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**VISION 2020 FINDINGS TO HELP GUIDE SOUTHWESTERN ILLINOIS'
ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS**

Allied Health, Transportation/Logistics and Energy Identified as Key Clusters with Most Promise

EDWARDSVILLE, ILL. AUG. 10, 2010 . . . While the lingering effects of the worst recession in decades can still be felt, the findings of a 15-month-long consensus project spearheaded by leaders in Southwestern Illinois are helping to identify a path forward to a stronger and more vibrant future for the region. The initiative, known as ***Vision 2020 Southwestern Illinois***, was officially initiated in May 2009 to better understand and define the region's economy; determine the economic opportunities and priorities for the region, and identify strategies for achieving those priorities in the next 10 years. At a special presentation on Aug. 10, more than 100 invited guests had the opportunity to learn about the findings of the Vision 2020 report and the clusters, initiatives and strategies that need to be considered for adoption as the region prepares for the future.

Spearheaded by the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois in concert with the Madison-Bond and MidAmerica workforce investment boards, county board chairs and regional leaders across a seven-county area, Vision 2020 has sought input from hundreds of key stake holders from throughout the broader Southwestern Illinois region via one-on-one interviews, surveys and focus groups. The seven Illinois counties represented include Bond, Clinton, Madison, Monroe, Randolph, St. Clair and Washington. The process also included the collection, review and comparison of data from similar areas throughout the Midwest and interviews with representatives from those areas.

Among the key findings in the report, the comparative analysis shows Southwestern Illinois is not significantly different than other peer regions in with Midwest; and economic success for Southwestern Illinois is contingent on its ability to develop and implement a strategy to compete regionally, nationally and globally. Participants in the study identified social and political decentralization as an impediment to economic success. In addition, respondents further identified the need for a united voice on regional economic development issues and the creation of an identifiable brand for Southwestern Illinois. The process identified the Leadership Council as an entity with the right foundation for improving the ability of Southwestern Illinois to compete. The creation of an identifiable and marketable brand for the region will be a key area of focus for the Council in the coming years as it moves into the implementation phase of Vision 2020.

"It is well-known that one of Southwestern Illinois' greatest strengths has been our ability to come together and act as one region. Now need to take that ability to effectively work together in times of adversity and leverage it along our other strengths into a proactive plan for the future," notes Patrick McKeehan, executive director of the Leadership Council.

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The Vision 2020 process has identified the region's additional strengths as significant energy-producing assets (i.e. bio-fuels, electricity generation and petroleum refining); a highly developed transportation infrastructure; a continued presence of heavy industry; a skilled, experienced and motivated workforce; a quality education system; a strong healthcare delivery system and an unmatched location. The main challenge for the region is to be able to mobilize these strengths and resources so that Southwestern Illinois can compete not just with other Midwestern regions but on a global basis, expanding global exports and attracting investment from international corporations.

Of significant interest to those leading the Vision 2020 initiative are the key cluster areas that have been identified as opportunities for future growth. In keeping with the region's confirmed strengths, these include allied health, energy, heavy industry, light industry, logistics and transportation, and agriculture: the latter not just because it's an economic driver for the more rural counties in the region but also because of its ties to alternative energy. Among the most promising clusters due to existing infrastructure and/or significant capital investments are allied health, energy and logistics and transportation. A host of initiatives and supporting strategies have been proposed in the Vision 2020 report to capitalize on those opportunities.

"A key next step in this initiative will be to engage individuals beyond the boundaries of our own organizations in prioritizing those initiatives and strategies to guide the region's overall economic development strategy for the upcoming decade," notes McKeegan.

Other essential elements identified for inclusion in planning for the future are the need for some of the regional efforts to be focused on redevelopment opportunities and also on retaining and strengthening those existing enterprises that have been key economic drivers in recent years, such as heavy industry players like Mid-Coast Aviation, U.S. Steel and ConocoPhillips. There also is a need for increased emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship and for expanding the role of institutions of higher education as economic development engines as they promote entrepreneurial skills and technology transfer. Continued coordination and collaboration will also be critical to ensure the successful implementation of the Vision 2020 recommendations.

Fully capitalizing on the opportunities to advance our region will also depend, in part, on our ability to recognize that work in the future will be defined differently than it has been in the past; to understand the impact that will have on workforce needs; and to adjust our labor force development systems accordingly. "We must place a high value on education and make sure we're teaching and learning the skills that will match the jobs that will be available in the future," notes Charlie Juneau, chairman of the Madison-Bond Workforce Investment Board. "Our education and workforce initiatives will need greater alignment with the sectors of our economy with the highest potential for growth – healthcare, energy and transportation/logistics."

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“The Vision 2020 process was intended to help us define who we are as a region, where we want to go and some potential paths to get us there,” notes McKeehan. “It has helped to confirm that we have all the right assets and institutions in place to achieve economic success in the future. We look forward to continued and growing participation in this process as we draw on the findings to develop specific implementation strategies that will allow us to define our own future.”

The Vision 2020 project was funded through a Regional Innovation Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. The research was led by T.R. Carr, Ph.D., Chair of Public Administration/Policy Analysis Department at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) and John Navin, Ph.D., Professor of Economics & Finance at SIUE. To see the complete report, visit www.siu.edu/vision2020.

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