

Behind the scenes with SIUE's Rich Walker



Segue • SIUE

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Beyond the walls of classrooms and laboratories at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, many factors come into play that ensure the day-to-day educational experiences on campus run smoothly and without interruption. Rich Walker, vice chancellor for administration, takes the lead on all the behind-the-scenes action, including major units like parking services, capital planning, human resources, financial affairs, facilities management and public safety and other services.

On this week's episode of Segue, which airs at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Oct. 1, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound, SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke, PhD, sits down to talk with Walker about his numerous responsibilities, upcoming facilities upgrades, and the University's relationship with the Edwardsville community and beyond.

"For the most part, we're the unit that's behind the curtain," Walker says. "We service our campus, so that our University can continue to provide solid teaching and research."

Walker and his teams throughout various units are responsible for maintaining the 2,660 acres of the Edwardsville campus, along with the East St. Louis Center and SIU School of Dental Medicine in Alton. "There's so much going here on campus that it functions just like a city," Walker says. "People live, work and play here at SIUE."

SIUE's campus continues to thrive as building renovation projects in the Science East and Art and Design Building near completion. Once students, faculty and staff members return to classrooms and offices in these buildings in fall 2018, work will begin on a total overhaul in Founders Hall. The building's utility systems will be demolished and replaced with modern, code-compliant systems. Turf at the University's Outdoor Recreational Sports Complex will be replaced with a new, synthetic turf to extend its use over time. Along with renovation projects in buildings on campus, facilities management continues to make small changes around campus, including converting lighting fixtures to LED, replacing sidewalks, repairing roofs and other small tasks.

"We're always investing in our facilities and the students who use them, so there is always something to do!" Walker says.

According to a 2016 SafeWise report, Edwardsville is ranked among the top 25 safest college towns in America. This ranking, Walker says, is due in part to the University's ongoing dedication to student, faculty and staff well-being through collaboration with local public safety organizations.

"Recently, the City of Edwardsville completed its new fire station, and we are extremely grateful to have it on our campus," Walker says. "Now, we have 24/7 access to fire and ambulance emergency services on campus, and it also serves the community at large. Our relationship with the surrounding community's public safety organizations are also important to keeping our students, faculty, staff and guests safe."

These relationships come into play when training public safety officers to handle some of the worst-case scenarios that could happen on campus. Over the summer, the Edwardsville Fire Department hosted an in-depth HazMat (hazardous materials) training session with the SIUE Police Department, Madison County Emergency Management Agency, Madison County HazMat team, and Glen Carbon Fire and Ambulance Services.

“You can’t just scratch your head when incidents happen like that on campus,” Walker says. “You must have specific plans in place, and strong relationships with departments and organizations, both on and off campus.”

Pembrook commended his colleague for his ability to handle the various types of interruptions that exist on campus, whether it be with severe weather situations, electrical interruptions or problems with the water supply. For these reasons, Pembrook asks how Walker handles these difficult situations and adequately communicates them to the community.

“I don’t mind taking the lead on those situations at all, especially if my team can help me be prepared,” Walker says. “The directors, my staff and team members help gather the facts, data and the emotions involved to be able to respond to requests in the best way for the University.”

It is easy to say that some days on the job as vice chancellor for administration can get stressful, but to Walker, taking time to find humor in certain situations helps him get through some of the tough moments.

“Since the SIUE Police Department reports through me, I get to read incident reports that come through each morning. Since 18-22 year-olds tend to make some interesting decisions, the results can be unusual. Not too long ago, a student in Cougar Village called 911 and told campus police that they heard an explosion in a nearby apartment. Our officers arrived on scene and found that a student had tried drying his wet baseball in the microwave, destroying both the baseball and the microwave. Everyone was safe, but the student’s defense was that it worked for his wet tennis shoes!”

Catch this conversation between Chancellor Pembrook and Walker in its entirety by tuning in at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Oct. 1, to WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound.

By Madelaine Gerard, SIUE Marketing & Communications