



SIUE and Leadership Council plan for growth

Join SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke, PhD, on WSIE 88.7 FM this Sunday, Oct. 16, at 9 a.m., as he welcomes Ronda Sauget D. Mgmt., MBA, PhD, executive director of the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois (LCSI). They will discuss how the Leadership Council serves the region and differs from other national councils, how education has evolved to assist economic development, and future growth opportunities for the region.

Sauget was appointed executive director in 2015, having previously served as president, vice president and chair of the LCSI. In her role, Sauget works closely with senior-level leaders in business, industry, labor, education and government to address initiatives regarding regional economic development.

Possessing more than 20 years of industry experience in consulting, strategic management, market research and executive leadership, Sauget was president of her entrepreneurial firm Validus Business Strategies. Prior to joining the LCSI, she served the Archview Economic Development Corp. as executive director for more than 10 years, attracting millions of dollars in new investment and creating hundreds of regional jobs in Southwestern Illinois.

The Leadership Council's mission is to unite the region for growth through business, industry, labor, education, governmental groups and goal-specific support committees. These groups collaborate to accomplish large goals that could not be achieved otherwise.

The Council consists of leaders primarily from Madison and St. Clair Counties with members from surrounding counties and the St. Louis metropolitan area participating, as well. As the second-largest population center in Illinois and the fourth-largest population in the St. Louis metropolitan area, Southwestern Illinois is uniquely positioned to cultivate positive economic change.

Sauget explains the LCSI differs from other national councils in its ability to deeply connect a variety of professional sectors.

"These different professional groups are the central and strategic fiber of Southwestern Illinois," Sauget shares. "Before the Leadership Council existed, some groups did not have the commonalities they should have. The entire genesis of the Leadership Council was to bring those groups more closely together to work on those common areas that benefit all of us.

She continues by explaining that differences among sectors will always exist, but if cohesion can be formed in neutral realms, such as job training and workforce development, the group can work together to generate significant positive change.

Perhaps what makes Southwestern Illinois most economically attractive to industrial leaders is the availability of transportation resources in an area where land is available and affordable. Highlighting multi-modal transportation via river, road, rail, air and pipeline, the region's assets have drawn major agricultural companies, such as ADM, Bunge, Louis Dreyfus and Cargill. Recently attracted major manufacturers also include Amazon, Proctor & Gamble, Dial and Hershey's.

“Our region has a robust economic sector which allows business to construct complex positioning strategies,” Sauget says. “Looking throughout the United States, it’s quite difficult to find and select sites with multi-modal capabilities in an area with such available land. We will continue to drive that – not only to maintain the companies existing here today, but also to grow those companies and others in a major way.

“One role I serve is talking to different businesses in the community about issues. These challenges are often common across all economic sectors, so addressing them is important for creating a positive business environment where companies want to come and thrive. We look at those areas to better understand how we can positively aid and impact the results for companies that operate here.”

They discuss that as online education becomes more popularized, the demographics of student enrollment have shifted.

“In the summers of 2015 and 2016, SIUE online enrollment doubled from the previous summer’s statistics – so there’s much more demand, and the online options are becoming much more popular,” Pembroke reveals.

“For the future, I see more companies moving toward certificates and other forms of education, in addition to degree programs,” Sauget explains. “There are many certifications that can advance career paths. I believe a lot of businesses would like to see more technical education combined with academic skills.

“Online classes can be taken whenever it’s convenient for a student. Many students are working many different hours and shifts. If they are going to advance their education, the teaching and learning environment must be flexible to provide that student an accessible learning opportunity.”

In her decorated career of economic leadership and competitive intelligence, among Sauget’s proudest career accomplishments includes work on the American Bottoms Levee Project. Having recently received a regional award for the project, the LCSJ has worked passionately over the last 10 years with Madison, Monroe and St. Clair county leaders to form the Flood Protection District Council, an assemblage developed to fundraise and advocate for the renovation and reaccreditation of the American Bottoms levee system.

Through collaborative efforts, the coalition invested \$110 million and has succeeded in repairing the 75-mile river levee, protecting 150,000 residents, 4,000 businesses, and 56,000 local jobs from threatening Mississippi River water levels. In 2017, the American Bottoms levee system will be evaluated for reaccreditation.

“If we had not taken this proactive approach, flood insurance rates in the area would have skyrocketed,” Sauget describes. “Many homeowners would not have been able to afford it, and businesses would not have been able to expand. It was critical to have the levees restored and make sure our communities are safe, our businesses are safe and continue to drive robust economic activities.

“In 2007, it was estimated that over \$50 million in increased insurance premiums would have left our region through the flood insurance protection program if we hadn’t done something. We didn’t want to see that exodus of money due to the levees being decertified without seeking some sort of process to have them fixed.”

Tune in to WSIE 88.7 FM every Sunday at 9 a.m. as weekly guests discuss issues on SIUE's campus.

By Logan Cameron, SIUE Marketing & Communications