

## Civic Progress, Tom Santel talk positive change



*By Amanda Cooper  
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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, Chancellor Randy Pembroke interviews Tom Santel, president and executive director of Civic Progress.

This episode of Segue airs at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Feb. 2. Listeners can tune to WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound or [siue.edu/wsie](http://siue.edu/wsie).

Civic Progress is an organization comprised of CEOs and senior executives from St. Louis area organizations. It seeks to leverage public and private resources to create positive change and improve the quality of life for all.

Prior to joining Civic Progress in 2018, Santel was a senior executive at Anheuser-Busch and spent a year as a Harvard University fellow in the Advanced Leadership Institute. He currently serves on the board of St. Louis University High School and the St. Louis Police Foundation.

"Civic Progress was established in the 1950s, and SIUE is proud to be a part of this organization," says Pembroke. "For those not familiar with Civic Progress, can you tell us what it does on a day-today basis?"

"We're a group of around 30 of the largest employers in the region," responds Santel. "We're a low profile group, but we try to do everything we can to move forward with progress for the region. Our four main areas of focus are public safety, economic development, workforce development and regional image."

"You have an amazing resume from large employers in St. Louis," mentions Pembroke. "Can you tell us about your path to the executive director position and what it's like to lead the organization?"

"It's a great organization, and I'm honored to serve as a leader for it," says Santel. "I'm a lifelong St. Louisan, and we have a lot of opportunities and challenges in St. Louis. This is a chance to help my hometown move forward. I got the job by accident when someone who knew my work at Anheuser-Busch reached out to me and asked if I'd consider applying."

“While leading the conversations here, do you talk to parallel organizations in other cities?” inquires Pembroke. “Do you travel often to understand the dynamics of St. Louis compared to other cities such as Denver or Nashville?”

“I don’t have much time to travel, but we have benchmarked and compared ourselves to a lot of other regions in the Midwest,” says Santel. “We see what they’re doing, and we have a lot of assets that we want to make work better for us. We have a tremendous amount of universities, including SIUE. We also have three innovation districts, and a lot of cities our size don’t have any.”

As St. Louis is becoming a place where entrepreneurship and startup companies thrive, more people are traveling to see and participate in the innovation that is taking place throughout the city. The current innovation districts include the Cortex Innovation Community in the Central West End, T-REX in downtown St. Louis and 39 North in Creve Coeur.

“What we want to do is create some kind of buzz like Nashville and other cities have,” adds Santel.

“What do we need to be doing to create that buzz?” asks Pembroke.

“Creating buzz is a shorthand way of asking how we can attract young people, which is something we have room to improve on,” answers Santel. “Efforts are being made in the region to increase our trails, and we have a number of great neighborhoods that young people enjoy. We have the building blocks, and we just have to put them together.”

“Are there any current projects you think that listeners would be interested in?” asks Pembroke.

“Everybody is pretty excited about the new soccer stadium that will be built near Union Station,” says Santel. “It’s going to be a showpiece and a new entertainment destination, and that will be particularly exciting for the young people we are trying to attract to the region.”

Other current efforts throughout the city include Better Family Life, a program established around the country to intervene in violent situations and Save Our Sons, a program operated by the Urban League to assist men in lower income areas to find jobs and earn livable wages. Additionally, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency is in the process of building a new campus in St. Louis, which will provide businesses and universities throughout the region a chance to collaborate while creating innovations in geospatial intelligence.

Tune in at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Feb. 2, to WSIE 88.7 The Sound to hear the entire conversation.