and established businesses**
- **Strategic location**

Quality of Life:

- **Jobs and employment opportunities** across a variety of industries, including healthcare, education, manufacturing and retail.
- **Easy access** to major highways such as I-55 and I-80, and public transportation options through the [Gateway Transportation Center](#), connecting Metra, Amtrak, and Pace. Joliet is known as the Crossroads of America.
- **Recreational opportunities** with parks, golf courses, sports facilities, and plenty of options for shopping, dining, and medical care.
- **Cultural attractions** such as the historic Rialto Square Theatre, Joliet Area Historical Museum, the Illinois Rock & Roll Museum and Route 66 attractions, making the city vibrant and engaging.

Joliet is the county seat of Will County. Will County is the home of the largest inland port in North America, served by five Class 1 railroads, three intermodal facilities, four interstate highways, three navigable waterways and 1,500 miles of pipeline.



Please reach out to our team at 815-724-4060
economicdevelopment@joliet.gov

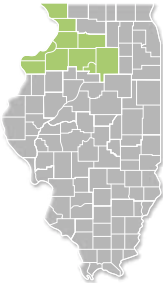
Visit our website:
joliet.gov/business/economic-development

10 Regions, One Mission

How Illinois supports economic development at the local level.

by ALEXIS ELMORE & RON STARNER

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity supports economic development at the local level through the administration of 10 separate regions statewide. The following is a snapshot of each of these 10 regions.

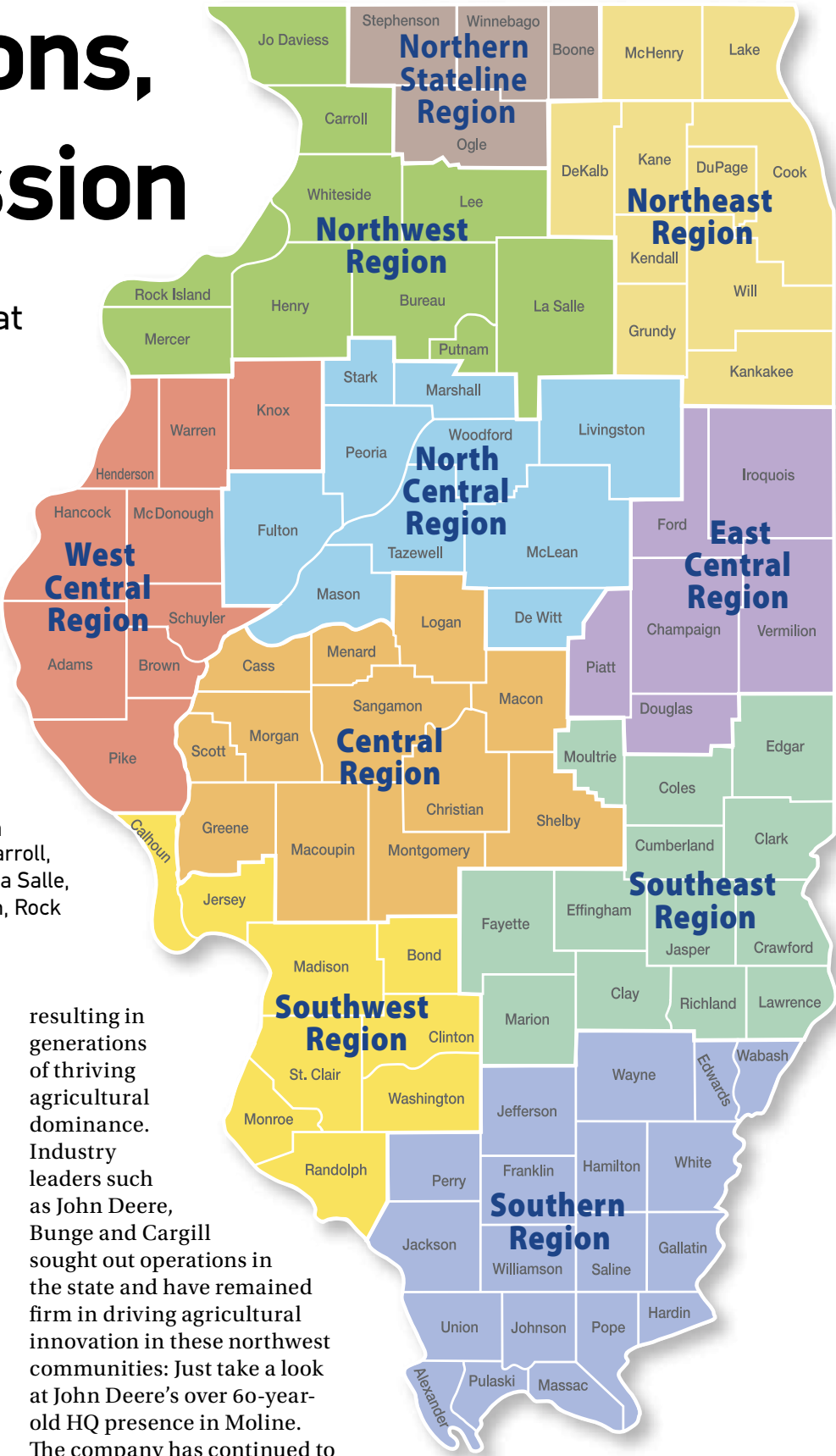


Northwest Region
Counties: Bureau, Carroll, Henry, Jo Daviess, La Salle, Lee, Mercer, Putnam, Rock Island, Whiteside

In Northwest Illinois there are plenty of ways to get connected to a quality live-work-play lifestyle. Prime outdoor recreation offerings, an array of attractions, affordable housing, a low cost of living and quality higher education institutions are just a few of the assets on hand in the region.

The 10 counties that make up the Northwest Illinois region — Bureau, Carroll, Henry, Jo Daviess, La Salle, Lee, Mercer, Putnam, Rock Island and Whiteside — are home to over 477,000 residents and climbing. These rolling hills and lush valleys stretch beyond the Mississippi River’s path to the west,

resulting in generations of thriving agricultural dominance. Industry leaders such as John Deere, Bunge and Cargill sought out operations in the state and have remained firm in driving agricultural innovation in these northwest communities: Just take a look at John Deere’s over 60-year-old HQ presence in Moline. The company has continued to pour into its Illinois locations, recently wrapping up a combined



The I-74 Bridge project was a collaboration between the City of Moline & the City of Bettendorf completed in 2021. Photo courtesy of NewView Drone Services/ Visit Quad Cities



Over 56,000 engineers are within 90 miles of the Rockford metro area, a key pull for manufacturers in the region. Photo: Getty Images

\$149 million renovation at its East Moline plant and a \$10 million, 60,000-sq.-ft. expansion of the nearby Moline seeding facility.

This region feeds into the larger Davenport-Moline-Rock Island metropolitan area, encompassing five cities in Iowa and Illinois, which tied for No. 6 in Site Selection’s Top 10 Mississippi River Corridor Metros rankings in 2025. The Quad Cities communities in Illinois — including Moline, East Moline, Rock Island and Silvis — are benefiting from recent infrastructure investments designed to boost connectivity in the region. Rock Island County’s MetroLINK received \$1.28 million in Climate and Equitable Jobs Act funding to introduce eight new EV fast charging stations in downtown areas to boost the region’s sustainable transportation network. Meanwhile, East Moline has begun work on its \$30 million Greater Downtown Revitalization Project. The goal is to ensure the city is more walkable and connected, introducing new sidewalks, bike paths, outdoor event space and more.

A focus on quality transportation infrastructure and direct access to Interstates 39, 88, 74 and 80 support a robust logistics and warehousing industry in the state’s northwest. Amazon is in the midst of constructing a new last-mile delivery facility at the Ottawa Industrial Park located in La Salle. Once complete, the 50,800-sq.-ft. warehouse will aid the company in improving delivery times while expanding its regional logistics network.



Northern Stateline Region
Counties: Stephenson, Winnebago, Boone, Ogle

The four-county cluster of the Northern Stateline region is best known for its ability to support advanced manufacturing needs. Stephenson, Winnebago, Boone and Ogle counties are home to more than 436,000 residents combined and have become a hot spot for

food & beverage, health care, aerospace and automotive industry production. Such concentration allows for higher education institutions such as Northern Illinois University, Rockford University, Highland Community College, Rock Valley College and the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford to collaborate with local manufacturers to develop and update curriculum and training opportunities for local talent.

The city of Rockford, which rests in the heart of the Stateline region’s Winnebago county, has previously been ranked as a top five location to work in manufacturing by IndustryWeek, bolstered by operations from Collins Aerospace, Stellantis, Woodward, General Mills, GE Aviation and more in the area. Over 56,000 engineers are located within 90 miles of the Rockford metro area, whose local concentration of more than 4,000 skilled engineers represents 30% more than the national average.

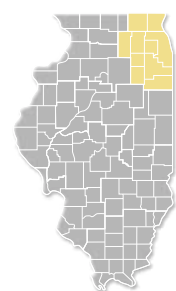
Within the past year, the Stateline region has landed a \$45 million facility investment

The Chicago-Naperville-Elgin metro area attracted over 580 new project investments in 2024.

Photo courtesy of Illinois Office of Tourism/ Dice Sales

from data security systems manufacturer Hennings, Inc. in Machesney Park; an \$18 million arrival from Piranha to begin metal-cutting manufacturing and assembly in Belvidere; an expansion of Zekelman Industries' Wheatland Tube manufacturing plant which created 200 new jobs in Rochelle; and a \$10 million investment to expand and upgrade equipment at J.L. Clark's Rockford metal packaging plant.

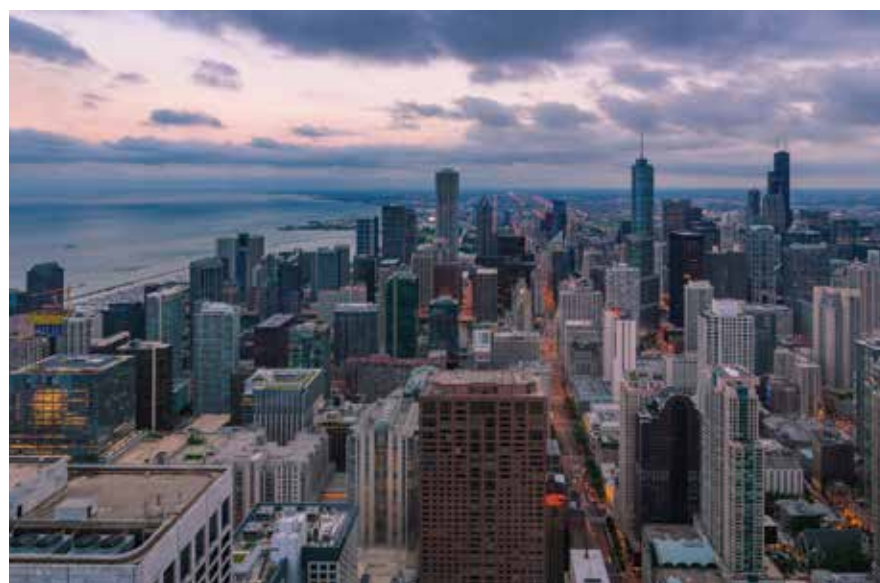
By 2027, Stellantis plans to revamp its Belvidere Assembly Plant after moving away from plans to integrate EV battery production at the site. The company will now instead move forward with production of a brand new mid-sized truck at the facility, although further details on the project have not been announced. Once operational, the Belvidere facility will welcome back 1,500 employees.



Northeast Region
Counties: Cook, DuPage, Lake, Will, Kane, McHenry, Kendall, Kankakee, DeKalb, Grundy

It would be difficult to ignore the economic impact of Northeast Illinois. A regional workforce of over 4 million residents have transformed this 10-county spread, becoming a pillar for IT, energy, life sciences, advanced manufacturing and food & beverage industries.

Of the state's roster of 32 Fortune 500 corporate HQs, 24 of those are located in Chicago. Archer Daniels Midland, AbbVie, Exelon, Kraft Heinz, McDonald's, Mondelez International and United Airlines are just a few of



these heavyweights.

Regardless of industry, the state's northeast has become a playground for the innovative. Leading higher education institutions such as the University of Chicago and Northwestern University, paired with dedicated innovation environments such as mHUB, the Chan Zuckerberg Biohub, 1871 or any number of local university or corporate-led innovation centers, churn out a steady supply of both skilled talent and daring entrepreneurial pursuits.

As start-up battery technology company Pure Lithium Corporation looks to scale its future commercial operations, the manufacturer announced in July a full relocation will be made from Boston, Massachusetts, to Chicago. The city provides the infrastructure and talent needed to effectively transition from R&D at its pilot facility into successful long-term production, company leaders said.

"Our new facility in Chicago aligns with the company's long-term operational goals and growth strategy," said Pure Lithium Founder and CEO Emilie Bodoin. "This move allows us to construct a semi-automated battery pilot line vertically integrating our lithium metal reactor, and the incentives

assist in funding critical pilot equipment, accelerating our timeline to market."

The \$46 million investment, supported by Reimagining Energy and Vehicles in Illinois (REV Illinois) incentives, will establish a new HQ and manufacturing site located in the Fulton Market district. Pure Lithium anticipates production of the first commercially viable lithium metal battery to commence by the end of the year.

Beyond the hustle and bustle of life within Cook County's renowned Windy City, regional hubs including Aurora, Joliet, Naperville, Elgin, Waukegan and Cicero have also found themselves at the center of domestic and international corporate growth strategies. The greater Chicago-Naperville-Elgin metro area was named as Site Selection's No. 1 Top Tier 1 Metro by projects in 2024, as 582 project announcements landed throughout the region last year. Low energy costs and access to computing facilities like PsiQuantum led to a regional data center boom, as billions of investment dollars were announced throughout Northeast Illinois from developers Compass Datacenters, T5 Data Centers, QTS and more.

Seamless Logistics, Limitless Growth: Southwestern Illinois – Your Gateway to the World!



- **Over 100 miles of interstate**
I-44, I-55, I-64, I-70, I-255, I-270
- **Access to all six Class 1 Railroads**
- **Access to America's Central Port**
Northernmost ice and lock free port on the Mississippi River
- **Served by 3 regional airports**
*MidAmerica St. Louis Airport
St. Louis Downtown Airport
St. Louis Regional Airport*
- **650,000+ Population**
- **Home to Scott Air Force Base**
- **50,000+ Veterans in our Workforce**
- **Home to WWT Raceway**
- **Just a short drive to St. Louis**

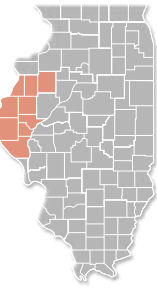


Rivian arrived in Normal in 2017 upon acquiring a former manufacturing facility operated by Mitsubishi Motors.

Photo courtesy of Rivian



University, Heartland Community College, Illinois Central College and the University of Illinois Medical School are a few located throughout the 10-county region. This collaboration has proved vital for prospective students and a local workforce of over 300,000 to obtain the relevant skillsets or upskilling opportunities needed to land a quality role.



West Central
Counties: Adams, Brown, Hancock, Henderson, Knox, McDonough, Pike, Schuyler, Warren

In West Central Illinois, agriculture has been the backbone of generations of economic growth. These rolling hills and prime farmland bolster the state’s overall agricultural output for leading crops like corn and soybeans, while providing a fertile landscape for a food processing and manufacturing industry to thrive.

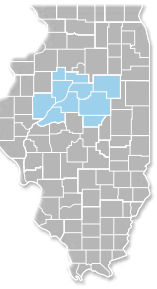
Thrushwood Farms Quality Meats, now a subsidiary of Western Smokehouse Partners, announced the company would revamp a former 179,000-sq.-ft. Maytag manufacturing site in Galesburg that has sat dormant for over 21 years. The \$50 million investment will allow the company, which was originally founded in the city, to increase current production capacity of its snack stick products. The City of Galesburg supported the project with a \$1 million investment, following Thrushwood Farms’ 10-year lease commitment and the creation of up to 180 new jobs.

“We believe in the potential of this community and are excited to create new jobs that will provide stability and prosperity for local families,” said Western Smokehouse Partners CEO Matt Bormann. “This project will not only increase our production

the meantime, automotive seat manufacturer Adient announced an \$8 million investment in July to construct an 85,000-sq.-ft. facility adjacent to Rivian’s Normal plant, creating 75 new jobs. “We are excited to see this supplier park coming together so quickly,” said Rivian Founder and CEO RJ Scaringe in May 2025. “This will be a key enabler to increasing production at the plant in 2026 when we start to build R2 in addition to R1 and our commercial vans.”

Outside of automotive success, North Central Illinois has found favor in the ever-evolving life sciences industry. Singapore-based medical equipment manufacturer Epic Medical is coming to Tazewell County’s city of Pekin to establish the company’s first U.S. production facility. The \$25 million intravenous (IV) solutions plant will be constructed at the Riverway Business Park on over 66 acres the company purchased in March. By the end of 2026, Epic Medical hopes to expand its presence in the U.S. market, creating 100 new jobs.

A robust array of universities and community colleges work closely with regional employers when crafting new degrees, curriculum or training programs. Illinois State



North Central
Counties: Peoria, McLean, Tazewell, Woodford, Livingston, Fulton, DeWitt, Mason, Marshall, Stark

Once manufacturers discover the capabilities of North Central Illinois, they’re in no rush to leave. Those capabilities have kept the likes of Caterpillar, Ferrero, Komatsu, Maui Jim and Rivian locked in on the region for years. Just as importantly, these communities have supplied ample space to support growth of their respective industry ecosystems.

For Rivian, this means investing \$120 million to construct its own supplier park to feed its EV manufacturing facility in Normal, which is currently undergoing a \$1.5 billion expansion. By investing in this new space, the company looks to welcome vital suppliers to plant roots in Illinois, as the company looks to expand its production portfolio to include a new R2 model. The 1.2-million-sq.-ft. campus will allow for seamless parts delivery in part to an underground tunnel that will connect it to the main manufacturing facility. In



Quincy is located in Adams County along the Mississippi River, bordering Northeast Missouri.

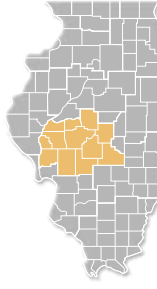
Photo courtesy of Illinois Office of Tourism

capacity but also strengthen our ties to the community, fostering a collaborative environment.”

For companies like global wheel and tire manufacturer Titan International and aerospace components supplier Pegasus Manufacturing, establishing an HQ in West Central Illinois introduced plenty of space to innovate. The region’s nine counties — Adams, Brown, Hancock, Henderson, Knox, McDonough, Pike, Schuyler and Warren — support not only the ability to grow, but to move.

West Central Illinois’ proximity to both the Mississippi and Illinois rivers, highway, Interstate, commercial airports, short line and Class I rail have not gone unnoticed by transportation and logistics industry players.

Those logistics factors led Amazon to choose the city of Quincy to construct a new “last mile” warehouse and distribution facility. The project, which went into motion in November 2024, will introduce a 59,000-sq.-ft. distribution center that will aid the company in better serving West Central Illinois, in addition to the the tri-state region encompassing Northeast Missouri and Southeast Iowa, before 2026.



Central Region
Counties: Cass, Logan, Menard, Macon, Morgan, Sangamon, Scott, Christian, Greene, Macoupin, Montgomery, Shelby

The Central Illinois region is a 12-county area anchored by the state capital of Springfield. Other regional hub cities include Decatur, Jacksonville, Lincoln, Taylorville, Litchfield and Carlinville. The area’s largest employer reads like a Who’s Who of the Fortune 500: Archer Daniels Midland; Blue Cross Blue Shield; Norfolk Southern; Primient; Mueller; and Wells Fargo Home Mortgage.

With a population of over 550,000 and a labor force of 270,000, Central Illinois has access to 90 million people within a day’s drive. Top manufacturing sectors include paper manufacturing and printing; food processing; fabricated metal manufacturing; hospitality and tourism; and health care.

One of Central Illinois’ chief assets for industry is the Midwest Inland Port in Decatur in Macon County. This multimodal transportation hub offers shippers easy access to



Sunrise Hill is in Montgomery County in the Central Region.

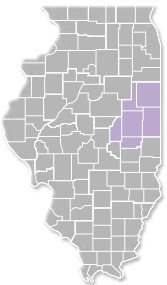
Photo courtesy of Illinois Office of Tourism

the Midwest and all three coasts: East, West and Gulf. Among other port benefits are the following:

- Strategically located, this logistics complex offers non-congested, toll-free access to one of the country’s heaviest trucking and railway traffic flows.
- Served by two Class I railroads and short line (CN, NS, Watco) connecting to all North American rail networks.
- Intermodal ramp with 25-minute average turn times.
- A quick channel to coastal and export markets.
- Abundance of competitively priced labor and an available workforce.
- An airport equipped with a Fixed-Based Operator (FBO) and an 8,500-foot main runway. Daily passenger service provided to Chicago through United SkyWest.
- A diverse community of importers and exporters in the area creates opportunities for intermodal container match-back shipments.
- Rail-serve LEAF Gen-Set locomotives, which reduce Nitrogen Oxide emissions by 84% compared to conventional locomotives and operate using 45-60% less fuel.



