

Edwardsville mayor pushes for partnerships

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Segue/Logan Cameron

This week on Segue, SIUE Interim Chancellor Stephen Hansen, PhD, welcomes Dr. Hal Patton, mayor of the City of Edwardsville.

A native of Edwardsville, Patton assumed office as mayor in 2013. Having served the City of Edwardsville and Madison County municipalities for nearly 20 years, Patton has held positions as city alderman, city councilman and member of the Madison County Board of Directors.

In addition to his mayoral duties, Patton is a practicing dentist. Patton shares, “I’ve always loved the community. Prior to joining local politics, I was constantly looking around town at different projects, and I wanted to have more of a role in the future of the community. I heard a great quote, ‘You can’t do much about the past, but you can do things about your future.’ I wanted to get involved, so the future of Edwardsville is something I can participate in and have a lot of passion for.”

Prior to returning home, Patton earned a bachelor’s from Centenary College in Louisiana before attending dental school at the University of Minnesota. Today, he and his wife, Carrie, are happily raising three children in the city that he loves.

Discussion primarily focuses upon Patton’s responsibilities as mayor, the decision-making challenges faced due to lack of state appropriation, and recent collaboration initiatives between the City of Edwardsville and the University.

Patton explains that while municipal decision-making can be quite challenging, the City of Edwardsville prides itself upon the success of recent decisions made, despite the lack of State funding. He further details that his life responsibilities are made easier, because he is surrounded by great people at the mayor’s office, at his dentistry and at home.

Maintaining the City’s infrastructure using a tightened budget is among Patton’s major challenges, but the City has still managed to thrive. “We have to maintain roads, sewers, water systems, fire and police protection, parks and recreation, public works, leadership, and more,” he shares. “Balancing all of those departments and making sure that funding for each is appropriate can be tough, but we’ve been able to hold the city’s portion of the tax bill flat since I assumed office. It is just a matter of balancing what you’d like to do and what you can afford. I’m fortunate that our municipality and our aldermen are now seemingly working together toward the same goals.”

Patton attributes much of the City’s fiscal stability to the recent community growth occurring in Edwardsville. He noted rising retail sales and efficient sales tax rates that allow for approximately 45 percent of the City’s budget to be derived from local sales tax. The remaining 55 percent comes from property taxes and other state-sourced reimbursements. This success has been threatened by proposed solutions from the State government, as the State seeks to retain an additional percentage of local sales taxes – a move that could lose the City of Edwardsville between \$1.2 million and \$2.4 million within their annual budget, if executed.

“The State budget impasse creates a lot of worry for the City,” Patton states. “We have already become efficient and have been trying to remove any fat or excess that is present within our budget, so any cuts here forward would be significant.”

With both men expressing frustrations with the State budget impasse, Patton shares how its effects are not only trickling into his duties as mayor, but also into his dentistry. “Approximately eight percent of my dentistry patient base receives State insurance coverage,” he says. “We now have accounts receivable for the State that is more than \$100,000. I know that those employees are still paying their premiums and still doing great work for this State, and it’s unfortunate to see their benefits cut that way. We will continue providing care for them and balance our finances at the office the best that we can, but not paying insurance companies is what the State has chosen to do, so insurance companies are not reimbursing providers, in return.”

Both Hansen and Patton have placed heavy emphasis on campus and community collaboration since assuming their respective offices, having recently approved the construction of an on-campus fire station and a leasing agreement for the City of Edwardsville to utilize the on-campus Cougar Lake Pool. Together, the two entities are working to enrich the community and create synergy that attracts students, residents and visitors alike to the wonderful amenities offered through this community.

“The passion of individuals serving to voluntarily help make decisions on making our community better, and then to watch City employees execute on those project ideas – such as the cleanliness of the streets and local park improvements – you just have the sense that we’re all working hard, and the benefit of that turns out to be a lot of good for all of us operating in this community,” shares Patton.

Patton further stresses the importance of educational opportunity to the area, referencing Edwardsville School District 7, SIUE, Lewis & Clark Community College and other institutions as points of pride that further cultivate the community’s growth. With growth, additional collaboration opportunities arise as Patton cites the growing local employment opportunities for students both during and upon completion of their education.

Moving forward, both Patton and Hansen share the necessity for goal alignment between those at the University and the City of Edwardsville, referencing each entity’s current commitment to community safety. Through synergetic initiatives such as these, the University and the community create an arena to foster interactions between city residents and the campus community.

Patton explains, “People always think, ‘How about having the students come into town to enjoy the City?’ I always think, ‘Well, how about having the residents come out here to enjoy the Arts & Issues series, sports and maybe take classes as well?’

“These kinds of interactions are a great opportunity for students to get out and interact with the residents of Edwardsville. Because of this, students may be able to meet someone who can create a future business or employment opportunity for them, and they can also tell people what’s going on on-campus.”

As the community has seen drastic growth throughout Patton’s life and since Hansen moved to the area 35 years ago, the two men discuss what a joy it has been to witness the blooming of the community, while Patton explains the City’s commitment to providing high-quality growth opportunities to those coming to the area.

“At the City, we work to ensure that what growth does come in, it’s something that’s positive and adds to the quality of life that our residents have here. I love the opportunity to not have to leave town very much anymore – I don’t have to go shopping at other municipalities. We have great sports and parks, and wonderful restaurants and businesses to engage with.”

Before ending the session, Patton reveals a special talent in a winter sport.

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By Logan Cameron, SIUE Marketing & Communications