

SIUE alum Mark Von Nida discusses career with Madison County

Amanda Cooper, For the Intelligencer

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EDWARDSVILLE — On this week's episode of Segue, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's weekly radio program exploring the lives and work of the people on campus and beyond, Greg Budzban, PhD, College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) dean, interviews Mark Von Nida, Madison County circuit clerk and the newest CAS representative in the SIUE Alumni Hall of Fame.

The interview airs at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 17. Listeners can tune in to WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound or siue.edu/wsie.

Von Nida graduated from SIUE with a bachelor's in government in 1985. Since then, he has dedicated his career to Madison County government. He has served four terms as county clerk and is currently serving his second term as circuit clerk.

Throughout his years serving Madison County, he has received national recognition as an innovator in the field. While working in the prosecutor's office, Von Nida helped create the nation's first locally funded drug court. Additionally, he was awarded a U.S. patent after developing a computerized tabulator for voters and assisted in leading efforts to modernize the court system by digitizing records and traffic tickets.

"What brought you to SIUE?" inquires Budzban.

"I would say that SIUE came to me," responds Von Nida. "I was just a kid in Granite City and not a single person in my family went to college. I felt like I was smart enough, but I didn't have an idea of what to do. I ended up joining the Navy and received GI Bill benefits to go to school.

"I spent four years in the Navy, dedicated towards going to school. I came back and ended up at SIUE back in 1979 as a newly-released Navy man."

"What was the transition like from college life to getting into your long and distinguished career?" asks Budzban.

"It's funny because my first real job was in sales, but I also worked on political campaigns on the side," says Von Nida. "My first job with the county was working with juvenile delinquents. While working as a guard, I remained active in politics and opened up a consulting firm. From

there, I managed the state's attorney candidate, Bill Haine, and it ended up being his first winning campaign."

"How did you move from that to county clerk?" asks Budzban.

"I spent seven years working with Bill, and I felt full of purpose while working with law enforcement officials," answers Von Nida. "I grew a pretty good reputation throughout my time there. When the sitting county clerk died in 1997, I was asked if I had an interest in filling out the term. I ran for the position, and I was then elected over and over again before I ran for circuit clerk in 2012."

"A number of our scientists in the Alumni Hall of Fame have patents, but it's rare for someone in government, now political science, to have one," notes Budzban. "Can you discuss the patent associated with your name?"

"When I arrived in '97, we had been using a punch card voting system for 20 years," says Von Nida. "This system had a terrible error rate, and I used that as my plank when running for the county clerk election. I wanted to change the way we did voting, and we created cardboard sleeves that kept votes private and were designed in a way that you could feed ballots into a computer reliably."

"I remember using those hanging chads for years," responds Budzban. "The fact that you received a patent on an invention to fix that is fascinating. Can you talk a little bit about your transition to circuit clerk?"

"In 2012, I decided to run for circuit clerk," says Von Nida. "As county clerk, I was the record-keeper for the county government, but as circuit clerk, I am the record-keeper for all of the courts. I had decided that I wanted a new challenge, and there were many opportunities to bring in more technology as circuit clerk."

While working as circuit clerk, Von Nida has introduced more electronic filing systems in courts throughout the county. Now, people in the area can go online and pay for their tickets, making Madison County one of the first in the state to offer this service. After 30 years of service for Madison County, Von Nida will be retiring at the end of his term in December 2020.

Tune in at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 17, to WSIE 88.7 The Sound to hear the entire conversation.