- Third-party logistics providers offer freight forwarding, transloading, warehousing, stock management, temperature-controlled storage and more.
- Reduced supply chain logistics costs.



East Central Region
Counties:
Ford, Iroquois,
Champaign, Piatt,
Vermillion, Douglas.

The six-county region of East Central Illinois is anchored by Champaign, home

to 88,822 people — the largest city in the region. Home to the University of Illinois, the city annually hosts over 56,000 college students from all over the country and the world. The ninth-ranked public university in the U.S., the school since its founding in 1867 has produced 29 Pulitzer Prize winners and the inventor of the first graphical web browser.

Due to the presence of UIUC, key industries in this region include R&D, manufacturing, health care and education, but the region also hosts sizable sectors in distribution, agriculture and food processing. The largest manufacturers in East Central Illinois are Danville Metal Stamping, Kraft Heinz and Plastipak.

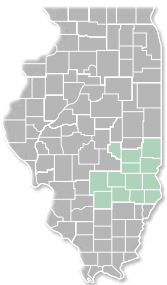
With a total population of 361,000 and a workforce of more than 160,000, East Central Illinois produces one of America’s most skilled labor pools for engineering, R&D and life sciences. The Research Park at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign is home to 2,100 people working at over 120 companies that also employ another 800 student interns.

The Carle Illinois College of Medicine at UIUC is the world’s first engineering-based school of medicine. Established in 2015, the school is leveraging advanced technology to train physician innovators and other specialists in the medical field.

East Central Illinois is also a bustling center for corporate headquarters. Among the many firms operating head offices in the region are Busey Bank, Frasca International, Litanias Sports Group, Horizon Hobby, Watchfire Signs and Wolfram.

Look for more to join them soon. For example, Serionix was recently ranked by Inc. Magazine as a member of the Inc. 5000 list of fastest-growing companies in the U.S. Checking in at No. 346, Serionix is based in the university community of Champaign-Urbana. As reported by Site Selection Editor Adam Bruns last year, “The company’s

founders were University of Illinois graduate students who adapted air filter technology created for NASA for home furnace use in a product called Colorfil, made for homes with pet owners. “The main active ingredient in our patented coating is citric acid, which is naturally occurring and commonly found in fruit,” the company said.”



Southeast Region
Counties: Coles,
Clark, Cumberland,
Edgar, Effingham,
Moultrie, Crawford,
Fayette, Jasper,
Clay, Lawrence,
Marion, Richland.

With 272,400 people, the 13-county region of Southeast Illinois boasts a highly diversified economy that is anchored by its three largest economic hubs: Charleston, Mattoon and Effingham. Much of this region shares a border with Indiana, which is separated from Illinois by the Wabash River.

Ronda Sauget, president and CEO of Coles Together in Mattoon, says that “we have a lot of industry from multimodal transportation because we are in the center of the U.S. We are on the Canadian National Railway line. They have a 2.8-mile-long rail yard in Mattoon. It is a very busy multimodal hub here. We are two hours from the Mississippi River, two hours from Indy and two hours from Chicago.”

Due to these transportation and logistics assets, “a lot of manufacturers are here,” says Sauget. “Mars Pet Care, Mattoon Precision; North American Lighting; Bimbo Bakeries — they are all here. Bimbo makes 9 million Lender’s bagels weekly from their plant here.”

Available sites make Southeast Illinois appealing to investors, she adds. “We have a good inventory. Agracel has two sites here. We got a \$3 million grant from DCEO to build

How a Mattoon Retailer Rose to King of Its Class

A \$200-million mixed-use development promises to make Mattoon a regional destination for several reasons. That’s because farm goods and outdoor lifestyle retailer Rural King is using its real estate arm to build a walkable project with retail, restaurants, sports facilities and entertainment — the first lifestyle center of its kind in Coles County in Southeast Illinois.

Rural King, also known as RK Holdings LLP, is a classic American farm and home store that caters to the needs of its customers in the Farm Belt and beyond. With its roots firmly planted in Mattoon, Rural King has been steadily growing since its founding in 1960.

Today, the popular retailer employs about 9,000 people and operates around 150 stores in 17 states, stretching from the Upper Midwest to the Southwest Florida Coast. Rural King’s real estate portfolio now stands at 20 million sq. ft. owned or operated. The firm maintains its headquarters, main distribution center and flagship store in its city of origin, Mattoon.

We recently caught up with Blake Pierce, president of Rural King Real Estate, to learn more about the Emerald Acres development and the company that spawned it.

What does the Emerald Acres project entail?

PIERCE: The Shops at Emerald Acres Sports Connection was developed because we know we needed to attract and retain people in Mattoon. We are utilizing sports tourism to spur economic development. Rural King owned all this land out here and donated it to Mattoon Sports Complex Inc. I serve as president of that not-for-profit organization. The first thing we did was build a 140,000-sq.-ft. indoor sports facility on this 150-acre site. That opened in December of 2024. We just started construction on the outdoor fields for opening in the summer of 2026.

Emerald Acres is aiming to have 580,000 visitors annually, bringing \$23.8 million in economic impact to the area.

We’ve also constructed a shopping center with Ulta Beauty, Chipotle, Chick-fil-A, Ross, Texas Roadhouse and others. Fairfield Inn opens in October. Hampton Inn breaks ground this week. This is a real momentum changer for the area. Matton is a micro-hub in a rural area. People come from 30 to 40 minutes away on Saturday to eat and shop. This new project is our chance to make a good first impression of our community.

What kind of store expansions are you doing in other states?

PIERCE: We are targeting the East and Southeast. We opened 10 stores in 2025 including our entry into Mississippi, South Carolina and Maryland. We will open another 15 stores in 2026. We will have 150 stores by the end of this year. We are able to expand because we are privately owned. We don’t have any outside capital or debt. That allows us to make generation-to-generation decisions and not day-to-day ones. We also sell a diversified and unique product offering.

Our typical store footprint is around 83,000 sq. ft., and we carry much more than just farm goods. We carry firearms and ammunition. We carry some consumable products. We carry sub-compact tractors. We have a clothing area of 8,000 to 10,000 sq. ft. We also compete on price. We operate as a low-cost retailer and offer the best price every day.

We are more of a destination because of the size of our stores. The Farm & Ranch sector is very segregated. The industry was started to serve the farmer and rancher. Most of these chains came about in the 1950s and 60s. Back then, a 40-to-80-acre farm could be worked by one family. Rural King was established to serve their needs.

Over time, farms grew in size. The



Rural King is a Mattoon-based rural farm goods retailer that is in expansion mode.
Photo courtesy of Rural King Real Estate

average-sized farm now is 5,000 acres and is farmed by major corporations. Today, being in the farm and ranch sector means catering to folks who like to live the rural lifestyle — people who want the attributes of what our stores sell. They identify with the rural lifestyle. COVID saw a great migration to rural areas. Nowadays, many of our shoppers have more discretionary income and choose to live here just because they prefer a more rural lifestyle.

What are your store site selection criteria?

PIERCE: We only look to purchase locations today. We do not lease. We go into primarily second- and third-generation space. That keeps costs down. We can go in and take over an old Kmart box and use that space. We need large parking lots because we have large garden centers. Our minimum is 10 acres. Here are our other key criteria:

- Trade area of 50,000 population.
- Too urban of a market is not a good fit.
- Too high of income is not a good fit. We target the working class.
- We prefer to be on main and main, but we are a destination. Our typical customer drives 30 minutes to see us.
- Our stores are rather minimalist in terms of buildout. Going into existing buildings is less expensive.
- We use an internal algorithm that projects sales based on location. We factor in things like population, traffic, cattle head counts, etc.

— Ron Starner



Dam near Lake of Egypt Cabins is in Marion County in Southeast Illinois.
Photo courtesy of Illinois Office of Tourism

out electrical capacity for a shovel-ready site on Highway 57. We have the CN Prairie Park site — a certified rail-served site of over 500 acres.”

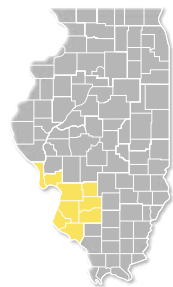
Among other regional assets, she notes, are an extensive educational system with Eastern Illinois University in Charleston and a community college system that puts together customized programs for employers, including tailored upskilling programs.

“Also,” she says, “this area has one of the highest safety ratings in all of Illinois. That is a big deal. We have the \$200-million mixed-use sports complex built by Rural King (see sidebar). That brings 5,000 to 6,000 people to town on some weekends.”

Sauget adds, “Tertiary markets like this are highly desirable because of our productivity. We offer a highly productive and stable workforce, a low cost of living and ease of operations. It is easy to get up and running here. Local government is very business-friendly; the local schools are good; and the turnaround time for companies is competitive. You can lease or buy space for 25% less here than you can in larger markets. Wages tend to run lower here with higher productivity. And there are 821,000 people living within a 60-mile radius. Our region is a hidden gem for industrial brokers.”

Her elevator speech to prospects is simple, she says: “If you are a company and you are looking to locate in a micro market, know that companies come here and they don’t leave.”

Joe Dively, chairman and CEO of First Mid Bank & Trust in Mattoon, says his regional bank with \$6.5 billion in assets under management is ready to help those firms grow. “I am from Charleston just nine miles down the road,” he says. “This is a great part of the country. We wanted to raise our family here. I am a big believer in what community banks do. We bring capital to families and help businesses grow.”



Southwest Region
Counties: Calhoun, Jersey, Madison, Bond, Clinton, St. Clair, Monroe, Randolph, Washington.

Much of the economy of Southwest Illinois is intertwined

with that of the Greater St. Louis metro area. Located just across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Southwest Illinois has nine counties that collectively are home to 685,000 residents and a workforce of 275,000.

Belleville is the largest city

with over 42,000 people, while Collinsville, Edwardsville, O’Fallon and Alton are also sizable employment centers in the region.

Kyle Anderson, executive director of the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois, says that his region’s best-kept secret is how well educated its residents are. “We are the biggest producer of bachelor’s degrees in the entire St. Louis region. That school is Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville. It outpaces every other higher-education institution in the region in churning out new bachelor’s degree graduates every year,” he says.

He adds that “we have great assets through University of Illinois being only two hours away. We have one of the best community college partners too. We are big enough that our population can handle any size company that wants to come here; but we are also small enough that we can craft a training program just for you.”

Anderson cites Southwest Illinois College and Westar Aviation as an example of a good partnership. “With a grant from the counties, SWIC came on the Westar campus and trained over 50 workers and graduated them in a year,” Anderson notes. “We have a concierge service to prepare that training program for them.”

Another regional economic engine is Scott Air Force Base. “That base produces \$8.3 billion a year in direct economic impact,” Anderson adds. “We have 57,000 veterans living in the Greater St. Louis Region. We have the best trained workforce in America in our backyard. They show up every day, take great pride in their work and work very hard.”

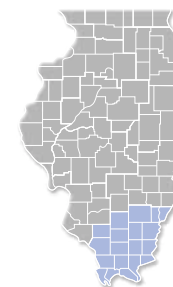
Anderson says that quality of life is a huge drawing card. “We are only 25 minutes away from the St. Louis Cardinals, St. Louis Blues or St. Louis City SC,” he notes. “We are a very safe area, and we offer affordable and high-quality housing.”



Gulfstream Aerospace recently expanded in Southwest Illinois.
Photo courtesy of Ameren Illinois

Industry diversification is another advantage, he says. “We have a very diverse economic ecosystem. We are not dependent on any one industry sector. We have a great manufacturing presence, a growing geospatial presence and Scott AFB. And we are known for our logistics. We are a day’s drive to 50% of U.S. consumers and a two-days drive to 85% of U.S. consumers. Our railroads, our ports, our connectivity — we have one of the largest inland ports in the country. We have three Interstates going through downtown St. Louis. You can get anywhere in the U.S. very quickly through here.”

With major firms like Boeing, Gulfstream, Prairie Farms and Tyson Foods expanding in the area recently, Anderson says the ground has been laid for major supplier growth as well.



Southern Region
Counties: Wayne, Jefferson, Wabash, Edwards, Perry, Franklin, Hamilton, White, Jackson, Williamson, Saline, Gallatin, Union, Johnson, Pope, Hardin, Alexander, Pulaski, Hardin.

The largest city in the 19-county

region that makes up Southern Illinois is Carbondale, with a population of 25,083 people. While Carbondale is located in Jackson County, the neighboring county to the east, Williamson, is actually the most populated one in Southern Illinois, with 67,030 people. Altogether, the region is home is around 400,000 people.

Southern Illinois towns may be small in population, but they make up for it in economic impact. Deb Barnett, executive director of Southern Illinois Now, says the focus of her economic development efforts is centered around the region’s transportation and logistics assets. She calls it the 4R Advantage: roads, river, rails and runways.

Bordered by the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, Southern Illinois is a preferred destination for distribution warehouses. “We are a largely rural area that was known as a heavy coal mining region historically,” says Barnett. “We have a very strong manufacturing presence today. We are also home to Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, which is a Research 1 institution. There are five community colleges in our region, and we are centrally located in the Midwest. You can get to eight major metros within five hours.”

Being located in the center of St.



Big Rocky Hollow Trail is in Goreville in Johnson County in Southern Illinois.
Photo courtesy of Illinois Office of Tourism

Louis, Nashville, Memphis and Indianapolis gives Southern Illinois a strategic advantage, she adds. “I-57 runs north to Chicago. I-64 runs west to St. Louis; and I-24 runs east and west through our region,” she notes. “Carbondale, Marion and Mount Vernon are the main commercial and industrial hubs, but all of the companies in our region benefit from the logistics assets we have.”

Those companies are growing too. “Dyson Illinois has three plants here. They are in the auto sector,” Barnett says. “They just built a 463,000-sq.-ft. logistics center. They benefit from being in the center of the country.”

Southern Illinois Airport near SIU-Carbondale is benefiting from this growth. “It has 30 companies on the airfield, and they are continuing to grow,” says Barnett. “We also have the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail, bike trails, hiking trails, coffee trails — you name it. We have trails for everything.”

With a cost of living that is 17% lower than the national average, Southern Illinois is a huge bargain, she adds. “You can get a really nice home here for around \$200,000. I live on a lake on a point on the water, and my house was less than \$300,000. It is just a matter of getting the word out — and we are working very hard to do that.” 🍷

WHAT BUSINESS LEADERS ARE SAYING ABOUT ILLINOIS



Illinois EDC has been a great partner for Formic Technologies as we have looked to grow and expand our presence in Illinois and the Midwest. Formic has appreciated and valued the guidance, insights, feedback and thoughtful suggestions that the Illinois EDC team has provided.

— JACK WAGLER, CFO, Formic Technologies



Illinois EDC has been helpful in attracting potential businesses to the Decatur market by providing unique opportunities for exposure through curated networking events and conferences. This targeted approach has allowed for productive conversations about actual projects that may be a good fit for our community and the state.

— NICOLE BATEMAN, President, Economic Development Corporation of Decatur and Macon County



Illinois EDC is a huge asset to the state of Illinois. It [GAF] was my first interaction working a project start to finish with them. They are a really good resource. I'm not always keen on having an extra layer. They were impressive.

— DENISE MULLIS, Senior Vice President, J.M. Mullis, Inc.



Illinois EDC provides strong research and data analytic tools that support our own business development and attraction activities such as understanding industry trends and reaching decision-makers. The responsiveness of the entire team ensures that prospects receive white glove treatment when they are considering expanding their business in Illinois.

— ED SITAR, ComEd Economic Development



One benefit to working with state-wide economic development organizations, like Illinois EDC, is that they provide a great resource of data/information to assist foreign-based companies in deciding where to locate, such as readily available fact sheets on labor force and industry clusters/industries.

— REINHOLD F. KRAMMER, Attorney at Law, Masuda, Funai, Eifert & Mitchell, Ltd.





Roads, rivers, rails
and runways add up
to economic success
in Illinois.

by **RON STARNER**

The Great River Road is one of the most scenic drives in Illinois.

Photo by Adam Alexander courtesy of Illinois Office of Tourism

Illinois' transportation infrastructure is both well-known and well-documented. Statewide, the Land of Lincoln boasts five international airports; seven other commercial airports; all seven Class I freight railroads (the only state to have this); the third-largest intermodal port in the world; the third largest Interstate highway system in the U.S.; and two major inland ports and 14 waterway ports.

With assets like that, is it any wonder that large-scale logistics end-users keep building new distribution warehouse facilities in the state? According to the Conway Projects Database of Site Selection Magazine, Illinois landed 1,312 such projects from 2020 to 2025 — the most in the nation during that time.

Illinois reaps this haul because of its world-class transportation infrastructure. Tim Feemster, CEO and managing principal of Foremost Quality Logistics in Dallas, says that “the availability

of rail — both intermodal and manifest — from the five major North American railroads in the Chicago area to reach Canada and both coasts for international inbound and outbound goods” is a key factor in Greater Chicago maintaining its place as America's largest industrial market. He also cites “direct access to the St. Lawrence Seaway for ship traffic to Europe and the East Coast of the U.S.” as pivotal.

Getting goods to market efficiently is a competitive advantage in Illinois. According to Feemster, “Transportation is over 60% of the cost of the overall supply chain in the U.S. Rent, labor and taxes are all in the 10% range. Most people do not realize how much the transportation cost impacts the location decision. They tend to focus on rent, labor and taxes. This can cause major profitability issues down the road as the company realizes the impact of the transportation costs on the profitability of the site.”

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Route 66 is the original highway across America. This sign in Joliet is part of a Choose Chicago marketing campaign celebrating the rich heritage of America's first cross-country highway.

Photo courtesy of Visit Joliet and Unidos Marketing Network

“Illinois is the freight hub of North America, and Union Pacific is the largest of six Class I railroads that operate in the state. **We have an extensive network** of more than 2,300 miles of railroad track, 3,000 employees, and \$1.7 billion in annual in-state purchases.”

— Robynn Tysver, Communications Manager, Union Pacific Railroad

How Illinois Wins

Here is how Illinois wins. Within a 275-mile radius of Joliet in Northern Illinois, there is a population of 44.3 million people. Within a 250-mile radius are pretty much all the major markets of Indiana, Wisconsin and Michigan. Half of Iowa and the western arc of Ohio — including Toledo, Dayton and Cincinnati — are within this radius as well. Moreover, within this circle there is a total labor force of 22.7 million workers.

Travel southward to the region of Southwest Illinois and you find much the same access via transportation. Within a 250-mile radius of the bi-state Metro St. Louis region are 33.26 million people. That means that within a single day's drive, a truck can go there and back to these markets: Champaign, Illinois; Kansas City; Memphis; Louisville; Indianapolis; and Des Moines.

Shipping by truck is only part of the transportation story in Illinois. Rail and waterway transport are the two modes that elevate Illinois to top-tier status. According to Robynn Tysver, communications manager for Union Pacific Railroad, “Illinois is the freight hub of North America, and Union Pacific is the largest of six Class I railroads that operate in the state. We have an extensive network of more than

2,300 miles of railroad track, 3,000 employees, and \$1.7 billion in annual in-state purchases.”

Just how important is Illinois to the rest of the country? Consider this: “Approximately 25% of all rail cars, and 50% of all intermodal containers in the U.S., travel through Chicago, Illinois’ central location,” says Tysver. “Proximity to Lake Michigan, and the size of Chicagoland’s workforce, combined with its long-held reliance on railroad service, helps Illinois maintain its status as a critical U.S. market.”

UP operates three intermodal facilities in Greater Chicago. Combined, they complete more than 1.3 million container lifts each year. “These facilities help transport the products that can be found on store shelves and in businesses throughout the Chicago area, including food, cars and consumer products such as clothes and exercise bikes,” says Tysver.

UP’s biggest intermodal facility in Illinois is the Global IV port in Joliet. This massive site of more than 700 acres handles 750,000 containers per year and has more than 4,000 parking stalls, according to Tysver.

UP is not done growing in Illinois either, notes Tysver. “In 2024, we invested about \$105 million into our Illinois infrastructure,” she

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WOOD DALE
ILLINOIS



Rebuild Illinois is REBUILDING ROADWAYS

If recent history is any indication, the transportation infrastructure of Illinois will continue to expand courtesy of a number of federal and state funding programs.

One project that is at the top of that list is a proposed \$1 billion expressway that would connect Southern Illinois with St. Louis. The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) announced on July 28 that it would seek public input as part of an ongoing \$6 million study of the proposed Southwestern Illinois Expressway through Jackson, Monroe, Perry and Randolph counties.

