

Pembrook, Jackstadt discuss relations



SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembrook.

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Community involvement is the topic of this week's episode of Segue on WSIE-FM 88.7, as Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Chancellor Dr. Randy Pembrook hosts Rob Jackstadt, mayor of Glen Carbon and founding partner of the law firm Tueth, Keeney, Cooper, Mohan & Jackstadt, P.C.

A Collinsville native, Jackstadt practices law in the areas of commercial, construction and education litigation. Following in the footsteps of his father, former Collinsville mayor Louis Jackstadt, Rob has served as Glen Carbon's mayor since 2005. Jackstadt previously served on the planning and zoning commission as a Village of Glen Carbon trustee, and was also an Edwardsville School District board member.

"My parents instilled in me the idea that public service is important and to be sure to give back to your community by getting involved at some level," Jackstadt explains. "I encourage others to get involved with their communities as well, because it can be rewarding to learn the different issues involved in running a municipality."

Jackstadt shares what mayoral decisions he would have made differently from when he assumed office.

"If I or anyone knew the state of Illinois would be in the financial condition it is currently, not funding major infrastructure projects, I would have implemented funding structures and found different avenues for the funding of infrastructure improvements much earlier than what we are currently doing," he says. "In the state today, we've had to establish a 'new normal.' You cannot count on a capital bill or having majority funding from the state for major infrastructure right now. Municipalities must basically come up with that money on their own."

Pembrook agrees, "Moving forward, we're going to have to be more creative as leaders to accomplish certain outcomes."

Jackstadt explains that the biggest challenge faced as a mayor is dealing with and prioritizing unlimited demands using limited funds. In addition, Jackstadt has pursued the challenge of transforming the government structure for the Village of Glen Carbon, encouraging change in practice from its traditional models to a more modern, business-structured entity.

"We've accomplished a lot in the Village of Glen Carbon since I became mayor," Jackstadt shares. "The village was undergoing rapid growth when I was elected. It has continued to grow in population, now up to 13,000 residents, and continues to be a place where people want to live and raise their families. It has also become a place where businesses want to invest their money."

"A lot of smart growth has taken place over the last 11 years, and the village government has certainly become more diversified since 2005. We hired our first village administrator, and also improved communication in the village through a residence advisory board, a business advisory board, and the continued publishing and distribution of a quarterly village newsletter. We've also improved our system capabilities to keep residents more informed, and we've made our board meetings more accessible for residents to come and discuss issues."

Pembrook applauds Jackstadt's achievements by saying, "Diversity is certainly something that a lot of organizations are talking about. It provides a wealth of ideas when you have the right people at the table. At SIUE, we're quite proud of that as well. This is the third consecutive year we've won the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity award. As mayor, I'm sure those diverse ideas are important to village planning."

Jackstadt believes in order for local government to thrive, elected officials and appointees must reflect the diverse characteristics of a community in its entirety.

Another recent topic is merging Edwardsville and Glen Carbon. Jackstadt shares that he's open to researching the possibility.

"Many people, especially those residents who didn't grow up here, see us as one community," he says. "I have always supported the concept of letting the voters decide if the two municipalities should actually merge. Part of the misperception is the residents believe elected officials don't want that to go forward."

"The challenge is to let the residents decide if a combination of Edwardsville/Glen Carbon would be a good idea. I certainly would be in favor of having the pros and cons of that decision explored, but making sure the residents are also informed on the pros and cons."

"The counterview is, 'What about the historical significance of Glen Carbon, and the significance of Edwardsville as the third-oldest city in the state?' There's ways that could be addressed, but it's important to allow the residents to decide that – not the elected people to decide whether or not the people even get a choice in it."

Jackstadt defends the ease of such a decision by adding that he and other local mayors frequently collaborate through the District 7 Council of Mayors, a group established to discuss common interests and concerns for decision making in the local area.

Pembrook and Jackstadt continue by discussing what makes the area so attractive to both SIUE students and community residents.

"It can be said in one word: unique," Jackstadt says. "We're the only town in the world called Glen Carbon. The area is unique in that we are strategically located within 25 minutes of a major metropolitan area, but are also located far enough away from that metropolitan area where we have that 'small town' feel."

"Glen Carbon has the distinct pleasure of being located next to the city of Edwardsville, which is the county seat, and also next to SIUE. What an asset! So many mayors would die to be located next to a state institution such as SIUE and the county seat. Our location is just wonderful, but it's the people of this community that make it remarkable, and a great place to live and raise a family."

Pembrook adds, "You've touched on many of the points that I love to discuss with potential students, which is, 'SIUE has beautiful green space with fun opportunities, situated in the safe, suburban environment of Edwardsville/Glen Carbon.'"

"This area was named one of the 25 safest environments for higher education. I'm also quick to point out our accessibility to major metropolitan opportunities, especially as it relates to internships. I look at Edwardsville/Glen Carbon as a major factor in attracting students. Once they are here, it's great to see the effect they have on our environment through creativity and their effect on the local economy."

Discussion continues with Jackstadt explaining what attracted him to a career in law, future implications that law may have on higher education and professional advice for students considering a career in law.

They conclude by discussing local traditions such as the Edwardsville Halloween Parade, the Glen Carbon Pre-Veteran's Day Parade, the Edwardsville Veteran's Day Parade, Glen Carbon Homecoming Festival, Glenfest and more.

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