

# Brett Stawar

Segue • SIUE

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## Tourism: Pushing Communities Forward



On this week's episode of Segue, a program discussing the lives and work of the people of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and beyond, SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke interviews Brett Stawar, president of the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau, which serves Alton, Grafton, Edwardsville and Collinsville, as well as other communities in Madison, Jersey and Calhoun Counties.

Stawar is the current past chair of the Illinois Council of Convention & Visitors Bureaus. He is an SIUE alumnus, who received a master's in speech communications in 2005 after earning his bachelor's degree in public relations from Illinois State University. He also is an adjunct professor at Lewis and Clark Community College.

Tune in at 9 a.m. this Sunday, June 17, to WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound to hear this episode in its entirety.

"I was in Florida a little while ago and thought about the massive economic impact the tourism industry has on the towns there," Pembroke said. "Can you talk about how the tourism industry impacts the economy in our communities?"

"If you look at the counties we serve, we see that visitors come in and spend over \$500 million a year," Stawar replies. "These new dollars can create jobs and enhance quality of life for our residents.

"Doing that through the venue of tourism is wonderful. The state of Illinois has its share of difficulties right now, but tourism is one of those things that's working the hardest to bring in new dollars so we as a state can have wonderful communities."

Stawar also mentions that the local tourism bureaus are coordinating within each community to share what each town or village has to offer or what they need to build upon in order to create a better visitor experience.

Governor Bruce Rauner recently revealed that the number of visitors to Illinois was up from 2016. The state hosted more than 114 million visitors in 2017 who left billions in economic impact.

"We're excited to see what that means for our local economies," Stawar says.

The Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau, formerly known as the Alton Regional Convention & Tourism Bureau, includes Madison, Macoupin and Jersey Counties.

“Our vision features where the Mother Road, or Route 66, and the Great River Road meet,” Stawar says. “There is nowhere else in America that it happens and we’re right here at the crossroads. We are here to raise our flag high and shout to the world that this place exists!”

Stawar was excited to have recently welcomed a group of Japanese tourists to the area. He traveled with them to Cahokia Mounds, showed them to their reserved cottage at Pere Marquette Lodge, and they continued their adventures up in Quincy.

“The amphitheater in Alton is a beautiful setting right there on the Mississippi River,” Pembroke says. “Is there anything coming up at that location you would like to share?”

“It’s a wonderful location! Where else can you get the Mississippi River flowing by with the Lewis and Clark Bridge? Then, you throw in some fireworks and it’s even better!”

“Alton has its annual fireworks on the Mississippi on July 3 each year. There will be family festivities beforehand, and a lot of communities will have fireworks displays set up each evening, so you can hop around to different towns each evening, if you wanted!” Stawar suggests.

Fireworks at Riverfront Park is just the tip of the iceberg, Stawar mentions. The second annual Bikes & BBQ Festival will take place on Saturday, July 21. The Beach Boys will be performing at the amphitheater on Sunday, July 29. “An Evening of Disney Magic” will mesmerize children and the young at heart on Saturday, August 18. The annual Sauce Alton Food Truck Festival will ride on into the park on Saturday, August 25.

More events happening at the Riverfront Amphitheater can be found at [riverfrontamphitheater.com](http://riverfrontamphitheater.com).

Pembroke emphasizes how he looks forward to the exciting activities that summer brings.

“Growing up not so far from SIUE and in a rural area, I always looked forward to the farmer’s markets and seeing all of the different things I found for sale there,” Pembroke says. “All through the area, farmer’s markets pop up in all of the areas you have talked about.”

“Oh yes!” Stawar says. “Specifically, our farmer’s market in Alton and at the Land of Goshen Market in Edwardsville. Society has changed along with that, and it’s so popular to go to them now. There is a flurry of wonderful times, visitors and cultures getting together.”

“It certainly livens up the morning!”

To hear Pembroke and Stawar’s entire conversation, tune in to WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound at 9 a.m. Sunday, June 17.

*By Madelaine Gerard, SIUE Marketing & Communications*