The project would take 10 years to complete and would include portions of Illinois State Roads 3, 154 and 13/27 from Carbondale to St. Louis.

To learn more about this and other roadway projects in Illinois, we turned to IDOT Communications Director Guy Tridgell.

Can you provide an update on the Rebuild Illinois program in terms of recently completed projects and major projects that are planned?

TRIDGELL: Accomplishments through Year Six of Rebuild Illinois include almost \$20.8 billion of improvements statewide on 7,897 miles of highway, 815 bridges and 1,181 additional safety improvements. Over the next six years, IDOT is planning to improve more than 3,200 miles of highway and nearly 9 million square feet of bridge deck as part of Rebuild Illinois, which is investing \$33.2 billion into all modes of transportation.

Among the major projects that have been completed: The first two phases of the Interstate 255 reconstruction in Metro East, upgrades to the Murray Baker and Bob Michel bridges in Peoria, the rehabilitation of the I-280 bridge over the Mississippi River in the Quad Cities, I-57 pavement improvements through Cook County, a new Illinois 59-I-55 interchange in Will County, pieces of the I-57 expansion in Southern Illinois and the I-70 resurfacing near Effingham.

Major projects ongoing or in the works made possible by the capital program: I-80 rebuild and expansion in Will County, passenger rail reintroduction between Rockford and Chicago, I-57/74 interchange rebuild in Champaign-Urbana, MetroLink expansion in Metro East, a new I-80 over the Mississippi River bridge in the Quad Cities, I-270 corridor improvements between Illinois and Missouri, Rebuild I-39 in Winnebago County, Bishop Ford Freeway resurfacing in Cook County and the Springfield Rail Improvements Project.

What are the three biggest ongoing transportation infrastructure improvements projects that are currently taking place in Illinois?

TRIDGELL: The I-80 reconstruction in Will County; the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) program and its various elements in the Chicago region; and the new I-57/74 interchange in Champaign-Urbana.

The American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) recently released its annual report on the Top 100 Truck Bottlenecks in America and listed the I-294/290/88 congruence in Chicago as the No. 2 most congested truck bottleneck in the country. Is there any ongoing plan or work in place to address this?

TRIDGELL: The Illinois Department of Transportation has been coordinating with the ongoing Illinois Tollway's Central Tri-State reconstruction project, which includes the reconstruction of the I-290/88 interchange at I-294 interchange. The \$700 million to \$800 million interchange component is part of a broader \$4 billion corridor-wide upgrade. Major ramps — including from westbound I-290 to northbound I-294 and from Roosevelt Road to southbound I-294 — remain closed with posted detours. For the latest maps and alerts, visit the Illinois Tollway's I-290/88 Interchange project page.

Illinois is proactive about keeping its roads in good shape and addressing bottlenecks. Chicago region commuters have many options beyond driving: Metra commuter trains, Amtrak's national passenger rail service, and the "L."

says. "The significant investments we've made in our facilities and our network help improve rail efficiency in Chicago and help Union Pacific offer safe, best-in-class rail service that meets the needs of our customers."

A Port to the World

By water, the Illinois International Port District is a major player in expediting the flow of commerce through Illinois and to the world. Home to the Port of Chicago, this district is instrumental in shipping goods to the Atlantic Ocean via the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway and to the Gulf of Mexico via the Illinois Waterway and the Mississippi River.

Erik Varela, executive director of the IIPD, says that "IIPD secured both state and federal grant funding last year, aimed at making huge improvements to the Port of Chicago, including investments in zero-emissions equipment and the reconstruction of our 100-year-old dock wall. These grants are worth tens of millions of dollars, will modernize the IIPD and will have positive impacts on our community, Chicago and the state."

Besides Chicago and surrounding Northern Illinois, perhaps the best example of a community incorporating all elements of transportation into its regional economy is the Southern Illinois region anchored by Carbondale. Deb Barnett, executive director of Southern Illinois Now (SI Now), says that her region's strong suit is something she calls the "R4 Advantage."

By R4, she means roads, rivers, rails and runways. "This strategic blend of regional assets makes Southern Illinois a powerful logistics and transportation hub for businesses," Barnett says. "The region is intersected by



major Interstates like I-57, I-24 and I-54, placing 80% of the U.S. population within a two-day trucking distance."

Other regional transportation assets include:

- Being located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers.
- Home to five port districts.
- Home to five Class I railroads.
- Veterans Airport in Marion and Southern Illinois Airport in Carbondale.

Barnett adds that this infrastructure attracts businesses. "Companies like Continental Tire, General Dynamics and AISIN benefit from the region's connectivity and workforce," she notes. "Prysmian Group and Manner Polymers expanded here due to the efficient highway and rail access. Also, AECI Schirm chose Southern Illinois to better serve Midwest markets. These businesses leverage the R4 Advantage to reduce transportation costs, improve delivery times and streamline supply chains." 🍷

Chicago Rockford International Airport, located 68 miles northwest of Chicago, is a prime transportation resource for people and businesses in Northern Illinois.

Photo courtesy of Chicago Rockford International Airport

Why Chicago's Quantum Industry Has a GRAVITATIONAL PULL



Chicago's quantum ecosystem centerpiece is taking shape at the former US Steel South Works plant on the city's southeast side. The 128-acre Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park (IQMP) was announced by Governor JB Pritzker in July 2024.

PsiQuantum, which is building the first utility-scale, fault tolerant quantum computer in the U.S., will serve as the anchor tenant. Other tenants will include the IL-DARPA Quantum Proving Ground, for testing quantum technology prototypes, Infleqtion, and Australian company Diraq.

"The Diraq mission is to design, build and deploy the world's most cost-effective quantum computers, with the most compact footprint, allowing for mass deployment in data centers worldwide," said Diraq's CEO and Founder, Andrew Dzurak, in a statement. "We recently set up operations

in Silicon Valley and Boston, and we are looking at suitable options for expanding our presence. The IQMP represents an exciting opportunity that can support our U.S. growth strategy."

Is there interest in the park from other quantum players outside the U.S.?

"Absolutely," says Preeti Chalsani, senior vice president and Chief Quantum Officer at the Illinois Economic Development Corporation (IEDC). "In addition to Diraq, the IQMP has received interest from, and is in talks with, many international companies looking to establish U.S. operations in Illinois. Our unmatched infrastructure, transportation, workforce, and existing quantum ecosystem, along with other attractions, make the IQMP and Illinois in general a highly desirable location for this emerging industry and quantum businesses, no matter their size."

by MARK AREND

A rendering of the Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park

Image courtesy of Alex Mack, PsiQuantum Corp.



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Chalsani recently was invited to speak on the Illinois quantum ecosystem and initiatives at Quantum Korea conference in South Korea.

Similarly, in a bid to reach an international audience, IEDC, P33 and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs in July hosted the inaugural Global Quantum Forum, bringing together individuals from more than 20 countries centered on the global implications and opportunities of quantum.

Illinois Checks All the Boxes

“Illinois has all of the elements of the quantum value chain, providing a fertile base for further growth, development and commercialization,” says Chalsani. “For one, we’re home to world-class research institutions, including universities like the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the University of Chicago – one of the first in the country to launch a quantum PhD program, Northwestern University and others, as well as two DOE National Labs, Argonne and Fermi, that continue to build on decades of pioneering discoveries to advance quantum science and technology.

“Together with our outstanding four-year institutions and extensive community college system, we continue to collaboratively build one of the largest quantum-ready talent pipelines in the nation,” she adds. “Collectively, Illinois has a large and highly skilled STEM talent pool, which is critical. We have some of the world’s best business schools in the University of Chicago’s Booth and Northwestern’s Kellogg, which nurture high quality business and entrepreneurial talent, another key element needed for a developing quantum industry.”

The IQMP recently launched the National Quantum Algorithm

Center, a one-of-a-kind opportunity for companies across sectors to work alongside quantum experts, researchers and academics to solve industry challenges. Chalsani says the initiative will focus on the development of quantum algorithms and applications, ultimately developing solutions to some of society’s most complex challenges.

“Quantum investment is concentrating in Illinois because industry resources and anchors exist to support growing businesses.”

— Andrew Batson, Senior Director, Americas Data Center Research and Strategy, JLL

How Illinois Stacks Up Globally

Chicago is one of six U.S. locations among 20 worldwide recognized as leading global quantum real estate markets in The Future of Quantum Real Estate, a report released in July by JLL. It would have been hard to exclude it.

Few places have a quantum computing ecosystem like the Windy City, which the JLL report says has attracted more than \$1 billion in quantum-related investment in recent years. It’s home to the Chicago Quantum Exchange (CQE), a regional hub comprised of the U.S. Department of Energy’s Argonne National Laboratory and Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory and

research universities in Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana. CQE is based at the University of Chicago’s Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering.

The Bloch Quantum Tech Hub, organized by CQE, is a coalition of universities; government, economic development and workforce agencies; and companies large and small working in the quantum computing space. It was awarded a \$500,000 Consortium Accelerator Award grant from the Economic Development Administration in 2024 to boost industry adoption of quantum computing.

Still another organization in the ecosystem is P33, which it says is “a nonprofit organization accelerating Chicago’s growth as a global tech and innovation hub by aligning the city’s research institutions, corporate leaders, civic talent, and investment ecosystem around high-impact sectors,” including quantum computing.

“When we think about the ingredients needed to form a global quantum ecosystem, Chicago scores very high across the board (universities, existing quantum facilities, government support, advocacy groups, skilled workforce and a growing private sector),” says Andrew Batson, senior director, Americas Data Center Research and Strategy, JLL, a co-author of the firm’s report. “Quantum investment is concentrating in Illinois because industry resources and anchors exist to support growing businesses.

“Chicago has established itself as a global quantum leader,” he adds. “The industry foundation that has developed in Chicago has a gravitation pull, which will attract additional investment over time and help the region sustain its leading position for a number of years.” 🍷

S I T E R E A D I N E S S

Grab a Shovel: Illinois Has the Land



This site in Decatur is one of many currently available for development statewide. Photo courtesy of JLL

Gov. Pritzker announces \$500 million in funding to certify sites statewide.

by RON STARNER

When the Illinois General Assembly passed the \$55.1 billion state FY2026 budget on June 1, the bill included, among other economic development spending measures, a record \$500 million commitment to site readiness. Funds specifically were

earmarked to support two state programs: Central Management Service’s Surplus to Success and the Site Readiness Initiative (SRI) of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO).

Surplus to Success receives \$300 million, while SRI nets a new infusion of \$200 million. Together,

these allocations represent the largest investment in state history to make sites across Illinois ready for business. Funding includes state dollars for remediation of state-owned sites as well as efforts to market and recruit businesses from other states.

The budget passage follows actions taken by Gov. JB Pritzker

There are 15 certified Megasites in Illinois. Vetted Sites is another state program that has 70 certified sites that are primed for fast-moving for industrial development.

Source: Illinois EDC



earlier this year to award site preparedness funding to 24 sites across Illinois. On January 29, Pritzker announced awards totaling \$31 million through two competitive funding opportunities: grants to support due diligence activities, studies and site plans; and Capital Ready grants to support capital infrastructure improvements. The grants ranged in size from \$35,000 to \$3 million.

Recipients of these awards included the Jo-Carroll Depot Local Redevelopment Authority in Northwest Illinois, which is getting \$3 million to build natural gas infrastructure at the Savanna Industrial Park; and the City of Mattoon in Southeast Illinois, which is getting nearly \$2.4 million to make substation improvements for 74 acres at Mattoon Enterprise Park.

“Readiness planning, assessments, infrastructure improvements — these are all the fundamental work that must be done for businesses and investments to flourish and jobs to grow across the state,” Pritzker said. “In every corner of Illinois, there are communities that are overflowing with untapped potential but do not have the resources and support they need to fully realize it. Now, I am happy to say that a whole lot has changed. We are investing in our sites. We are thinking about the future, and we are growing economic development across the state.”

DCEO Director Kristin Richards added, “The Regional Site Readiness Program is building on the state’s economic momentum. These projects are readying sites for new capital investment and job creation to solidify Illinois’ reputation as an economic powerhouse that provides companies with access to the infrastructure they need to succeed.”

Pumping Millions Into Megasites

The state also administers the Megasites initiative and the Vetted Sites program. The Megasites initiative is a state effort to support site readiness at large-scale tracts around Illinois.

Two years ago, Pritzker kicked off the program by announcing \$40 million in state funding for Megasites statewide. Recent award recipients include Jerseyville; Winnebago County; Interchange City West; Marquis Land Holdings LLC; and the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 150.

The Illinois EDC currently lists 15 available Megasites statewide. Examples include the 3,184-acre NRG site in Morris in Grundy County and the 5,000-acre Dual Rail Mega Site in Rochelle in Ogle County. There are also the 3,300-acre Marquis Industrial Complex in Hennepin and the 3,200-acre AC Rail-Access Megasite in Manteno. All four of these tracts are firmly on the radar screen of site selectors right now.

For a complete list of Megasites in Illinois, go to Illinois EDC’s website (illinoisedc.org)

Vetted Sites Up to 70

Vetted Sites, also administered by the Illinois EDC, are identified by the organization as the top sites in Illinois based on eight site characteristics: acreage; utilities; logistics; permitting and entitlement; workforce; ownership; local and state incentives; and environmental and topographical conditions. The program also provides ample site data so that companies can make local decisions quickly and accurately.

Currently, Illinois EDC Vetted Sites has 35 sites that are certified in the program. These tracts include the 500-acre Hartford Industrial Center and the 96-acre Blitstein Farm site in Dwight.

Paulina San Millan, senior vice president of business development for Illinois EDC, says, “We retain experts in Illinois to certify our sites. They do a deep-dive analysis; and then we market them. We know that in the global economy today, if you don’t have the sites, you can’t compete for projects.”

“We retain experts in Illinois to certify our sites. They do a deep-dive analysis; and then we market them. We know that in the global economy today, if you don’t have the sites, you can’t compete for projects.”

— Paulina San Millan, Senior Vice President, Illinois EDC



She adds that “We started at 35, we are now at 70. We are always asking ourselves ‘How can we be creative and get [these assets] in front of site selectors?’ ”

Helping Illinois is the fact that many Vetted Sites are located along major highways. A good example is the I-80 Logistics Park site in Minooka. It has 416 acres that are ready for development. There are also the 250-acre I-55 Commerce Center in Litchfield and the 320-acre Cornerstone at Chicago Rockford International Airport.

For a complete list of Vetted Sites in Illinois, go to illinoisedc.org/resources/site-selection/megasites.

Ameren Speeds Up the Process

Eric Whitfield, economic director for Ameren Illinois, says his electric utility company began investing heavily into site preparation about three or four years ago. “We wanted to know two things: What are the top sites across the whole service territory? And what sites are being submitted for the most projects? It started out as a process improve-

ment initiative for ourselves.” Whitfield says certified sites are essential today because “RFI submissions are only getting quicker and requiring more detailed information. We took our top sites and had our engineers look at them ahead of time. The Illinois EDC rolled out its Vetted Sites

program at the same time. As they identified more sites, we were able to take those into our own intake and be more proactive.”

Whitfield adds that the primary goal of shoring up site readiness is “improving speed to market. Everyone needs to know what it will take from an energy standpoint; and it helps our communities understand what they have.”

To date, says Whitfield, Ameren has vetted close to 100 sites around the state. “We keep a rolling top 35 that we refresh each year,” he notes. “That helps us identify some gaps too. That led to the Site Readiness grants that the state now uses.”

A big beneficiary of this new state program is downstate Illinois, he adds. “This program is really paying off for the downstate area. A sustainable aviation fuel plant went to Metro East [near St. Louis] because the rail-served sites in that area were pre-vetted. Because of results like this, we will continue to enhance this program.” 🍌

The Global Ties That Bind

Illinois sets new high mark for exports as it attracts record FDI.

Sunset over Chicago, the No. 1 destination for FDI in the Midwest. Photo by Dice Sales courtesy of Enjoy Illinois

When German copper supplier Wieland announced last year that it would invest \$500 million to modernize its production facilities in East Alton, the news was but the latest confirmation that Illinois is a magnet for global foreign direct investment.

Wieland, which supplies semi-finished copper and copper alloy products, is retaining 800 jobs statewide and adding a new mill at this manufacturing complex in East Alton. “Wieland, which is a global company, could have chosen to make this investment anywhere in the United States, let alone anywhere in the world,” Gov. JB Pritzker said.

“This announcement is a compliment to the quality of the workers here in East Alton, their dedication and the region itself; and it is proof that in the global competition to attract and retain great companies, Illinois is competing and winning.”

The numbers back him up. According to Dunn and Bradstreet, more than 2,682 international companies employ more than 552,695 people in Illinois. The top countries by FDI employment in Illinois are the UK with 96,290 workers in the state, followed by Germany, Canada, Japan and France.

Compass Group PLC out of the UK is the top FDI employer in Illinois with 23,310 workers in the state. Other top foreign

employers in Illinois include Fareva of Luxembourg, Randstad N.V. of the Netherlands, Banque de Montreal of Canada, and Continental AG of Germany.

But global commerce is not a one-way street in Illinois. The FDI goes both ways, as evidenced by the fact that five Illinois-based companies each employ more than 50,000 workers abroad, led by Chicago-based McDonald’s, which has a non-U.S. workforce of 157,508 people. United Airlines of Chicago is next on the list with 105,255.

As long as Chicago has served as the financial and commercial capital of the Central U.S., it has built and maintained global ties. In 2024, global exports from Illinois businesses reached an all-

time high of \$80.82 billion — a 2.5% increase from 2023 and a 35% increase from 2019, according to the World Institute for Strategic Economic Research (WISERTrade) and U.S. Census Bureau.

Illinois ranks as the largest farm exporting state in the Midwest and the fourth largest in the country, according to USDA and Census Bureau data. Agricultural products alone accounted for \$5.1 billion in exports from Illinois in 2024 — up 15.7% from 2023 and up 152.2% from 2019.

Besides agriculture, the largest exporting sectors in Illinois last year were chemicals at \$15.68 billion; machinery at \$12.5 billion;

computer and electronic products at \$9.88 billion; and transportation equipment at \$8.35 billion.

There are many reasons why Illinois serves as a global hub of commerce, but chief contributing factors include the following:

- Illinois has a top-20 economy in the world.
- Illinois is the No. 1 state in the Midwest for new and expanding companies, per Site Selection Magazine.
- Greater Chicago ranks as the No. 1 metro area in the U.S. for new and expanding companies, per Site Selection, and has maintained this perch for 12 years.
- There are 32 Fortune 500 headquarters and over 2,634 international companies from 73 countries based in Illinois.
- Illinois has a skilled and trained workforce of 6.5 million people.
- Illinois is home to three national laboratories: USDA, Argonne and Fermilab.
- Illinois is the only U.S. state with all six Class I freight railroads.

Pitchbook recently analyzed 1,234 international capital deals in Illinois from 2019 through the third quarter of 2024 and found that the top five foreign investors by deal count in Illinois-based companies were from the UK, Canada, India, Singapore

and Switzerland. Among the largest of these investment deals was Medline’s \$34 billion leveraged buyout (LBO) by U.S.-based private equity firms from the UAE, Singapore and the U.S.

Recent FDI facility deals in Chicago came from BSB Industry of Denmark, Rapyuta Robotics of Japan, and Farmer’s Milk of Ukraine. “Chicago is a key strategic hub for Japanese companies in the U.S. Midwest, offering industrial diversity, market scale, excellent connectivity, a skilled workforce and a high quality of life,” said Nakagawa Takashi, chief executive director of the Chicago office of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). “The city’s innovation ecosystem has also attracted a growing number of Japanese startups. WBC [World Business Chicago] and JETRO have actively supported Japanese business engagement through joint initiatives, such as the co-hosted seminar in Tokyo in March and the Quantum Delegation to Chicago in June. I am delighted to see our partnership becoming increasingly tangible and dynamic.”

To support and enhance further ties abroad, Illinois EDC and DCEO organized multiple foreign trade trips for Illinois officials and business leaders this year. These include trade missions to Japan, Mexico, Dubai, Monterrey, Barcelona, Toronto, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Paris. 🇺🇸



Just before Thanksgiving in 2024, Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker shared the good news that a \$5 million state grant would enable Marshalltown Hammer to acquire the tool manufacturing operations of Vaughan and Bushnell.
Photos courtesy of Office of the Governor

Remembering ‘Forgottonia’: How a ‘Heart and Soul American’ Tool Manufacturer and Town Were Saved

by ADAM BRUNS

When you’re a 155-year-old company, all it takes is a 135-year-old company to inject some vitality into the proceedings. That and some help from your friends.

