

# SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY EDWARDSVILLE

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## **A DISTINGUISHED CAREER IN PUBLIC SERVICE**



This weekend on Segue, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's premier radio show that discusses the lives and work of the people on campus and beyond, CAS Dean Greg Budzban, PhD, interviews former East St. Louis Mayor, Gordon Bush

This episode of Segue aired at 9 a.m. this Sunday, August 18, 2019, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound and [siue.edu/wsie](http://siue.edu/wsie).

In over forty years of public service, Bush has exemplified the best traditions of putting the welfare of others first. Bush served in the armed forces for 29 years, and then returned to the area and served in a variety of public positions in and around St. Clair County/East St. Louis. The US Army celebrated Bush's retirement in the Clinton White House. President Clinton presented Bush with a certificate of recognition and several Army medals for exemplary service.

While Mayor of East St. Louis, Bush was elected President of the National Association of Black Mayors. Bush is also active in many local boards and associations. A local elementary school carries his name in honor of his faithful local service. Bush is a lifetime member of the SIUE Alumni Association. Bush is a "Distinguished Alumnus Award" winner, and is enshrined in the SIUE Alumni Hall of Fall.

Bush actually curtailed his military career, turning down a plum Pentagon assignment in order to take on the critical problems East St. Louis was experiencing. Bush was determined to bring his talent and skills to the City to save East St. Louis from being an area of high crime and low expectations, with undependable services and a skeptical populace. East St. Louis had the highest homicide rate in the nation among cities of comparable size.

Bush says a precipitous plunge in East St. Louis's quality of life provided the spur. Bush's wife was supportive of this change in direction. He actually launched his first mayoral campaign prior to his exit from the Army.

Bush believes he brought hope to a hurting community because of his skills, training, and education.

Community leaders at the time had become hopelessly jaded, with many of them telling Bush "thugs run everything, and there is nothing anyone can do". Conditions were so sad that drugs were on sale on the property of City Hall, and police cars did not function properly. Bush's personal commitment was to "turn the city around".

Pembroke asked about the process of setting priorities for Bush's nascent administration. Bush said the foundation of change was having confidence and helping residents to gain confidence in the system, that the city could be turned in a positive direction.

Bush's extended family and other personal relationships were key in building and maintaining support.

Bush also gives his SIUE education a lot of credit for giving him a solid foundation.

Bush stated that East St. Louis "hit bottom", but a dedicated team of solid officials has turned the City around. Bush also drew in a lot of community agency support from agencies, many of which fall under the umbrella of the Higher Education Learning Center. There is a charter high school, a day care center, an active "Upward Bound" program, and an arts center under their auspice. SIUE also offers health outreach through a dental clinic and nursing intervention.

The progress of the city has led to a great deal of institutional pride for both the City of East St. Louis, and SIUE. Chancellor Pembroke reminded Bush that East St. Louis played a seminal role in the creation of SIUE. East St. Louis was the first SIUE site, and the success of the East St. Louis campus became a platform for the formation of what eventually developed into SIUE.

To hear this episode in its entirety, return to the College of Arts and Sciences website and choose "College Talk" for our episode archives. Or, follow this link:

[http://www.siue.edu/artsandsciences/CASsegue\\_prevshows.html](http://www.siue.edu/artsandsciences/CASsegue_prevshows.html) .