In April 2024, prospects for hand tool manufacturer Vaughan & Bushnell and its 120 employees looked as dim as the company’s long-ago roots, which trace back to 1869 in Chicago and eventually a major manufacturing plant located in Bushnell, Illinois, a town of fewer than 2,700 people located not far

from the railroad town of Galesburg (home to Knox College) and the city of Macomb (home to Western Illinois University). “Macomb is not that big either,” says Robin Wilt, who just finished serving two terms as Bushnell’s mayor, “not Peoria-sized by any means.”

Bushnell sits in the heart of a 16-county region of west-central Illinois that WIU student Neal Gamm in the 1960s branded “Forgottonia” because of perceived infrastructure neglect.

Declaring himself the governor, Gamm and his fellow activists/satirists attracted national attention (and eventually the desired attention of transportation officials) with the elaborate scenario, complete with a run-down building as capitol and a plan to secede, “go to war” with the United States, immediately give up and then petition for foreign aid.

The official Forgottonia state bird? The albatross. State flower? The forget-me-not. Official flag? The white flag of surrender.

Wilt, the first female mayor of Bushnell in its 160-year history, was in no mood to surrender in 2024. Sure, there are other employers around: Midwest Control Products, a maker of tubes, spring pins, spherical rod ends, ball joints and other products; a grain grinding operation from ADM; grain bin maker Bushnell Tank Company. But nothing drove the economy like the pounding of the hammer plant, where Vaughan & Bushnell also made prybars, handsaws and axes.

A Bushnell native whose parents used to operate a gas station next to the plant, Wilt spoke to me on a July day when the sun was so hot the corn was sweating. But that’s nothing compared to the heat in the factory. “It’s a million degrees in there,” she says. “It’s an old plant, heart and soul American. It’s loud. I grew up falling asleep hearing the hammers drop,” along with the 100 trains a day that used to pass through town.

“It was a tremendous thing to be a part of. We couldn’t have done it without the State of Illinois stepping in and helping the way they did.”

— Robin Wilt, *Bushnell native and former mayor*



Gov. Pritzker visits with Marshalltown Hammer Plant Manager Mike Havens.

Wilt ran for mayor on a citizen's ticket. "I didn't declare Republican or Democrat because it's not about politics for me," she says. "It's about the people." It's also about unseen things like infrastructure.

"I learned more about the sewer system than I ever wanted to know," she says. "It gave me a purposeful way of governing. We have to put so much money into that infrastructure we never see, but it sustains our village."

So does an employer such as Vaughan & Bushnell, whose operation Wilt describes as a "vital organ" to the town, where more than 80 of its employees lived.

"I was in the thick of it all," she says of the plant's teetering fortunes. It was a situation that truly put the community in a position of survival, she says, "that I hope we don't see again."

Rollercoaster Ride

Privately owned since the beginning, Vaughan and Bushnell kept things close to the vest, but everyone had an aunt, uncle or

parent who worked there. Word got around that business was down. After the city loaned the company money but things were still looking bad, the family called the city looking for further assistance. "We were blindsided," Wilt says. "We didn't know things were so bad. We had town meetings to find out what our community thought."

Within six weeks of the red alert, executives from tool company Marshalltown, based about a four-hour drive away in Marshalltown, Iowa, since 1890, were among the suitors on the ground in Bushnell evaluating whether they could make the acquisition. By May 2024, the answer was yes, which came as a huge relief to employees and town alike. Just as quickly, however, the devil in the details reared his head and the deal was off.

Suddenly all those jobs were on the chopping block again. Plant closure appeared imminent. Some employees went ahead and retired.

On closer inspection, however, there was still a heartbeat. One of the negotiators was about to head off

on a long-planned vacation and Wilt found herself stopping at truck stops to do interviews during a drive down to Texas to see her kids.

"It was pretty frantic," Wilt recalls. "We buckled down. That's when the State of Illinois stepped in and said, 'We have some grant money that can help you out. This is how you qualify for it.' They spun it so fast. It was heaven sent, you could say."

Kim Pierce, president and CEO of Macomb Area Economic Development Corporation, "was a tremendous asset throughout the entire process," Wilt says. "She was a key figure in making sure of the I's we had to dot and T's we had to cross."

So was Salvador Garza of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO). Consequently, Gov. JB Pritzker himself came to town on November 20, 2024, to announce that the state would provide a \$5 million grant to enable the acquisition by Marshalltown. Marshalltown Hammer has committed to retaining at least 100 full-time jobs at its Bushnell facility, investing in updating manufacturing equipment and rebuilding the inventory needed to continue to manufacture tools at this site.

"Today, we are shining light on a century-old legacy in Bushnell — American-made tools manufactured right here by generations of Illinoisans have built the places and spaces where we work, live and play," DCEO Director Kristin Richards said at the ceremony. "Marshalltown Hammer's success story is a true testament to what it means for government to work with our economic development and corporate partners and do what we do best: Invest in a sector that is key to Illinois' economy, and invest in our neighbors, who call Western Illinois home."

Back in Business

Thirty years working with student health insurance at WIU had given Wilt an inkling of the speed to expect from any government when it came to getting requests approved. But the Marshalltown deal was different.

"I've never seen government move so quickly as it did," she says. "It was a tremendous thing to be a part of. We couldn't have done it without the State of Illinois stepping in and helping the way they did."

“Today, we are shining light on a century-old legacy in Bushnell — American-made tools manufactured right here by generations of Illinoisans have built the places and spaces where we work, live and play.”

— Kristin Richards, Illinois DCEO Director, at the November 2024 announcement of the Marshalltown Hammer investment

The state was not the only helping hand: The City of Bushnell owns and operates its own utilities, so offered a \$500,000 concession on utility bills if Marshalltown employs a certain number of people. "That's a lot of money for us little people to be giving up, but it was saving 120 jobs and the future of the community, so it had to happen," Wilt says.

Like small towns scattered across Illinois, Bushnell knows that even in a place where the major employer goes back six generations, this is no time to look back.

As of July 2025, the community swimming pool's splash pad was about to hold its grand opening. The refurbished Bushnell Train Depot continued to host events. And Marshalltown Hammer was looking to fill five open positions. 🛠️

Illinois Shifts into Talent Overdrive

by ADAM BRUNS



Rivian's growing production base in central Illinois is but one emblem of a statewide focus on growing the clean tech workforce.

As of July 15, 2025, the Illinois Secretary of State's office had recorded a total registered electric vehicle count of more than 145,000 in the state, nearly double the 76,000 tallied in July 2023 and nearly six times the 25,000 documented in 2020.

Backed by forward-thinking state policies supporting clean energy and clean tech, Illinois is charging up its base of talent and knowledge to meet company requirements, from specialized community college programs to the

latest discoveries at recognized EV battery research pioneer Argonne National Laboratory.

There's no better example than Normal, Illinois, part of the 130,000-strong metro area of Bloomington-Normal, where EV innovator Rivian in 2016 first launched negotiations to purchase the recently closed Mitsubishi Motors plant. Accelerate to today and Rivian employs around 8,500 people from the region as it nears completion of a \$1.5 billion, 1.1 million-sq.-ft., 550-job expansion of its nearly 9-million-sq.-ft. manufacturing complex to produce

the company's next-generation R2 model. In early 2025 the company announced a 1.2 million-sq.-ft. supplier park that would add 90 new jobs initially and attract a nearly \$120 million investment from Rivian. Before you knew it, seat manufacturer Adient was investing \$8 million and pledging to create its own 75 jobs in Normal.

Incentives totaling \$633 million from the state through its Reimagining Energy and Vehicles in Illinois (REV Illinois) are important to Rivian's main plant expansion. But just as important is that next generation of talent. A 12-week

Rivian's new Chicago workspace and showroom are a reflection of the work output at the EV company's manufacturing campus in Normal, Illinois.

Photo courtesy of Rivian

intensive internship program has proved successful, including study in such areas as self-driving software development, product development in supply chain and operations, and manufacturing engineering for battery cell development. So have skills training programs such as SkillBridge (for exiting military service members), an emerging technology co-op program and a technical trades program for the company's service centers throughout the country.

Shortly after the establishment of the manufacturing plant in Normal, Rivian and Heartland Community College successfully collaborated to launch the state's first EV manufacturing training programs in fall 2021, says Rivian Director of Engineering and Manufacturing Learning and Development Hugh Shadeed. "The public-private partnership continues to strengthen the electric vehicle talent pipeline and drive economic growth in McLean County and surrounding areas," he says. "Rivian is also working with community groups like the McLean County Chamber of Commerce and Local Workforce Innovation Areas to establish entry level manufacturing programs. Our goal is to leverage community-based organizations like the YWCA, Minority Business Development Center, and others to deliver these programs at no cost to eligible participants."

Heartland Partnership

In mid-July 2025 Rivian showed more than 40 positions available connected to its site in Normal, including intern positions at UIUC Research Park an hour's drive away in Champaign, home to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. But one of the most crucial partnerships is right in its Normal backyard, where Heartland

Community College (HCC) operates the Electric Vehicle-Energy Storage Manufacturing Training Academy (EVES), featuring a range of certificate and degree programs encompassing the two career pathways EV and energy storage manufacturing offer. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) supported the construction of the facility with a nearly \$7.5 million capital grant, with HCC and employers kicking in \$1.5 million in leveraged funds.

"Heartland Community College currently supports 32 U.S. Department of Labor Registered Apprentices employed by Rivian Automotive in their Rivian Technical Trades program for Industrial Maintenance Technician and Tool and Die Maker," says Curt Rendall, HCC's executive

director of program development and innovation. "We are now expanding the program into the Production Technologist occupation through a pre-apprenticeship pilot program with the American Association of Community Colleges through their Department of Labor Apprenticeships Building America EV Hub grant."

Overall, HCC's apprenticeship program includes 102 current apprentices across employers in manufacturing, health care and IT, Rendall says. Moreover, HCC continues to collaborate with other community colleges through state-wide consortia, regular forums and targeted workforce development initiatives including leadership within the Illinois Innovation Network, the Rev Up EV Technology initiative, and the Make It In Illinois campaign, says Rendall, noting that



Normal, Illinois, is ground zero for Rivian vehicle production and for innovative workforce development partnerships.

Photos courtesy of Rivian





“The Manufacturing Training Academy is a game-changer — increasing access to career pathways tied to real wages and real employer demand.”

— Dr. Melanie Whitelow, Director of Continuing Education and Business Partnerships, Kankakee Community College

strong partnerships with the Illinois Manufacturers’ Association and the German American Chamber of Commerce Midwest continue to aid HCC in connecting directly with employers.

Multiplying Pathways

In April 2025, TCCI Manufacturing in Decatur celebrated the grand opening of the company’s \$45 million, 260,000-sq.-ft. Clean Energy Innovation Hub, which onshores critical EV component manufacturing and provides training and research opportunities. Early in 2023 the department awarded a total of \$21 million to Richland Community College & the City of Decatur to create an Electric Vehicle (EV) Innovation Hub, which includes an EV Electric Compressor Component Manufacturing Center, a Climatic Center for Innovation & Research, and an EV + Energy Workforce Training Academy. This first of its kind manufacturing, workforce, and research and development center for excellence will lead to a renovated and expanded manufacturing facility in Decatur, Illinois, completed through a partnership with TCCI Manufacturing, Richland and the City of Decatur. Grant dollars will be used to construct research, education and workforce training spaces. The project will transform the facility to meet critical needs in the EV supply chain, and the expanded investment in climatic research and workforce

development initiatives will benefit the entire Illinois EV ecosystem.

“Partnering with TCCI is a game-changer for our students and our community,” adds Tamika Thomas, Director of Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) at RCC.

“This collaboration gives our students the unique opportunity to learn inside a facility where innovation is happening in real time, where EV and hybrid compressors are designed and built.”

The Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA), Public Act 102-0662, was passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Pritzker on September 15, 2021. CEJA includes provisions to phase out carbon emissions from the energy and transportation sectors. The Illinois EPA is directed in CEJA to establish rebate and grant programs for electric vehicles and charging stations and oversee the phase-out of fossil fuel-fired electrical generation units.

The State also has backed an Advanced Manufacturing Academy at Southwestern Illinois College (SWIC) in Belleville, which opened in fall 2024 on the perimeter of the St. Louis metro area. The first phase of the center creates a new precision machining career pathway.

A dozen miles away, State funds totaling \$25 million have supported expansion of the Collinsville Area Vocational Center, which will serve growing CTE demand at 10 area high schools (and potentially more). The expansion will allow

enrollment to increase from the current 575 to an expected 900 students annually. Career pathways range across 15 areas from cosmetology to auto body and building trades, with new pathways coming in HVAC/R, aviation mechanics, avionics, EMT, and three additional programs to be named at a later date.

Another Manufacturing Training Academy is located at Kankakee Community College (KCC), near where Gotion is building a \$2 billion battery plant. KCC annually trains around 1,500 community members through non-credit employment programs, workshops and continuing ed courses in key skills areas. Dr. Melanie Whitelow, the new director of Continuing Education and Business Partnerships at Kankakee Community College, says there’s demand in sectors like manufacturing, logistics and health care across Kankakee County — “which translates into real opportunity for residents ready to upskill. The Manufacturing Training Academy is a game-changer — increasing access to career pathways tied to real wages and real employer demand.

“Our Academy builds on KCC’s existing strengths — like non-credit professional development and continuing education — by offering a dedicated training center focused on in-demand, stackable credentials,” she says. “Local businesses help guide our curriculum to ensure graduates can step into jobs quickly, confidently and with the skills employers need.” 🧑🏽💡



Tamika Thomas



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Snapshots of World-Changing R&D



by ADAM BRUNS

An aerial view from above Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management takes in the Lake Michigan shoreline and the Chicago skyline.

Photo courtesy of Northwestern University

By number of higher education institutions receiving federal obligations for science and engineering in FY2023, Illinois ranked No. 6 in the nation with 48 schools receiving nearly \$1.9 billion, the National Science Foundation reported in 2025.

It's safe to say the state's colleges and universities have a penchant for industry partnership and pioneering R&D. Drawn from university newsrooms, these highlights from a cross-section of those institutions show where the scientific research is going ... and where economic development is likely to follow.

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

In May 2025, SIU Carbondale reached rarefied air: After attaining the designation of Research 1: Very High Spending and Doctorate Production (R1) from the Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education in February, the school learned it was one of 479 schools earning the Opportunity Colleges and Universities designation, part of Carnegie's new Student Access and Earnings Classification, which measures whether institutions are enrolling and creating opportunities for students in communities they serve and whether students earn competitive wages after

they attend. SIU Carbondale is one of only 21 schools to attain both designations.

SIU Carbondale is one of six R1 universities in Illinois, including Loyola University Chicago, Northwestern University, University of Chicago, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and U of I Chicago. In 2023, SIU Carbondale had 102 research doctorates and \$58.3 million in research expenditures, a university release stated, helped not only by work on the Carbondale campus in such areas as rare earth element recovery, cognitive computing and unleaded aviation fuel, but also the School of Medicine campus in the state capital of Springfield.

PARTNERING WITH INDUSTRY

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Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

For the fiscal year ended in June 2024, SIUE’s Office of Research & Projects reported 188 research and project awards valued at more than \$33 million. Among the most significant were 17 awards worth nearly \$4 million that went to the National Corn-to-Ethanol Center at SIUE.

In March 2025, a 55,000-sq.-ft. workspace, research lab and social impact hub in downtown Alton, Illinois, called The Wedge and SIUE announced a partnership that they said will “transform the economic landscape of the greater Alton Metro Region” when The Wedge opened in April.

“This partnership represents a pivotal moment for our region,” said AltonWorks CEO John Simmons. “By bringing together SIUE’s research capabilities and educational programming with The Wedge’s innovative workspace, we’re creating unprecedented opportunities for economic growth, workforce development and community engagement.” The project followed the installation of a \$20 million 10G fiber network made possible by funding from the State of Illinois.

Northern Illinois University

In May 2025, the NIU Engineering at RVC (Rock Valley College) team took Grand Champion honors for the second year in a row at the National Fluid Power Association (NFPA) national competition in Ames, Iowa, which involves the construction and operation of a specially designed bicycle. The NIU Engineering Program at Rock Valley College in Rockford was formed in 2016 in collaboration with regional industry partners to foster talent in the Rockford area. Students can earn their associate degree in engineering from RVC and go on to earn a bachelor’s in

engineering from NIU, all on the RVC campus in Rockford. A crucial industry partner to the institutions and to the NFPA competition is Danfoss Drives, a manufacturer based in the Rockford area.

Ongoing work at NIU includes projects backed by federal grants that focus on lithium-ion batteries, superconducting microelectronics and hail storms.

Illinois State University

The state’s first public university is located in Normal, where Rivian continues to invest in a major manufacturing complex. Rivian Director of Trade Compliance Julie Hoeniges in May 2025 was appointed to serve as a member of the ISU Board of Trustees. A total of \$31.6 million in external grant funding has been awarded to Redbird scholars, the school notes. Among the school’s innovations are the creation of the ARCS (Advancing Research and Creative Scholarship) program to support interdisciplinary scholarship; a new Connected Communities Initiative between ISU and OSF HealthCare; a new data science degree program; and the establishment of a new college of engineering.

Home to more than 20,000 students, Illinois State is also home to such industry partnership resources as the Illinois Innovation Network hub; the Adlai Stevenson II Center for community and economic development; the Center for Insurance and Risk Management; and the Means Center for Entrepreneurial Studies.

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

In March 2025, Wolf Creek Farm, based in Williamsville, was named the recipient of the Glen “GB” Brandt Prize for Ag Entrepreneurism at the 2025 AgTech Innovation Summit hosted by the University of Illinois

Research Park, which is home to more than 120 companies and more than 2,000 affiliated employees. Over the years it’s supported more than 350 startups with an array of assets that include Class A office space, wet labs, prototyping labs, light manufacturing, the EnterpriseWorks incubator and LabWorks, a facility that opened in early 2024 to support growth-stage, deep-tech and science-based startups.

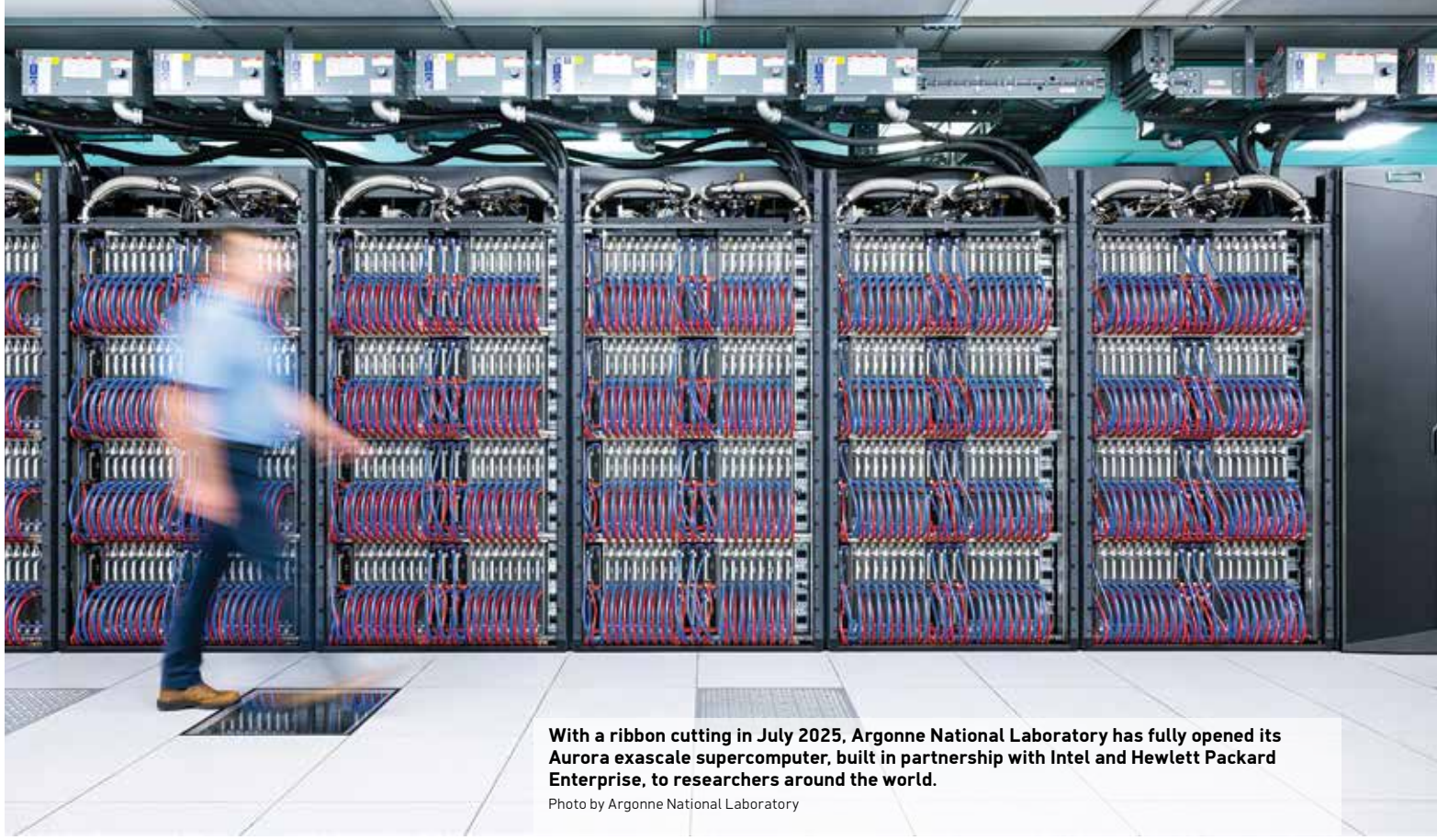
Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) in July 2025 awarded EnterpriseWorks \$3 million through the state’s Tech Incubator Enhancement Grant Program in order to help the university move forward with a second incubator.

“The \$20 million project has been scoped to align with growing opportunities in bioprocessing and light manufacturing across the region within the Illinois Fermentation and Agriculture Biomanufacturing Hub,” the university announced. Since its opening in 2003, companies launched at EnterpriseWorks have raised over \$1.4 billion in venture capital and \$200 million in Small Business Innovation Research federal grant funding.

In November 2024, the Center for Advanced Bioenergy and Bioproducts Innovation (CABBI) opened the \$252.5 million, U.S. Department of Energy-funded Plant Biology Innovation Greenhouse in Research Park.

Northwestern University

With more than \$600 million in federal obligations for science and engineering in FY2023, Northwestern University ranked No. 18 in the nation. A new steering committee looks to further leverage data science and artificial intelligence (DS/AI) to enhance research and boost discovery.



With a ribbon cutting in July 2025, Argonne National Laboratory has fully opened its Aurora exascale supercomputer, built in partnership with Intel and Hewlett Packard Enterprise, to researchers around the world.
Photo by Argonne National Laboratory

“By embracing our unique cross-disciplinary strengths,” said Northwestern University President Michael Schill, “we can make groundbreaking contributions to shape the future of DS/ AI and address society’s most pressing challenges.”

NAISE, a collaborative research initiative founded in 2011 as a partnership between Northwestern and Argonne National Laboratory, serves as a multidisciplinary hub that bridges the expertise and resources of both institutions, fostering cutting-edge research in materials science, energy, environmental sustainability and computational modeling.

In September 2024, the Center for Regenerative Nanomedicine (CRN), formerly part of the now-closed Simpson Querrey Institute for BioNanotechnology (SQI), became a standalone University Research Institute and Center (URIC), one of nearly two dozen at the campus that engage around 700 faculty members from more than 100 departments.

Materials are certainly material

to efforts by Northwestern engineers in the new US National Science Foundation Human AugmentatioN via Dexterity Engineering Research Center (HAND ERC), where they are working to develop dexterous, intelligent robot hands with the ability to assist humans with manufacturing, caregiving and the handling of precious or dangerous materials.

“We’re working toward the day, probably a decade down the road, when a small manufacturing firm can hire people who know its business, are not programmers, but can buy a manufacturing robot and put it to use very quickly and quite differently from the way robots are used today,” said Professor J. Edward Colgate, director of HAND ERC, who with a colleague in the early 1990s invented new collaborative robots or “cobots” in partnership with General Motors.

University of Chicago

On July 24 at the Global Quantum Forum in Chicago, IBM and the University of Chicago

announced their intent to offer startups at the university’s Duality quantum accelerator resources and support to develop quantum software and explore algorithms and applications that could help unlock the potential of quantum computers. This includes access to the IBM Quantum System Two planned to be deployed at the Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park (IQMP), a multibillion-dollar, 128-acre public-private development located on the site of a former U. S. Steel South Works plant near the mouth of the Calumet River on Chicago’s Southeast Side.

The park will include shared cryogenic facilities, equipment labs and research spaces.

Duality is the nation’s first quantum startup accelerator led by multiple research and industry leaders, including the Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the University of Chicago and the Chicago Quantum Exchange, along with founding partners the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Argonne National Laboratory and P33. 🍷



by ALEXIS ELMORE

Became A Key Ingredient

Increased product demand is a welcome challenge for any company, especially when a farmer-owned cooperative becomes the nation's fastest-growing ice cream brand. In the past four years, over 4.4 million new consumers set out to purchase a 48-ounce family-sized Tillamook ice cream tub, and more than half of these sweet teeth were located on the U.S. East Coast.

There was just one not-so-sweet logistical problem—the Tillamook County Creamery Association (TCCA) had been exclusively churning out ice cream from its homebase in Tillamook County, Oregon, for the past 116 years.

A milestone moment had arrived. The company decided it was time to explore a national expansion for the first time since its founding.

A site selection search led TCCA to Central Illinois, a region known

best for its agricultural strength. TCCA Executive Vice President and Chief Supply Chain Officer Mike Bever says the Macon County city of Decatur stood out for five reasons: the city's strong business climate, affordable utilities, access to high-quality dairy, prime location and close proximity to new customers in the U.S. Midwest and East Coast.

"While we do not disclose the exact cost figures publicly, this facility was a major investment for our company and one that we know will continue to deliver benefits for our business long into the future," he notes.

In June, operations officially began at the 41,000-sq.-ft. Decatur facility. Production will focus on Tillamook's 48-ounce family-size ice cream and its 3-gallon foodservice ice cream products, although Bever says a potential

growth opportunity would be incorporating a pint size depending on market demand.

No flavor will be left behind once the plant fully ramps up, as all 33 Tillamook flavors will be introduced. Fifty new jobs have been created at the facility, but that number is expected to scale alongside increased production capacity.

"We estimate that the facility will produce nearly 3 million gallons by the end of 2025, and over the next two years, we will ramp up to 15.5 million gallons annually," says Bever. "Some flavors currently in production are Tillamook's classic flavors like Vanilla Bean, Oregon Strawberry and Mudslide."

The most vital aspect of this new facility was forming a partnership with the Midwest-based dairy co-op, Foremost Farms Cooperative. It is one of the largest

dairy cooperatives in the nation, encompassing farmers in seven Midwest states — Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin— and will serve as the Decatur facility's direct milk supplier.

"As with all our milk supply partners, Foremost aligns with TCCA's values and adheres to the Farmers Assuring Responsible Management program standards, a common set of practices for the humane and ethical treatment of dairy cows," Bever continues. "Which is a priority for Tillamook for all of the milk we source for our products."

Beyond Tillamook's new venture in the city, Decatur has become a hotspot for forward-looking industry activity.

Last year, plant-based food and industrial ingredients manufacturer Primient announced it would invest \$400 million to enhance its Decatur facility. The project will modernize its feed, germ and drying processes; improve syrup refining; enhance safety and equipment; and provide workforce training and

development opportunities.

Meanwhile, France-based Innovafeed launched its first U.S. Insect Innovation Center in Decatur where *Hermetia illucens*, also known as black soldier flies, will be bred. Direct access to the largest corn mill operations in the world, owned by ADM, utilizes ample corn-by products to develop insect meal, oil and soil amendment used for sustainable animal and pet feed.

"Innovative, exciting new approaches to agricultural and environmental challenges are what Illinois is all about, from the invention of the farm silo to global leaders like Innovafeed," said Governor JB Pritzker. "This expansion, perfectly situated in Illinois's rich corn country, demonstrates a commitment to Illinois as a place to grow and continue to innovate, and I'm glad to welcome Innovafeed to Illinois."

Tasteful Confidence in Illinois

While the state has made a name for itself in several key industries, its agricultural dominance remains unwavering. The industry

makes up 13% of the state's gross domestic product, contributing about \$120 billion annually to the Illinois economy. This activity has positioned Illinois as the largest exporting state in the U.S. Midwest, accounting for \$13.7 billion in total exports in 2023.

Industry expertise runs deep, capable of handling every level of development from traditional farming, food processing and manufacturing to advanced research and technological innovation. In Central Illinois, one of the largest U.S. Department of Agriculture National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research (NCAUR) Centers in the U.S. is located in Peoria.

At any given time about 200 scientists are here exploring ways to advance sustainable agriculture practices and food safety and tackle environmental problems that affect public health, economic development and environmental quality. NCAUR has become a

The Decatur plant is the first step in TCCA's national expansion.
Photos courtesy of Tillamook

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key resource promoting STEM education for educators and students of all ages throughout Illinois communities, providing various camps, career fairs, hands-on lab experience and in-depth programs throughout the year.

The addition of the Illinois Fermentation and Agriculture Biomanufacturing (iFAB) Tech Hub to the region brings a fresh layer of R&D opportunity to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and over 30 research partners. iFAB leverages Illinois' top cash crops, corn and soybeans, to pursue new biomanufacturing applications in the development of fuel alternatives, advanced food proteins, new textiles and fibers, commercial grade oils, pigments and cosmetics.

In June, National Foodworks announced the Decatur-based company would be joining the iFAB consortium as its 34th member. The contract food manufacturer works with established and startup food companies to formulate, test and scale new products, which will be a valuable resource for early production runs testing out newly discovered fermented ingredients.



Home to more than 400 agtech companies and over 2,000 food manufacturers, this level of innovative activity and collaboration is far from concentrated in Illinois. The state's magnetic pull for companies looking to drive innovation forward has resulted in over 900,000 jobs directly related to food and agriculture, according to the Illinois Agri-Food Alliance. As companies look to shake up North American markets with exciting new products, all strategic roads lead to Illinois.

It's what led Ferrero to invest \$75 million to begin expanding its Franklin Park operations to

exclusively manufacture Nutella Peanut, the company's first new Nutella flavor to ever be released. In Huntley, Germany-based Silesia broke ground in June to establish a new \$40 million manufacturing and R&D center to explore product innovation and grow its presence in the American market.

It's hard to pass up the state's robust supply chains, infrastructure, talent and research capabilities — and companies aren't doing so. In the past year, Illinois has drawn in over 100 new food and beverage projects around the state as companies look to expand or cultivate new roots. 🌱

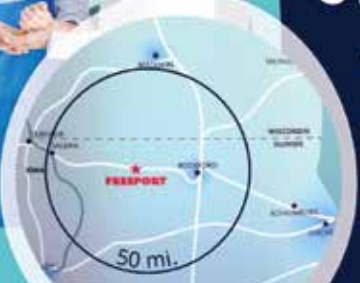


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Where Successful Outcomes Take Shape

by MARK AREND

In Chicagoland and Champaign — and in Peoria, Rockford, Carbondale and Springfield — Illinois' innovation ecosystem is hiding in plain sight. Drive through or by the campuses of Bradley University in Peoria, Northern Illinois University in Rockford, Southern Illinois University in Carbondale or the University of Chicago and the Illinois Institute of Technology in the Windy City, and you are steps from one or more of Illinois' many business incubators and accelerators.

According to Chicago's Economic Landscape, a May 2025 report from World Business Chicago and the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership, the Chicago area is home to nearly 100 incubators and innovation centers that nurture startups in IT, manufacturing, life sciences, logistics and other industries.

Workspace — lab or otherwise — is an immediate need they can fill. But access to networking, mentorship and early-stage funding is in abundant supply

too. More than 1,300 startups in the Chicago area have secured \$2.3 billion in pre-venture-capital funding since 2016, according to the report, and more than 200 of those advanced to later funding or other successful outcomes.

Incubator Enhancement Grants

Illinois is investing in incubators to ensure future successful outcomes. In mid-July, \$7 million in Tech Incubator Enhancement Grant (TIEG) funds were awarded to four recipients. The grants, administered by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), support entrepreneurship and innovation in key growth industries and strengthen the resilience of both existing and new startup incubators, according to a release from Governor JB Pritzker's office. "Our technology incubators and start-up ecosystem are positioning our state as a powerhouse in the economy of tomorrow, and I am proud to be strengthening our investment in that future," said the governor.



The Chicago mHUB startup community has raised over \$2.2 billion in capital and launched 1,702 new products statewide.

Photo courtesy of mHUB



The TIEG recipients are (1) the 518 Collective at Carl Sandburg College (\$1.8 million), Galesburg, a proposed ag-tech-focused incubator; (2) the DeepTech Innovation Lab at mHUB Chicago (\$590,200), specializing in HardTech, or digital and hardware integration; (3) EnterpriseWorks 2.0 at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (\$3 million), a new facility at the Research Park in Champaign-Urbana for startup companies with an emphasis on laboratory and manufacturing commercial spaces for scaling companies; and (4) SouthernTECH High-Tech Food Incubator (\$1.6 million) at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, for a new food processing and manufacturing-based incubator that will provide a lineup of high-tech, energy-efficient and future-proof kitchen equipment. “Strategic incentivized investments in key sectors will

provide critical support to both new and existing technology incubators throughout the state,” noted DCEO Director Kristin Richards.

Statewide Incubator Network

Galesburg, Chicago, Champaign-Urbana and Carbondale. The TIEG recipients’ geographic diversity across Illinois is Exhibit A showing the state’s startup and innovation ecosystem is not confined to the Chicago metro. Exhibit B is the Illinois University Incubator Network (IUIN) that links university incubators around the state to technical assistance resources and a wide range of business startup services. IUIN partners with the University of Illinois EDA University Center and the Illinois FAST (Federal and State Technology) Partnership Center at the University of Illinois Research Park. The latter supports technology-based entrepreneurs (TBE) and startups seeking SBIR/

STTR funding for small business innovation research.

IUIN members include:

- EnterpriseWorks at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- The Peoria NEXT Innovation Center at Bradley University in Peoria
- The University Technology Park (UTP) on the Illinois Institute of Technology campus in Chicago
- EIGERlab at Northern Illinois University in Rockford
- The Technology Innovation Lab of the University of Illinois at Chicago, in the Illinois Medical District
- The Garage at Northwestern University in Evanston
- The Incubator at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale
- The University of Chicago’s Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation

- Innovate Springfield at the University of Illinois at Springfield
- The Helix 51 Incubator at Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science in North Chicago
- The Business Innovation and Growth (BIG) Center at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago
- Ignite Lab at Loyola University Chicago

Not all business incubators in Illinois are located at or administered by universities. Distillery Labs, in Peoria, opened in 2024 as the region’s base for entrepreneurship programs and startups with 40,000 sq. ft. of space. It’s where startup accelerator gener8tor, in partnership with OSF HealthCare, Peoria County, Hanson Professional Services, Central Illinois Angels and Attollo, will house its annual seven-week gBETA pre-accelerator programs for local entrepreneurs.

“This next-level support will cultivate entrepreneurs and startups from a number of sources, including those that may result from concepts and inventions from local companies, like OSF, and provide them with additional expertise and access to capital to take their solution to a commercial product or service,” said Kip McCoy, vice president for innovation integration at Peoria-based OSF HealthCare, announcing the company’s sponsorship of the gBETA program. “Traditional economic development usually focuses on business attraction and helping existing, and usually larger, local companies grow,” says Christopher Setti, CEO of the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council. “But supporting startups — and particularly scalable and innovative startups — should be

considered the critical third leg of the stool. Creating a vibrant startup ecosystem can yield significant economic results, and today’s small idea can turn into tomorrow’s major win.”

Since launching in 2015, according to OSF Healthcare, gBETA program alumni have raised more than \$188 million in capital and created more than 2,000 jobs across the U.S. and Canada. The program helps startups gain early customer traction for their product or idea and establish and execute on metrics that make them competitive applicants for full-time, equity-based accelerators or seed investment.

Portals to Growth

Portal Innovations helps startup biotech enterprises meet their early workspace needs with wet/dry lab and office facilities in several cities, including Chicago. It has 50,000 sq. ft. on the Fulton Labs campus in the city’s booming Fulton Market neighborhood. It’s where Northwestern University spinoff Grove Biopharma got its start. The company is developing its Bionic Biologics drug development platform. In April, it announced the close of a \$30 million Series A financing, which will enable the company to expand its footprint in the Portal space.

Portal Innovations and the Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the University of Chicago are developing a 22,000-sq.-ft. science startup incubator at the Hyde Park Labs development called the UChicago Science Incubator. Portal will manage the design, buildout and support programming in collaboration with the Polsky Center, according to the University of Chicago.

“The partnership between the University of Chicago and

Portal Innovations underscores the significance of collaboration between academia and industry,” said Juan de Pablo, executive vice president for science, innovation, national laboratories and global initiatives at UChicago, in a statement. “By working together, we are better equipped to support our researchers and scientists in advancing their scientific research and innovation toward impact through commercialization.”

“We are thrilled to partner with the University of Chicago, a storied institution that has fueled scientific breakthroughs in biotech, energy, quantum, and beyond,” added John Flavin, founder and CEO of Portal Innovations. “With science moving quickly, it’s necessary to connect academic researchers with private industry including entrepreneurs, venture capitalists and corporate partners to commercialize innovation while attracting and retaining talent locally.”

The University of Chicago also is partnering with CIC, a global developer of innovation workspace, on a state-of-the-art lab incubator at Hyde Park. CIC Labs at Hyde Park Labs will include a facility spanning 20,000 sq. ft. of wet lab and office space, operating within UChicago’s leased space in Hyde Park Labs.

The University of Chicago says the CIC space will focus on startup companies of UChicago faculty members, helping to extend the impact of their research, discoveries and intellectual property. 🍷

The Integrated Bioprocessing Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign is a bioprocessing product research and development facility that bridges the gap from basic discovery to commercialization. Marissa Nyland is assistant director of operations and safety at IBRL.

Photo by Fred Zwicky of University of Illinois Public Affairs

Wieland's East Alton site has been in operation for over 100 years.
Photo courtesy of Wieland Group



Why Illinois Manufacturers Remain in Stock

by ALEXIS ELMORE

There's a variety of ways to make it in Illinois — and the state's extensive roster of over 13,000 manufacturers take that notion seriously.

These operations support more than 588,000 jobs across the state, a resilient manufacturing workforce base that ranks fifth nationally and third in the Midwest. In securing the No. 2 state for new and expanding companies for the third year in a row, Illinois knows how to reinforce its production powerhouse status.

When New-Jersey based Raptor Power Systems Founder Evan El Koury was looking to expand the company's manufacturing

footprint outside of the state for the first time, he found everything his businesses needed to scale in Champaign County.

Raptor currently runs two manufacturing facilities in New Jersey, producing mission-critical power distribution units (PDUs) and uninterruptible power supplies (UPS) used for military, industrial, data center and crypto mining applications. El Koury learned the ropes from his father Peter, who started Powerspec Inc. in the early 1990s as a UPS systems contract manufacturer for the military. About 14 years ago, El Koury saw the opportunity to diversify the small company's product portfolio,

shifting focus to data centers and establishing Raptor Power Systems as a subsidiary of Powerspec.

The flexibility of operating as a small business allowed El Koury's team to develop a product that solved supply chain issues faced by larger original equipment manufacturers like Siemens, ABB and Schneider. The company later landed large contracts that launched Raptor's product into the existing U.S. supply chain, marking the shift from operations within a small-scale garage shop to soon welcoming its largest manufacturing location to date.

During an extensive site selection search, the East Central Illinois

“It was one of the best mixes. When we were hunting spaces a lot of the times I found that where you might find a little cheaper land or might find cheaper labor, what you're not finding is a good mix of professional and blue collar in the same community with a low cost of living.”

— Evan El Koury, Founder, Raptor Power Systems

region stood out for its low cost of living, access to University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign talent and programming, transportation infrastructure, a large regional manufacturing workforce and community support.

“It was one of the best mixes,” El Koury says. “When we were hunting spaces a lot of the times I found that where you might find a little cheaper land or might find cheaper labor, what you're not finding is a good mix of professional and blue collar in the same community with a low cost of living.”

Between two sites in the region, Raptor purchased a 65,000-sq.-ft. building from real estate developer Atkins Group on a site that would allow for an expansion up to 300,000 additional sq. ft.

“We're starting a little bit smaller,” says El Koury. “In a short order, I can add this extra space as required and turn this area into a campus that we can call our forever home.”

Skilled talent was a critical factor, as Raptor's manufacturing process has yet to turn fully automated. The company instead trains its employees to be artisans in assembling remote power

panels (RPP) and floor power PDUs. RPPs between 400 to 600 amps typically take about four hours to assemble, while PDUs between 500 and 1,000 kVA take up to 30 hours per unit to build. Currently, the company's New Jersey facilities produce about 400 RPPs and 100 PDUs a month. Once operational, the north Champaign plant will contribute an additional 1,100 RPPs and 600 PDUs per month.

To ensure a pipeline of skilled local talent, Raptor is working to finalize plans with local economic developers to develop a community college program to train and certify workers to construct these power systems. In the prime era of data center development, with industry leaders such as Microsoft, Meta and Oracle planning projects up to a decade out, Raptor is positioning itself to meet new opportunities to adapt to evolving industry needs.

As the new facility gears up to meet its first contractual obligation in August, El Koury says activity is bustling at the facility as materials and 75 new employees file in.

“To see it really coming together has been special for me,” El Koury says.

MICROCOSM OF THE MIDWEST

Located on the urban/rural edge of the Chicagoland Region, Kane County has innovative agriculture, diverse manufacturing, and scenic beauty representing the best of the Midwest.

Home to Fermilab and “The Quantum Garage”. This new flagship research facility supports the emerging quantum computing sector advancing the next level of scientific research and information technology.

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“This investment marks a significant advancement in our manufacturing capabilities in Illinois and across the United States by enhancing our efficiency, precision, and potential output capacity. It also ensures that we remain adaptable in a constantly evolving market. We are well-positioned to increase and improve our production of essential copper and copper alloy components, which are vital for establishing a robust supply chain across various industries and end markets.”

— Greg Keown, President, Wieland Rolling & Recycling

“Especially starting in a 10-by-10 office here to now having this entire factory and being president of the entire company has been a heck of a journey.”

Resources Designed to Scale

Approval of the state’s \$55.1 billion FY26 budget from the Illinois General Assembly in June provided space to introduce a new manufacturing tax credit program, while leaving room to make improvements to key tax initiatives including the Reimagining Energy and Vehicles in Illinois (REV Illinois) program and the Economic Development for a Growing Economy (EDGE) tax credit.

The fresh Advancing Innovating Manufacturing for Illinois (AIM Illinois) tax credit is designed for manufacturers delivering significant capital investment in the state. It takes a keen focus to small and medium-sized companies looking to make large investments toward equipment or facility needs. The three-tiered AIM credit covers a maximum of 3% of capital expenditures for investments between \$10 million to \$50 million made in Illinois, increasing to coverage of up to 7% on investments of \$100 million or more. It’s a move

that leadership hopes will help land and retain growing businesses.

Combined with programs such as REV Illinois and EDGE, manufacturers spanning any number of industries can find an incentive program that fits their business needs. Industry feedback led the state to increase incentives provided to companies investing over \$100 million on a project, while REV Illinois extends its program eligibility to now cover additional EV supply chain industries.

The introduction of AIM Illinois builds upon the new project investment successes bolstered by the REV Illinois and EDGE programs. This traction continues to fuel expansions seen statewide, although evolving alongside the needs of its small to mid-size manufacturers was a chief growth opportunity pinpointed by Illinois leadership.

Why It Works

REV Illinois was a sweet incentive package addition Wieland Rolled Products North America wasn’t looking to pass up when it announced plans to invest \$500 million in the modernization of its East Alton site.

In March 2025, Wieland broke ground on the project designed to

help increase production capacity of components required for EV, EV charging infrastructure and renewable energy production. The East Alton facility will be fitted with a preheat furnace, hot mill, milling line, cold mill and intralogistics systems. This investment further demonstrates the company’s long-term commitment of operation in Illinois, which includes their five other facilities in Carol Stream, Granite City, Montgomery, Tinley Park and Wheeling. The company is eligible for up to \$150 million in REV Illinois and other state incentives over the next 30 years.

“This investment marks a significant advancement in our manufacturing capabilities in Illinois and across the United States by enhancing our efficiency, precision, and potential output capacity. It also ensures that we remain adaptable in a constantly evolving market,” says Wieland Rolling & Recycling President Greg Keown. “We are well-positioned to increase and improve our production of essential copper and copper alloy components, which are vital for establishing a robust supply chain across various industries and end markets.”

Keown says the East Alton facility, which has been in operation for over 100 years, embodies the hard work, dedication and passion required to meet North American market needs. The tremendous investment support Wieland received from Illinois state leadership and local institutions in the form of incentives was a reminder of why the company chose to avoid new site exploration and reinvest in the community.

“These upgrades will transform the plant into a world-class production facility equipped with modern technology, a high level of automation and lean processes,” he notes. “This will ensure superior product quality and provide best-in-class service to our Wieland customers.”

In Chicago, Freedman Seating Company chose to take advantage of EDGE when pursuing new facility equipment upgrades and site improvements. The \$4 million project follows the recent expansion of the 71-year-old facility, which now spans 650,000 sq. ft. in the city’s Austin neighborhood.

New equipment will enhance operational efficiency and grow the company’s manufacturing capabilities, as the plant currently produces 2,000 seats per day across bus, rail, maritime and truck markets. The investment will create an additional 50 jobs in the region once complete.

“Programs like EDGE don’t give businesses a handout — they help level the playing field. They allow companies like ours to invest, grow and compete while creating more opportunities where they are needed most,” said Freedman Seating Company CEO Craig Freedman. “Without real, tangible support, businesses will leave. When that happens, communities suffer. We continue to invest in our facilities and our people because we believe in the West Side, we believe in Chicago, and we believe in Illinois.”



Raptor Power Systems is opening its largest manufacturing site in Champaign.

Photo courtesy of Raptor Power Systems

COLES Together

DCEO Site Readiness Grant Awarded to City of Mattoon

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) has approved a DCEO Site Readiness Infrastructure Grant for total project cost of \$2,947,000 for electrical capacity near the 1000 North Mattoon Charleston Industrial Parkway Corridor.

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All Systems Go

by ADAM BRUNS

Double Black Diamond Solar in central Illinois, the largest operating solar facility east of the Mississippi, is projected to produce power equivalent to the annual needs of 100,000 homes.

Photo courtesy of Swift Current Energy

Illinois Governor Pritzker JB Pritzker has committed to a state goal of 1 million electric vehicles on the road by 2030 and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The groundwork is in place to make both of those goals reality.

Since it went into effect on January 1, 2022, the Reimagining Energy and Vehicles in Illinois (REV Illinois) has backed two dozen incentive agreements across the state, from multiple investments by Rivian and its suppliers in Normal to Gotion's battery plant in Manteno and bus companies and Damera in Channahon and Peoria County, respectively.

All told, those deals anticipate 4,388 new jobs created and 8,259 jobs retained, including 800 jobs at five locations in the state operated by Wieland North America and its affiliates, and 570 jobs maintained by Smalley Steel Ring Co. and The Greenhill Co. in Lake Zurich.

EV Update

April 2025 saw the grand opening of TCCI Manufacturing's \$45 million Clean Energy Innovation Hub in Decatur. The project was first in line among the 24 REV Illinois agreements. In addition to a new compressor line, the multifaceted project includes two partnerships with Richland Community College (see Workforce elsewhere in this publication).

"The Clean Energy Innovation Hub represents the kind of bold, future-focused investment that will define the next era of American manufacturing," said Mark Denzler, president and CEO of the Illinois Manufacturers' Association. "By onshoring critical EV component production and launching a dedicated workforce academy, TCCI and its partners are not only reinforcing Illinois' leadership in clean energy — they're setting a national standard for how industry, education and

government can come together to drive innovation, sustainability and economic growth."

Perhaps no project in the Illinois EV and battery ecosystem has received more attention in the past year than the \$2 billion, 2,600-job battery factory coming to tiny Manteno Village in Kankakee County from manufacturer Gotion, which is renovating an abandoned Kmart warehouse. "Once the plant is open and operating, Gotion will be paying real estate taxes up to \$2 million a year for the next 30 years — which is double what the empty property contributes now," says a county summary of the project.

The Manteno facility, another project in the REV Illinois portfolio, is moving forward on pace, say Kankakee County Economic Development President and CEO Tim Nugent and Business Development Vice President Angela Morrey.

Gotion as of July 2025 had posted

42 jobs in Manteno, including a module & pack line controls engineer position with a pay range of \$80,000 to \$150,000 requiring at least an undergraduate engineering degree and two years in a manufacturing environment. Nugent says the payroll is at around 300, with more jobs arriving all the time.

"They are always doing job fairs, and hiring strategically," he says.

"This is a different manufacturing facility than what a lot of us would perceive," says Nugent, noting the cleanliness and prevalence of the color white in the 1.5-million-sq.-ft. facility. "Walk in there now and it reminds me of a lab." The Kmart facility had more than 100 garage door bays. Many of those have been converted to windows to welcome more natural light inside.

Before full-scale EV battery production comes online, the factory's first manufacturing line will likely make battery storage systems, the semi-trailer-sized facilities used for storing power at solar and wind farms and at data centers. Illinois has plenty of those to serve.

"Gotion has been meeting with data center people to supply some of these ESS systems to get them up and going until the utility can provide more power to them," Nugent says. "It wasn't top of mind before. The power companies are so stretched. Once the utility does get the power to them in a few years, they can use these systems as backups or sell them ... Some of the data centers have been able to increase their speed to market because they can get some supplemental power they didn't have before."

State funds have contributed to

the setup of training programs for Gotion with Kankakee Community College. Morrey says the college "has been really instrumental with Gotion" as part of the institution's overall focus on skills for renewable energy and assembly. Gotion also is working with Olivet Nazarene University as well as such schools as Bradley University, University of Chicago and Governors State University in state, in addition to nearby heavy hitters Notre Dame and Purdue.

"Everybody in the region is very familiar with the Gotion factory and wants to get involved," says Nugent. "Once the facility is up and going, they potentially will have classes in the facility. Manufacturing will be so far advanced from what manufacturing has been."



Gotion will build a \$2 billion plant in Manteno, Illinois.

Photo by Joe Hendrickson: Getty Images

SAF: The Next Frontier

Projects on the drawing board from the liquid fuel sector could drive an entirely different clean energy industry and supply base: sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) and the farms that supply its raw material. While there currently are no operating SAF facilities in the state, three have received REV

Illinois agreements to help them reach production: (Avina, Crysalis, and Monarch Energy)

"Our facility will take advantage of existing rail and pipeline infrastructure for efficient delivery of ASTM-certified fuel to Chicago O'Hare and other major airports around the Midwest region," said Avina Clean Hydrogen Founder and CEO Vishal Shah when the project was announced in December 2024.

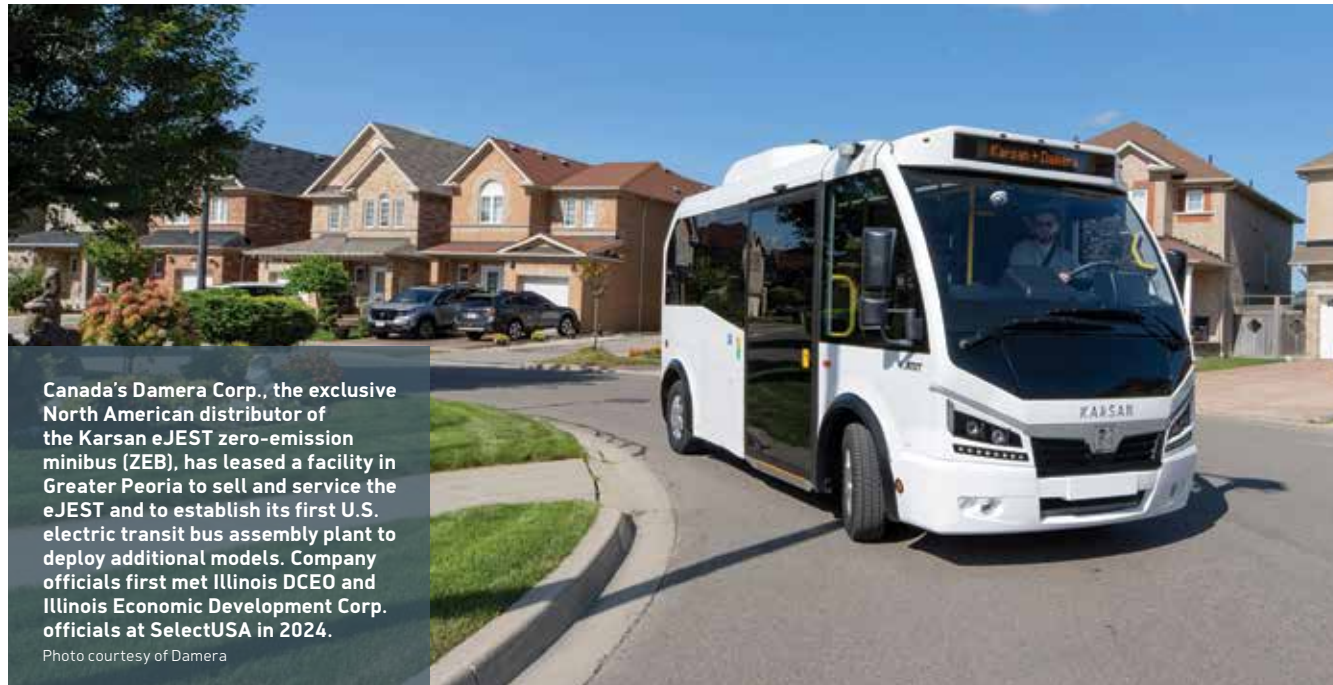
"If the proposed SAF projects come to fruition, they may provide a significant new market opportunity for Illinois corn and soybeans used as feedstock," says Illinois Farm Bureau Assistant Director of Energy Noelle Neef.

Illinois in the meantime has already prepared the soil. The state Illinois was the first in the nation

to implement a SAF tax incentive, providing a \$1.50/gallon tax credit for SAF sold to or used by an air carrier. When the Federal Aviation Administration announced nearly \$300 million for SAF projects across the country. Illinois-based projects at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Marquis Energy and Buckeye Terminals were selected, as was Chicago-based LanzaJet's SAF plant in Georgia.

At the state's inaugural two-day SAF Conference in 2024,

Illinois Governor JB Pritzker said, "As a leader in biomanufacturing and aviation, Illinois is well-suited to lead the charge on sustainable aviation fuel adoption and manufacturing. The shift to SAF will no doubt play an important role in Illinois' long-term climate goals, all while promoting innovation and creating jobs for our state."



Canada's Damera Corp., the exclusive North American distributor of the Karsan eJEST zero-emission minibus (ZEB), has leased a facility in Greater Peoria to sell and service the eJEST and to establish its first U.S. electric transit bus assembly plant to deploy additional models. Company officials first met Illinois DCEO and Illinois Economic Development Corp. officials at SelectUSA in 2024.

Photo courtesy of Damera

Check the Dashboard

As those SAF plants come online, they will add revenue to some \$88 million in land lease payments that clean power projects are paying to farmers, ranchers and other private landowners, according to the American Clean Power Association, which has tracked \$23 billion worth of wind, solar and energy storage projects in the state that pay more than \$98 million in state, local and property taxes annually. The state is No. 6 in the nation in clean power capacity (No. 5 in wind alone) at 11,407 MW and the clean power sector employs 44,999 people, says the ACPA.

SAF would also align as another opportunity for farmers alongside the \$10.8 billion worth of corn produced in the state annually to make ethanol at one of the 13 ethanol plants in Illinois, which together account for 25% of national ethanol production.

Up-to-date information on all aspects of the clean energy scene can be found at the Illinois Clean Energy Dashboard, found at cleanenergy.illinois.gov. That dashboard, operated by the Illinois Power Agency (IPA), in August found

that solar power in the state totaled 6,187 MW by the end of Q1 2025 with over 120,000 projects, helped in part by IPA initiatives such as Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar For All.

"Due to the Future Energy Jobs Act (2017) and the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (2021), the state experienced a significant increase in the rate of new solar project development," says the IPA. "Prior to 2017, Illinois featured only about 80 MW of solar projects operating in the state."

In March, the Solar Energy Industry Association (SEIA) announced that Illinois is No. 4 in the nation for solar energy capacity. "In 2024, about 2.5 gigawatts of capacity were installed in the state, which is about half of all the previously installed solar energy equipment," the SEIA stated, crediting the same legislation cited by the IPA.

Signs of win-win benefits of solar can be found in the same central Illinois region being boosted by Rivian and others. In late July the Springfield Sangamon Growth Alliance (SSGA) announced a 20-year Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) with Swift Current Energy,

developer of the Double Black Diamond solar installation, that includes a \$5 million commitment over the next two decades to support community priorities.

Double Black Diamond, which will provide clean power equivalent to the annual needs of 100,000 homes, employed 500 during construction and will be paying \$100 million in property taxes over the life of the project to Sangamon and Morgan counties.

The City of Chicago is sourcing around 70% of the power that is used for its facilities — including O'Hare and Midway airports — from Swift Current's Double Black Diamond Solar project. "Additionally, Cook County, CVS Health, Loyola University Chicago, PPG, State Farm and TransUnion are sourcing power from the project via Constellation NewEnergy, Inc.," according to a release.

"Double Black Diamond is more than a solar project. It is a bold example of what's possible when government, economic developers and communities work together toward shared goals," said SSGA CEO Ryan McCrady. 🌞



The latest CNBC Top States for Business ranking puts Illinois in the top 10 states for infrastructure, one of the 10 broad areas of competitiveness used to construct the ranking. Among other factors, according to the methodology, the infrastructure component considers "the vitality of each state's transportation system by the value and volume of goods shipped by air, waterways, roads and rail. We look at the condition of highways and bridges, the availability of air travel and the time it takes to commute to work."

Those infrastructure assets are of keen interest to the more than 21,000 transportation, logistics and distribution companies doing business in Illinois, which combined employ more than

346,000 people and contribute close to \$50 billion annually to the state's economy. These warehouse, freight, 3PL and other players give companies in the Midwest a fast lane to the rest of the U.S. and the world, whether they're bringing raw materials in or shipping finished products out.

Illinois had the second highest number of new or expanded logistics facility announcements between 2020 and 2024, according to the Conway Projects Database, and Chicagoland ranked first in the metros category (see charts). The Windy City has the largest inventory of big-box facility space (warehouse or distribution center of 200K+ sq. ft.) in North America (610M+ sq. ft.), according to the Illinois Economic Development Corporation.

by MARK AREND

Canadian National Railway's Homewood Campus is benefiting from new capital investment.

Photo credit: Lonnie Wishart, Canadian National Railway Company

Top 10 States for Logistics Facility Projects

2020-2024

State	Projects
Texas	2,311
Illinois	1,321
California	712
Ohio	679
Georgia	579
Florida	489
Pennsylvania	382
North Carolina	354
Virginia	334
South Carolina	280

Source: Conway Projects Database

Why Companies Locate Their Logistics Facilities in Illinois

Among the many logistics assets to be found in Illinois are all six Class 1 railroads, the third largest Interstate system in the U.S. by mileage, water access to the Atlantic Ocean via the Great Lakes and the Gulf with more than 1,000 miles of inland waterways and two of the country’s leading air cargo facilities — Chicago O’Hare International and Rockford/Chicago International Airports.

These and other assets, including Illinois being a leading national supplier of transportation, logistics and distribution talent, are why corporate investors are so bullish on Land of Lincoln locations.

Canadian National Railway Company (CN), for example, is investing about \$170 million of its 2025 capital investment program in Illinois, the company announced in June. Included are track maintenance, upgrades at its Homewood Campus, network improvements and investments earmarked for its planned Chicago Logistics Hub and intermodal

terminal in Grundy County, southwest of Chicago. CN employs approximately 1,600 Illinoisans and operates more than 1,200 miles of rail in the state.

“We believe that investing in our network is about building for the future. Our continued infrastructure investment in Illinois will help strengthen the resiliency and efficiency of our network across the state,” said CN President and Chief Executive Officer Tracy Robinson in a statement. “Our focus remains on providing exceptional service to our customers and supply chain partners, supporting strong economic growth for North America and across communities where we operate.”

CN expects the Logistics Hub to create 6,500 jobs at full buildout. At press time, the facility was still in the proposed stage, but “CN is continuing to advance the project and will be commencing some early earthworks this year to prepare the site for future construction,” says a company spokesperson.

Top U.S. Metros for Logistics Facility Projects

2020-2024

Metro	Projects
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN	1,224
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	898
Houston-Pasadena-The Woodlands, TX	737
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	290
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ	277
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	275
Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX	186
Phoenix-Mesa-Chandler, AZ	176
Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN	173
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	172

Source: Conway Projects Database

A Natural for the Ag Industry

Rainbow North America, a division of China-based Rainbow Agro, announced plans in March to build a Partner Production Center as part of a multi-phase expansion in Champaign. The global crop protection products supplier says improving its supply chain is a project motivator.

The company says the new center will afford “diverse import routes to optimize supply chain logistics and predictability, multiple tech-enabled production lines for high capacity, quality herbicide formulations and comprehensive packaging solutions, including bulk, to service the Midwest market.”

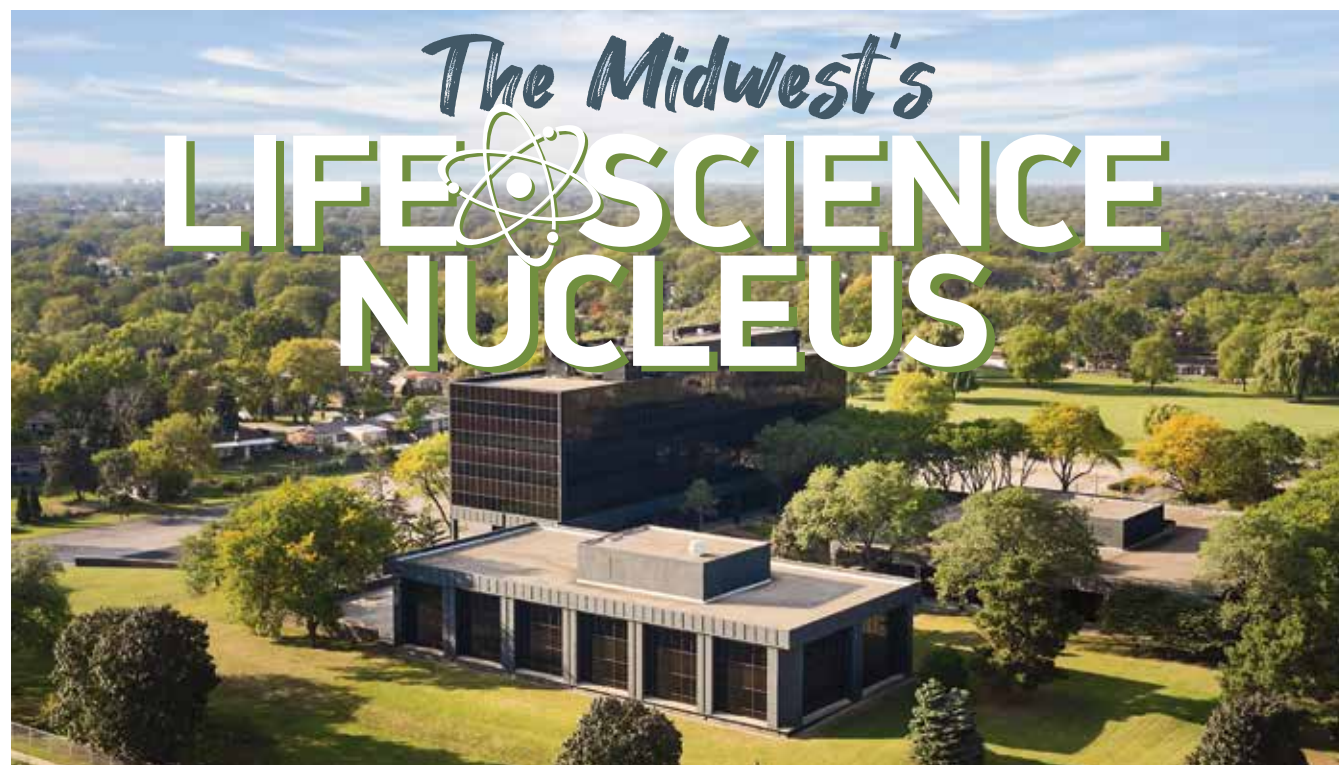
“By expanding our production capabilities and enhancing logistical efficiency, we will facilitate the growth of our partners by simplifying an increasingly complex and aging supply chain ecosystem,” said Tom Lyons, General Manager at Rainbow North America, in a statement.

The company says

Champaign was selected as the center’s location due to its “central positioning to serve Midwestern agriculture and its leadership as a center of excellence for AgTech innovation. Additionally, the region’s highly skilled talent pool and well-established logistical infrastructure will allow Rainbow to better serve partners with speed, efficiency, and reliability.”

In August 2024, Ollie’s Bargain Outlet opened its fourth and newest distribution center in Princeton, Illinois, to bolster its presence in the Midwest and to expedite plans to expand westward. The retailer operates stores in 31 states.

The facility spans over 615,000 sq. ft. and is positioned to play a crucial role in Ollie’s growth, according to the Pennsylvania-based company, initially servicing approximately 60 stores in nine states and eventually servicing more than 150 stores. The \$75 million distribution center will create over 200 new full-time jobs. 🏗️



Eight years ago, Germany-based global contract development and manufacturing organization Vetter Pharma purchased a vacant 860,000-sq.-ft. site in a northwest Chicago suburb with a vision for growth.

There were no plans to act just yet, although it quietly laid a pivotal stepping stone in the company's burgeoning Illinois foundation.

The Des Plaines land purchase came six years after the independent pharmaceutical service provider, specializing in aseptic production of injectable medicines, took a chance on establishing its first U.S. operations in nearby Skokie. Several prominent U.S. biotech hubs came under consideration during the company's initial site selection search in 2011, but the Chicago area was found as the most suitable location for Vetter's needs, especially as an international manufacturer.

"This investment laid the groundwork for future development," says Vetter Pharma

Managing Director Henryk Badack. "As an independent and family-owned company, long-term planning and sustainable growth are deeply embedded in our corporate philosophy. The current investment reflects the continuation of this strategic approach and our confidence in the region's potential."

As a tenant within the city's 22-acre Illinois Science and Technology Park (ISTP), the company did not own the early clinical manufacturing facility it occupied. Regardless, Vetter had the ability to immerse into ISTP's dynamic and supportive environment, an experience that worked to strengthen the company's initial belief in the region and its commitment to influencing ecosystem development.

"[Greater Chicago's] unique combination of strengths — including a large talent pool of life science professionals, world-class research institutions, and a rapidly expanding infrastructure tailored to biopharmaceutical innovation — makes it an ideal location for

both our operations and future growth," says Badack.

In 2024, the decision for Vetter to move forward with a \$285 million investment into the Des Plaines site was driven by a clear forecast of increasing customer demand, in addition to a proactive approach to expanding capacity in anticipation of evolving needs. A year later, the company has officially broken ground on its new 160,000-sq.-ft. clinical manufacturing facility. The plant will feature advanced filling lines, dedicated process areas for material preparation and compounding, laboratories, storage facilities and office space. Buildings home to the remaining 700,000 sq. ft. of the site will be retained, providing ample space for future expansions. Badack says future growth opportunities will depend on global market developments, customer demand and investment projects currently underway for the company in Germany and Austria.

Vetter's new manufacturing facility is anticipated to begin media fill before closing out 2029. Once online, Vetter will relocate its complete clinical operations currently housed eight miles away in Skokie to the Des Plaines facility.

"For Vetter, the Chicago area is more than just a strategic choice — it is a place where we have achieved meaningful success, and we see strong potential for expansion here," notes Badack. "There is a clear and increasing commitment to innovation, talent development and cross-sector collaboration, creating a fertile environment for long-term success. Ongoing investment — both public and private — plays a key role in shaping a dynamic ecosystem that delivers value to local communities and global stakeholders alike."

An Ecosystem on the Rise

Vetter isn't the only manufacturer taking notice of Greater Chicago's

life sciences capabilities.

Upon branching out from multinational health care company Baxter International's kidney care segment, newly established independent health care company Vantive announced it would be establishing its U.S. headquarters in Deerfield, Illinois. Baxter's corporate HQ has been located in the city for over 50 years, and Vantive's decision to stay in Illinois was due to its strong health care ecosystem, skilled workforce and supportive business environment.

"We are proud to continue our legacy of innovation in Deerfield, Illinois, which has served as an important anchor for our mission-driven work over the last several decades," said Vantive CEO Chris Toth. "Our new headquarters is designed to inspire collaboration, creativity and excellence as we work to advance our mission to extend lives and expand possibilities for patients globally."

The new HQ will create 50 new jobs and grow the company's office facilities and pharmacy operations, which include critical care therapies and innovative products, digital solutions and advanced services for home and

clinic-based dialysis.

Talent is a critical factor for corporate life science leaders. Chicago's talent pool continues to gain depth. CBRE's 2025 U.S. Life Sciences Talent Trends report found that Chicago was the No. 6 market for life sciences degrees and certificates and No. 9 in life sciences PhD degrees granted as of Q2 2025. Students and employers alike find a vibrant ecosystem at work in the region as assets such as the Chan Zuckerberg Biohub aim to drive industry-wide collaboration. The Biohub places scientists, educators, engineers and physicians in a central location to develop technologies that achieve molecular-level measurements of biological processes in human tissue that cause diseases. This level of innovation is key to promoting STEM education in the state in addition to retaining budding talent.

The city comes in sixth within CBRE's fresh medtech talent ranking, finishing ahead of markets in San Diego, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.-Baltimore. The state is home to four of the top 10 medical device companies in the nation, and one of these leaders

by **ALEXIS ELMORE**

The 160,000-sq.-ft. facility will represent Vetter's first fully owned and operated U.S. manufacturing site.

Rendering courtesy of Vetter Pharma



Vetter Pharma officials, including Henryk Badack (second from right), gathered in June to break ground on a new clinical manufacturing site in Des Plaines.

Photo courtesy of Vetter Pharma

has announced plans to expand its Lake County presence.

As the impacts of impending tariffs loom, Abbott Laboratories is prepared to split a \$500 million investment across its Illinois and Dallas, Texas sites. The company's HQ, Abbott Park, in Green Oaks has been pinpointed for the expansion, although exact project details have not been announced by Abbott. These investments are designed to boost manufacturing and R&D catered toward the company's transfusion business. The expansion is set to begin before the end of the year and once complete will create 200 new jobs in the region.

Expect medical device activity to pick up as Sysmex America moves into a \$20.6 million expansion of

three of its northeastern Illinois facilities. Increased demand for medical diagnostic technologies led the company to enhance high

“The greater Chicago region has established itself as a strong and steadily growing player in the biotech landscape.”

— Vetter Pharma Managing Director Henryk Badack

precision and automation systems throughout these sites, while creating 110 new jobs. Meanwhile,

medical device company Epic Medical plans to launch its first U.S. manufacturing site in central Illinois. Located at the Riverway Business Park in the city of Pekin, the company's \$20 million facility will house production of high-quality IV solutions and various medical products.

To date, over 15,500 life sciences companies have stationed themselves within the state's life sciences network, ranging from emerging startups to Fortune 500 giants. A favorable business climate, high-quality talent, entrepreneurial resources and prime U.S. market proximity are just a few of the advantages that set Illinois apart for these operations and will be awaiting any business aiming to scale. 📍

TECHNOLOGY

Building a Data Dynasty

Illinois is poised to become an AI leader with top-end data centers and a quantum ecosystem.

by RON STARNER



Bluefors Labs is establishing a new lab facility in Chicago to provide cryostat equipment for quantum computing testing. Photo courtesy of Bluefors Labs

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From data centers to cryostat production, Illinois is in high-growth mode when it comes to attracting and growing high-tech companies and the talented workers they employ.

Chicagoland now ranks as the fourth largest colocation data center market in the nation and is poised to climb even higher up the charts in colocation facilities, cloud computing and AI hyperscale projects.

With recent major investments from CyrusOne, Compass Data Centers and Edged, Illinois proves that the growth in this sector is just getting started. CyrusOne recently topped out a new 18-MW facility in Aurora, where the company now has two data centers spanning 500,000 sq. ft. The firm plans to invest up to \$1 billion statewide and recently broke ground on an additional \$350 million, 40-MW facility in Aurora.

Compass, meanwhile, is converting an old Sears headquarters campus in Hoffman

Estates into a \$10 billion, 200-acre hyperscale complex. Earlier this year, Edged open its new ultra-efficient, 96-MW campus in Aurora, where the company so far has invested \$166 million into digital infrastructure on the 65-acre site west of Chicago.

These investments into building digital infrastructure are not an anomaly in Illinois. According to the Conway Projects Database of Site Selection Magazine and Conway Data Inc. in Atlanta, 50 new data centers have been announced in Illinois since the beginning of 2020. Eight of them cost \$1 billion or more.

The largest is the T5 Data Centers project which was announced last December in Grayslake in Lake County. Upon buildout, this complex will take up over 4.16 million sq. ft., employ 800 full-time workers and cost more than \$10 billion.

CloudHQ, Microsoft, Equinix and CyrusOne are all investing \$2 billion or more into new data centers across northern Illinois.

Other big investors include Meta, Aligned, Stack, Prime Data Centers, Digital Realty Trust, QTS Data Centers, CoreWeave, SkyBox and more.

John McWilliams, head of data center insights at Cushman & Wakefield, says to get used to it. “Chicago is ranked No. 9 globally among established data center markets,” he says. “Chicago has a history of success in this sector. There are a lot of large players in that market, with 39 different operators there.”

Alex Smith, executive vice chair at Cushman & Wakefield, adds, “It comes down to where you can site projects in Illinois. Elk Grove and Hoffman Estates work for cloud campuses. Generally, data center operators need to be in a city of at least 100,000 people, have access to readily available power and be close to highways.”

For those reasons, parts of southwestern Illinois work well for data centers, Smith says. “Interstate 55 is a major fiber provider,” he notes. “There is a lot of power



The inner workings of a Bluefors Labs facility in Chicago.

Photo courtesy of Bluefors Labs

in southwest Illinois. We have identified several sites ready for development there.”

A Power Plant for Bits & Bytes

Phil Clement, president and CEO of World Business Chicago, says the factors that attract data centers to Greater Chicago are many. “We rank seventh nationally for performance across key categories such as connectivity, power availability and infrastructure. Chicago’s data center market benefits from the region’s strong economic fundamentals, strategic location and unmatched connectivity,” he says.

As of Q4 2024, Chicago employed more than 15,000 people in IT and data center operations, reflecting a nearly 2% increase over the previous year. Moreover, this sector is projected to experience 12% job growth by 2028, adds Clement.

“Chicago’s electric power situation further strengthens its appeal,” says Clement. “With average electricity rates of 16.1 cents per kilowatt-hour as of December 2024, the region offers competitive energy prices compared to other major metros. This, combined with

the city’s comprehensive utility infrastructure, ensures reliable and affordable power for data centers. Additionally, Chicago’s central location and access to critical infrastructure, including fiber-optic networks and transportation hubs, make it an ideal location for businesses requiring low-latency connectivity and strong disaster recovery capabilities.”

None of this growth can happen without workforce and power. Brookings Metro recently published a report showing the U.S. metros that are primed to support the most AI capacity. Two of them are in Illinois: Chicago-Naperville-Elgin and Champaign-Urbana. Chicago excels because it ranks third nationally in science and engineering bachelor’s degrees; sixth in PhDs; and eighth in patents. Champaign-Urbana ranks eighth in PhDs; eighth in publications; and 90th in patents.

On the electric power front, two major utility companies — ComEd and Ameren Illinois — take the lead. Ed Sitar, senior manager of economic development at ComEd, says, “We continue to see unprecedented demand on the number of data center projects and

the size and scale of these projects. Our pipeline is very robust. We have active projects as far north as Grayslake and Rockford, and we have projects in the south too.”

To service this growth, ComEd embarked on an 11-project, \$1 billion capital investment to expand transmission and bring enhanced reliability and power to data centers moving to the region. On July 15, ComEd cut the ribbon on a new substation in Itasca. “ComEd has one of the most reliable grids in the nation, and that is a direct result of investments like this one that we are celebrating today,” said Gil Quinones, president and CEO of ComEd.

Eric Whitfield, economic development director for Ameren, says that “with the AI boom, we have seen an uptick in our data center activity downstate. There are about nine projects in the pipeline where they have put down a deposit while we do a study on the power impact. None of the large-scale data centers have been built yet in central or southern Illinois in the past two years, but we think there is great opportunity for that to happen here.”

Scaling the Quantum Universe

Data centers aren’t the only industry creating high-wage, high-tech jobs in Illinois. Across the state, emerging industry sectors like cryostat production are taking hold. Case in point: Bluefors Labs recently announced that it is opening a new lab facility in Chicago.

Bluefors enables customers working with quantum technology to test hardware and software without the need to invest in a complete cryogenic measurement system of their own. The goal is to support and further the growth of the quantum computing sector that is expanding rapidly in Chicago and Champaign-Urbana (see p. 46).

In another significant advancement, EeroQ announced

that it would locate its new quantum headquarters in Chicago’s Humboldt Park community.

“Illinois is on a mission to be at the center of this industry,” Gov. JB Pritzker said. “We are proud that EeroQ made the decision to make Chicago their headquarters and to put this remarkable research and development facility here. It means that we will see many more billions in new investment and thousands of quality, high-paying jobs that will grow our economy and create new opportunity for Illinois’ working families.”

Founded in 2017, EeroQ is constructing a commercial-scale quantum computer using electrons floating on top of liquid helium by using today’s existing chip fabrication technology. This method

enables EeroQ to scale rapidly and with resource efficiency.

The Pritzker Administration supports the advancement of high-tech industries through a variety of programs. One is the Venture Investment for Semiconductor Technology Advancement (VISTA) program funded by the U.S. Department of the Treasury. The governor recently announced \$20 million in VISTA grants to support semiconductor technology in Illinois.

The VISTA initiative is part of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) program known as the Illinois Innovation Venture Fund (INVENT), which has \$114 million to spend on projects aligned with the Federal CHIPS and Science Act. 📍



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— ILLINOIS —






- Sugar Grove is strategically located along I-88, and is served by Routes 47, 56 and 30. There are tremendous development opportunities at the I-88/Rt 47 interchange.
- The Village has developed a new Comprehensive Plan with future sites for data centers adjacent to a ComEd substation.
- Opportunities for new business park, residential and commercial development including a future town center.
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How Illinois Got Its Movie Magic Back

The show must go on in the Prairie State.

With nine stages and \$250 million backing construction, The Fields Studios adds to Illinois' valuable coffers of film and TV production houses.
Rendering courtesy of The Fields Studios

by KELLY BARRAZA

Momentarily curbed by the WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes of 2023, which suspended production on staple local television shows like “Chicago Med,” “Chicago PD” and “The Chi” for nearly half a year, the film and television industry in Illinois today has all the markers of a successful economic and creative rebound.

Take the science fiction thriller “Dark Matter,” which has been

filming season 2 in 2025 in the city, with its production offices located at The Fields Studios in Chicago. The Fields Studios is the first purpose-built studio campus in Chicago and was designed to be built “for producers, by producers.” The Apple TV+ series adds to other established and new television shows currently or recently shot in Chicago like “The Bear” and “The Deli Boys.”

The entertainment industry in Illinois saw a boom following the

steady expansion of its film and TV production tax incentive program since its inception in 2008. In 2024 film production expenditures in Illinois were counted at \$653 million, with an estimated 18,200 hires and \$351 million generated in wages. This is the second highest total in the state’s history, with 2025 numbers for the industry on track to meet or eclipse the 2022 record of nearly \$700 million in yearly production spending.

“Through the Film and TV Workforce Program, we have invested in the future of the industry — increasing diversity and building out a qualified pipeline of hundreds who are equipped to serve on film crews and making it possible for us to attract major productions,” stated Governor JB Pritzker in a press release. “Our success is a testament to our hard work and partnership as well as the undeniable charm of Illinois and our people that makes us a prime creative destination.”

Things Are Up Downstate

Some of the show birds have flown south in Illinois for the next season of the state’s bustling entertainment industry as some look for a change of shooting scenery outside of the Windy City.

Such is the case for 31st Street Studios CEO and developer Chris

Breakwell, who sat down with me in a café in Roswell, Georgia, during a well-timed visit to Atlanta to talk about his ambitious designs to build a suite of sound, film and e-sports production studios in Wood River, Illinois.

“The film business can be a bipartisan situation because it can create union jobs and because of the economic development and amount of spending it brings to the local economy.”

Advantageously placed on the stateline with Missouri, Wood River is located upstream of downtown St. Louis on the Mississippi River. Breakwell aims to replicate the model of film production he has demonstrated before in his hometown of Pittsburgh, where a 300,000-sq.-ft. retrofitted steel mill was used for large action movie productions that included “Unstoppable,” “The Dark Knight Rises” and “Jack Reacher.”

Wood River studios will comprise six stages of varying sizes ranging from 20,000 to 40,000 sq. ft. for large-scale productions to smaller studios of 5,000 to 10,000 sq. ft. for independent filmmaking, esports and recording space for entrepreneurs and online influencers looking to scale their brand.

Wood River, like other studios in Illinois, will benefit from a generous tax credit program for filmmaking that has been in play for years — with a base credit of 30% for qualified Illinois production spending, including post-production expenditures. Another 15% credit on top of that 30% is approved to be put toward salaries of employees on qualified productions that are in communities with high unemployment.

“We are going to be working hand-in-hand with the tourism sector,” Breakwell says of the \$62

million Wood River project and the buzz surrounding it. “We had a call with the governor’s office, and they are excited to help push that through. Economic development goes around big cities like Chicago, but if you spend the effort and time to spread the money around, it’s good for everybody.”

Updated technology is a big pull for the Wood River project, which is planned to have shovels in the ground in early 2026 and be ready to handle shooting in early 2027 thanks to the use of modular studio builds that will cut construction time in half compared to a traditional studio construction process. Wood River plans to produce virtual reality and immersive filming projects as one of its media concentrations on its lot, Breakwell notes.

This growing sector of the entertainment industry will be fed by a local talent pool of students engaged in emerging media at Wood River High School and the University of Missouri-St. Louis. These institutions are noted for their esports program and student engagement, a natural local connection that should contribute to workforce development efforts in the burgeoning VR, esports and emerging technologies sector.

A motion-capture stage, aided by the advice of Don Marinelli, a long-time educator and founder of immersive filming and alternative media departments at Point Park University and Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, is also being sought to inform the immersive technologies segment of the entertainment portfolio planned for Wood River.

Tech and Taxes

A chorus of people have noted the success and popularity of the Illinois film tax incentive program, which was seeded in 2008 and is up



A former northwestern Chicago warehouse, The Fields Studios was purchased by Knickpoint Ventures in 2018 and spans 23 acres. Rendering courtesy of The Fields Studios

for legislative renewal in 2032.

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity’s Illinois Film Office Deputy Director Peter Hawley spoke about the changes in the movie world he has felt while heading the film program for Governor JB Pritzker. Hawley credits the Illinois tax credit program as being the key driver of success for the state’s film and TV industry.

“Productions make a decision on where to go because of the tax credit and the incentive,” he says.

The Illinois Film Office is hands-on with building up the hiring base for the entertainment industry in the state, specifically with the Illinois Film and TV Workforce Training Program that started four years ago and is funded by a transfer fee on the film production tax credit. The 2025 cohort of the program graduated 201 individuals, part of a group of over 600 people that have completed this program since its inception.

“We have a robust film and TV workforce training pipeline,” Hawley notes. The Prairie State is known to have several education and training options

for individuals aspiring to be part of the entertainment industry, including programs at Columbia College Chicago, Northwestern University, DePaul University, Loyola University and University of Illinois at Chicago. Rock Valley College also has a tuition-free film and TV workforce training program, funded from the Illinois Film Office through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO).

Asked what the biggest difference is in the filmmaking industry today versus five years ago, Hawley immediately notes the advances in technology.

“Obviously, tech is a big difference. Very few people shoot on film anymore. Post-production is completely changed. It’s getting faster and better,” he says. “Technology as we see all around us is a real driver. So many young people have grown up being digital natives, and they just adapt to all of this so much faster, and they have grown up around it the entire time. So, they just know how to be filmmakers.”

The advent of virtual production has also changed the landscape

of the entertainment industry in Illinois. Two virtual production stages in Chicago, Smash and Resolution Studios, operate in this space.

“Chicago and Illinois are great places for production, hands down, full stop,” Hawley says. “We don’t have mountains here in Illinois, but you sure do on a virtual stage. You can film a scene set at Oak Street Beach on a summer day — you can film that in a VR stage in January, and no one would know.”

Hawley’s experience as a professional filmmaker and director preceding the COVID-19 pandemic colors his thoughts on the matter.

“That to me is a big driver, and the fact that getting into the film business is not a foreign thing, especially in a market like Illinois and Chicago where you can look around and see film production,” he says. “When I was a kid, you didn’t see it. You did not see a pathway to getting into business if you weren’t in Los Angeles or maybe New York. But now you see it all over the place, and the pathway to get into the industry is much shorter and clear-cut on how to do it.” 🍌



From Soccer Supporters to Bigfoot Lovers, Illinois Caters to EVERY KIND OF FAN

Illinois is a popular tourist spot. Chicago alone welcomed 55.3 million visitors in 2024 — with 2.2 million visiting from abroad. A new campaign for the city — “Never Done, Never Outdone” — is fitting for a place with so much to show off.

“Chicago is great at hosting big events,” said Hannah Loftus, vice president of research at World Business Chicago.

In November, rugby fans can watch Ireland continue its rivalry with New Zealand at Soldier Field in a much-anticipated match. The Chicago Fire FC also announced plans to start construction in early 2026 on its own privately funded soccer stadium in downtown Chicago in the South Loop. It will seat 22,000 fans.

“Water lovers can set sail on Lake Michigan — the Chicago Yacht Club Race to Mackinac is one of the most prestigious races in the world, try dragon boat racing in Chicago’s Chinatown, go fishing in spots like the Illinois River, cruise the Mississippi River or admire the waterfalls at Starved Rock State Park,” says Amanda Vinicky, vice president of communications

at Illinois EDC.

The city has its share of staple attractions like Navy Pier, Millennium Park and its famous Bean, shopping and dining options while strolling down the Magnificent Mile and views and recreation on Lake Michigan. And for those looking for flare outside of the Windy City, Illinois has plenty to offer visitors traveling from any place.

by KELLY BARRAZA

Sasquatch Festivities

A little over 300 miles south of Chicago, the southern Illinois town of Harrisburg has a unique annual tradition that is sure to be fun for family, friends and anybody looking to walk in the steps of Bigfoot himself.

With a population of nearly 8,000, the former coal town is holding its annual Shawnee Sasquatch Festival in October. The event will have free carnival rides and live band performances along with 100 craft vendors, eight food trucks, family-friendly activities, a car show and the Run Like A Squatch 5K/Walk. A sasquatch

The Run Like a Squatch 5K begins at the Shawnee Sasquatch Festival in Harrisburg. Photo by Stephanie Susie Photography courtesy of Illinois Office of Tourism

calling contest has also entered the schedule — with the winner earning a crisp \$100 bill.

“They come from all over because they love that sasquatch,” Harrisburg Mayor John McPeck says. “It brings the community together. It’s really good to see young kids getting out and enjoying the festival.”

McPeck says the celebration originated with a small group of 10 who in 2020 came up with an idea to bring crowds to the town and do it in the great outdoors at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We had a roundtable the first year about sasquatch encounters,” McPeck said. “We had guys from Kentucky come in — ‘sasquatch hunters.’ The auditorium was completely full.”

What started as an event with 250 to 300 attendees and a little live entertainment gradually grew into a celebration that saw 5,000 to 6,000 attendees in 2024, with higher numbers expected in 2025. Visitors hail from Iowa, northern

Stormtroopers invade Main Street in downtown Joliet each year on Star Wars Day, a fun festival for the whole family.

Photo courtesy of Visit Joliet.

Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee and elsewhere.

“Our little town is making a comeback. We have the Sasquatch Festival, Christmas in the Courtyard and Boo in the ‘Burg,” McPeek says. “Harrisburg is a small town with great schools. We have a lot of banks. We have a good hometown spirit and we are a great community to live in.”

Now, the festival is primarily organized by Mayor McPeek, City Treasurer Alex Jackson and City Clerk Terri Jenkins with the help of local businesswoman Kim Gibbs and is funded by sponsorships and donors so no cost is imposed on Harrisburg citizens.

The town will celebrate a Sasquatch September, with each weekend preceding the festival featuring a sasquatch-themed event (Harry and the Hendersons amphitheater screening, a Jeep poker run and tournaments in golf and soccer).

A big pull of the legendary creature-themed event is the neighboring Shawnee National Forest, which has a history of sasquatch sightings and folklore.

“We have a lot of tourism for hiking, horseback riding and trail riding,” McPeek says of Harrisburg and the nearby national forest. “It’s great for promoting tourism for southeastern Illinois.”

A Forest Stands Tall

The Shawnee National Forest is one of 155 national forests in the U.S., the only national forest in Illinois and the single largest publicly owned body of land in the state. Its 289,000 acres are nested in the Ozark and Shawnee Hills and perfect for outdoor recreation, with October a particularly busy time



as the leaves turn and fall color comes through.

The national forest that covers much of southernmost Illinois between the Ohio and Mississippi rivers touts natural beauty and resources that include wild and scenic rivers, wilderness areas, several natural landmarks, beautiful rock formations and four heritage resource sites on the National Register of Historic Places. Visitors can hike, fish, rock climb, mountain bike, zipline, ride horses and exercise their bird and nature watching skills.

Sommeliers and casual wine lovers also love raising their glasses along the winding Shawnee Hills Wine Trail, which is celebrating 30 years this year.

“The Shawnee Hills Wine Trail is a top destination driver,” says Carol Hoffman, executive director of the Southernmost Illinois

Tourism Bureau.

Right off the vine, the trail features 12 lauded wineries along a 35-mile drive down highways 127 and 51 in the Shawnee National Forest. A winter passport program also incentivizes visitors to enjoy the wineries and vineyards in January and February. The trail was the first of its kind in the state of Illinois when it opened with three winery members in 1995.

The nearby city of Carbondale, which has a vibrant music scene thanks to the presence of Southern Illinois University, is known as the gateway to the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail. For Shawnee visitors who want to venture out to Carbondale, there is also a privately owned park worth checking out for those seeking a little whimsical fantasy — Castle Park.

Opened to the general public, Castle Park was established in

2005 in the memory of Jeremy “Boo” Rochman. As a child, Rochman played with toy action figures and painted wizard figures as a hobby when he grew older. Several of the fantastical statues found throughout Castle Park are based off his creations and include dragons, a griffin, fairies and more. Themed after Dungeons and Dragons, visitors can admire the battlements of the maze-like wood and stone castle at the center of the park that houses hidden passageways, gargoyles and treasures that can be found by anyone eager enough to hunt for them.

May the Force Be in Illinois

An hour’s car ride away from Chicago is the city of Joliet, Illinois, that celebrates Star Wars Day every summer in June. A free event for all, the celebration includes costumes,

food trucks, merch vendors, games and artist and author alleys. A parade of stormtroopers can be seen marching in downtown Joliet each year for fans of the space opera franchise.

Brewing Up Something Good

Started by Oak Park trio and lifelong friends Rich Bloomfield, Greg Williams and Zack Day, Funkytown Brewery in Chicago got its start in a family garage and is now lauded by several craft beer awards bodies and served in over 100 locations near Chicago. Black-owned and inspired by the Chicago craft scene and ‘90s hip hop and R&B, the company features a tasting menu with a large variety of hops to suit any palate. Funkytown won gold in the best American style pale ale beer category at the Tasting Alliance World Beer 2023 Competition with its flagship beer

— Brewery Hip-Hops and R&Brew, a smooth sip with notes of citrus zest, strawberry and lychee that can be enjoyed any time of year.

The Brewers Association documents 296 craft breweries in Illinois, 13th most in the country, with a \$2.8 billion annual economic impact.

Revelry in Rockford

The state’s Tourism Attractions & Festivals Grant Program was launched in 2023 to support local governments, not-for-profit organizations, promotion groups and for-profit businesses to develop and improve tourism attractions and festivals.

The city of Rockford used support from the grant to host the first-ever Ironman 70.3 triathlon in Illinois in June 2025. Over 2,500 entries sold out five months before the event, which will return to the city in 2026 and 2027. For hockey fans, the Rockford IceHogs will host the 2026 American Hockey League All-Star Classic in February 2026. The AHL Skills Competition and All-Star Challenge will be held at the newly renovated BMO Center in downtown Rockford, which received a \$27 million investment from the state, the city and other public and private partners.

STAR Bond Project Gets Start in Marion

In May, shovels hit the ground on a 550,000-sq.-ft. retail, entertainment and hospitality development in the southern Illinois city of Marion, the first Sales Tax and Revenue (STAR) Bond project in the state. In early 2025, the Marion City Council approved \$112 million in STAR bonds for the development, which is anticipated to directly support schools, infrastructure and essential community services through increasing local tax revenue. 🏗️



Setting the Standard for Good Living

Great schools, a sense of community, a strong workforce and attainable housing make Illinois an excellent place to flourish.

by KELLY BARRAZA

Illinois is ranked highly for being a great place to live and prosper. Chicago recently was recognized as the Best Big City in the U.S. for the eighth consecutive year by Condé Nast Traveler. Both residents and people traveling to the state will benefit from outdoorsy activities with over 60 state parks, 700 miles of trails and 5,000 miles of the state highway system that welcome cyclists.

If indoor activities are more your scene, Chicago is also home to an iconic improv and stand-up comedy scene that has produced legends Tina Fey,

Amy Poehler, Steve Carell and Stephen Colbert. The city also touts a thriving theater district and live music events including Lollapalooza and Chicago blues bars such as Kingston Mines and House of Blues.

The Windy City was also named a top 10 moving destination, coming in at number eight on the list compiled by Penske Truck Rental, which compiles its ranking based on data from one-way consumer truck rentals. Survey participants cited closer proximity to loved ones, better job opportunities, lower cost of living and needing more space as reasons to move to Chicago.

Naperville Triumphs

With straight A's in the areas of public schools, housing, jobs, diversity, outdoor activities, health & fitness and family friendliness, Naperville was recently rated by Niche as the No. 1 best city to live in America.

"Naperville is a special place. We have all the traditional things that make a community attractive: top notch schools, ample retail and restaurant options, museums and art, an affordable cost of living, safe and well-maintained streets, and an excellent transportation system," says Monica Connors, president of the Naperville

Development Partnership & Convention & Visitors Bureau. "But the secret sauce to Naperville is our sense of community. Residents whose families have been here for generations, as well as new residents who have been here for just a short time, all take pride in living here, care about each other and want to see this city succeed."

The American Competitiveness Exchange (ACE) was held in the city earlier this year, where a group toured Ecolab's Water University (a high-tech water management learning environment owned by Nalco Water) and visited the Naper Settlement to learn about the Naperville Riverwalk. The Naper Settlement is a 12-acre outdoor history museum comprising 30

- ◀ **Bicycling one of the many trails in Chicago is a favorite pastime in the Windy City.**
- ▶ **The Garden of the Gods is a 3,318-acre park designated as a U.S. Wilderness Area. It is in the Shawnee National Forest in Hardin, Pope, Saline and Gallatin counties in Illinois.**
Photos: Getty Images

historical buildings and structures.

Take a leisurely stroll on the Riverwalk, the "Crown Jewel" of Naperville made of brick-paved



winding paths along the DuPage River. Safety can be assured as the Chicago suburb was one of four Illinois cities — in addition to Arlington Heights, Buffalo Grove and Palatine — to make U.S. News & World Report's Safest Places to Live in the U.S.

"As the third largest city in Illinois, Naperville's community pride is reflected in our Riverwalk, our award-winning parks and libraries and our neighborhoods," Connors says. "Decisions that citizens made decades ago are still bearing fruit and inspire others to have a long-term perspective for the benefit of the city's future."

Top of the Class

Illinois is also tough to outclass when it comes to education, ranked as the third best state in this category by CNBC's 2025 Best States for Business and as fourth-best in K-12 education and fifth-best in college

readiness according to U.S. News' 2025 Best States rankings.

When asked to grade the quality of education in the state, vice president of communications at Illinois EDC Amanda Vinicky says, "A-plus. From pre-K to higher education, Illinois has a dynamic education ecosystem that ultimately helps fuel one of the best and largest workforces in the nation."

The state has 673 nationally ranked high schools, a robust community college system, the first community college in the U.S. (Joliet Junior College) and top universities like Northwestern and University of Chicago.

The Illinois school-to-workforce pipeline is supported by the fact that the state has the largest labor force in the Midwest (6.5 million people) and strong partnerships between educational institutions and businesses.

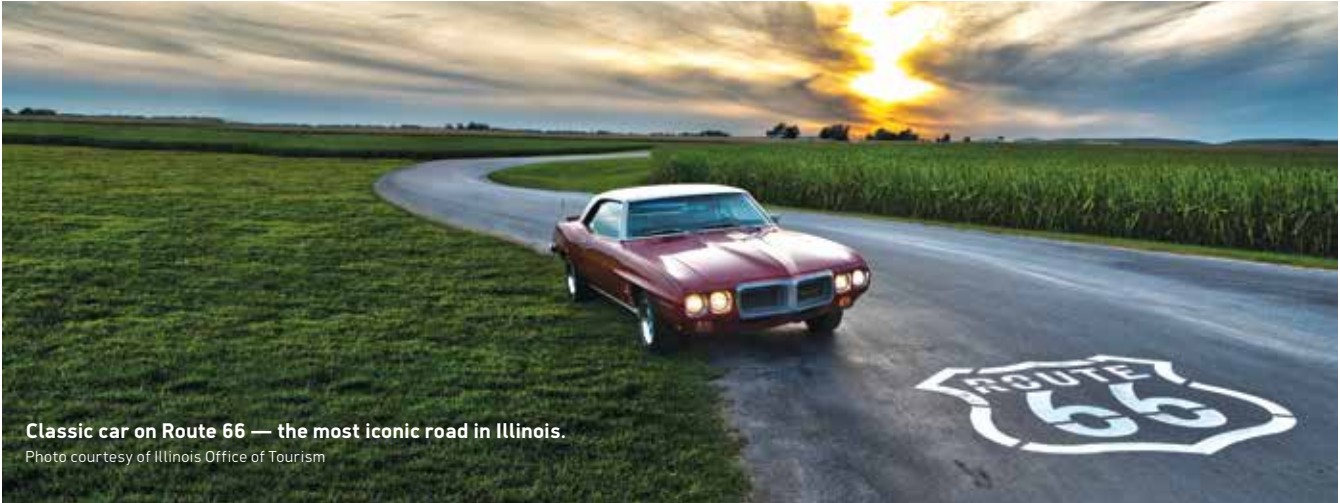
Building a Workforce

"Illinois is investing in its workforce like never before to ensure it can continue to support emerging, high-growth sectors like quantum, manufacturing and clean energy," Vinicky says.

A good example is TCCI Manufacturing's collaboration with Richland Community College at its new Clean Energy Innovation Hub in Decatur, Illinois — one of the first recipients of the Reimagining Energy and Vehicles in Illinois (REV Illinois).

"One of the hub's core components is its Clean Energy Workforce Academy, a first-of-its-kind clean energy education model," Vinicky says. "The state is dedicated to building and training a clean energy workforce, as evidenced by a state law, the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act."

In early 2024, Governor JB



Classic car on Route 66 — the most iconic road in Illinois.
Photo courtesy of Illinois Office of Tourism

Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) joined Heartland Community College to celebrate its new Advanced Manufacturing Training Center, funded in part by a \$7.5 million capital grant as part of the state’s larger \$15 million manufacturing training academy investment. The training facility will prepare students to meet the growing needs of the state’s expanding EV industry (see p. 58 for more).

Illinois is also not shy about investing in the trades. The Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program, an initiative that seeks to jumpstart participants’ paths to the trades, has nearly 21,000 active members and counting as the fifth round of applications for the program opened this past summer.

Those members are part of an Illinois population that grew last year by nearly 68,000 residents, adding to an overall total of nearly 12.8 million people whose backgrounds are as diverse as the state’s industry mix.

“One of Illinois’ foundational strengths as a world-class business destination is stability. Illinois has tremendous diversity in people, industry and infrastructure,” Vinicky says. “No one industry makes up more than 13% of our state’s economy, and the Washington Post even named Illinois the most representative state in the U.S.”

The Power of Community Planning

The Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) has developed a statewide planning tool, the Quality-of-Life Index (QOLI), that is used to determine areas of high livability within the state. The QOLI is census tract-based and used to bring awareness to what aspects make communities stronger and better for residents.

“The Quality-of-Life Index (QOLI) was designed to replace Opportunity Areas as a site location tool for competitive 9% Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) applications,” says Andrew Field, assistant director of government & public affairs specialist at IHDA.

The intended end-uses for the QOLI are both internal IHDA employees and external developers looking for sites to develop LIHTC properties. The IHDA uses QOLI as part of the competitive scoring for 9% LIHTC developments.

“The QOLI score is a dynamic measurement of cumulative positive outcome measurements in five different QOLI categories: education, prosperity, health, housing, and connectivity,” Field says. “The mission of the IHDA is to finance the construction and/or preservation of affordable housing. IHDA does not allocate funding for commercial or business purposes, solely residential. However, IHDA has had discussions with universities and non-profits about QOLI. Most recently, IHDA

has been assisting the Federal Home Loan Bank of Chicago in developing their own QOLI for Illinois and Wisconsin.”

The IHDA has provided more than \$52 million in down payment assistance to nearly 5,000 first-time homebuying individuals and families in fiscal year 2024. Further, the Illinois Housing Development Authority created or maintained more than 3,000 units of affordable housing through more than \$1.3 billion in financing.

“IHDA’s work extends to every county in Illinois, underscoring the belief that stable housing is fundamental to individual well-being, safety, and overall success” Field says. “Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Housing Development Authority are dedicated to expanding housing opportunities and revitalizing existing homes across the state. IHDA offers a comprehensive suite of resources, including loans, bonds, grants and tax credits, to finance the construction of affordable rental housing.

“We also provide down payment assistance to help families achieve homeownership,” Field adds, “and offer free planning and capacity-building services to assist local governments in identifying housing needs and strategizing for the future.” 🏡

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