

Illinois SBDC International Trade Center at SIUE Client, Emriver Recognized as Outstanding Exporter Honoree

Some of the world's most complex environmental challenges can be better understood through something as simple as a tabletop model.

That idea is at the heart of Emriver, a Southern Illinois manufacturer whose innovative river simulation systems help scientists, engineers, educators, and policymakers better understand river behavior and the impact of human activity on natural environments.

Founded by the late Steven Gough, a fluvial geomorphologist and former employee of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Emriver was built on a simple belief: people understand science more effectively when they can see it in action.

Today, under the leadership of Katherine Poulos, Emriver manufactures stream tables and hydraulic flumes in Carbondale, Illinois, while serving customers in 28 countries. In just the past two years, the company has expanded into Greece, Slovakia, and Armenia, further strengthening its international presence.

That continued global growth has earned Emriver recognition as an Outstanding Exporter Honoree for the state of Illinois during the 2026 Mid-America Trade Summit by the International Trade Center at the University of Missouri Trulaske College of Business, a distinction that reflects the company's sustained commitment to international markets and its success in taking Southern Illinois innovation around the world.

As global demand for environmental education, watershed management, and applied learning tools continues to grow, Emriver is looking ahead to the next chapter of its international expansion.

How Emriver is reaching customers in 28 countries with support from the Illinois SBDC International Trade Center at SIUE.

Expanding internationally has created tremendous opportunities for Emriver and international sales represent 20% of the business, but it has also introduced new challenges.

"*Every country has its own set of tariffs, import requirements, shipping regulations, and documentation. We also have to learn how business is done in each country, understand cultural differences, work through language barriers, and manage exchange rate fluctuations. There is a learning curve every time we enter a new market, but each one makes us better prepared for the next*." Said Katherine Poulos, President, Emriver.

To strengthen its international expansion efforts, Emriver turned to the Illinois SBDC International Trade Center (ITC) at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

The ITC provided export counseling, international market research, country-specific trade information, harmonized tariff guidance, and introductions to partners and distributors abroad. The team also connected Emriver with organizations in South America to better understand opportunities in Brazil and Peru.

"*The ITC has helped us identify new partners and distributors as we enter new markets. The market reports they've provided, including information on harmonized tariff codes and country-specific requirements, have been extremely valuable as we prepare to enter new markets*."

While the technical expertise was invaluable, Poulos says the relationship itself has made an equally important difference.

"Just as important, they regularly check in with us. Even though Emriver is a very small company, we have always felt that our business matters. We know we have knowledgeable people we can call when we have international business questions."

For Schneidine Louis, Director of the Illinois SBDC International Trade Center at SIUE, helping companies like Emriver compete globally is at the heart of the ITC's mission. "*Illinois is home to many innovative small businesses with products that have tremendous international potential. Our role is to help remove the uncertainty of exporting by providing market intelligence, strategic guidance, trusted connections, and access to resources that allow companies to compete confidently around the world*".

Opening Doors to New Markets

One of the partnership's most significant milestones came when the ITC assisted Emriver in securing funding through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), Office of Trade and Investment's (OTI) State Trade and Export Promotion (ISTEP) Program.

The grant allowed Emriver to exhibit at the International Conference on Geomorphology in New Zealand, placing the company in front of approximately 900 geomorphologists from 45 countries, exactly the audience it hoped to reach.

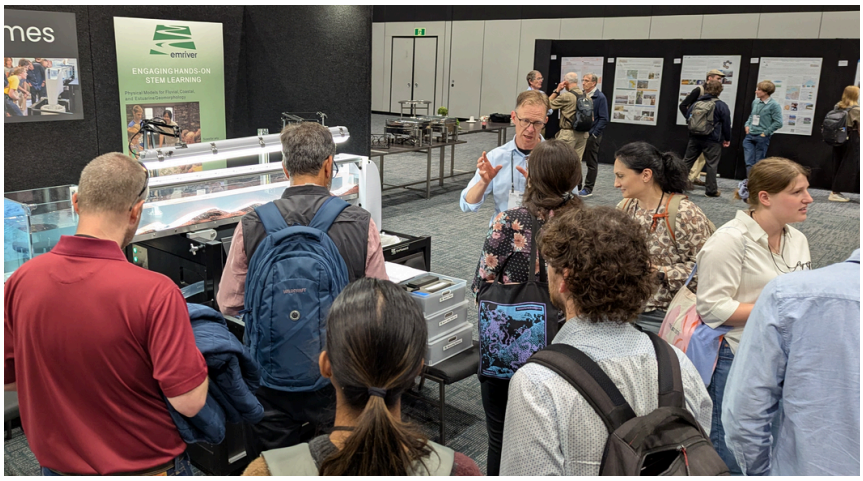
"We developed relationships with researchers, educators, and potential buyers from around the world." Poulos said.

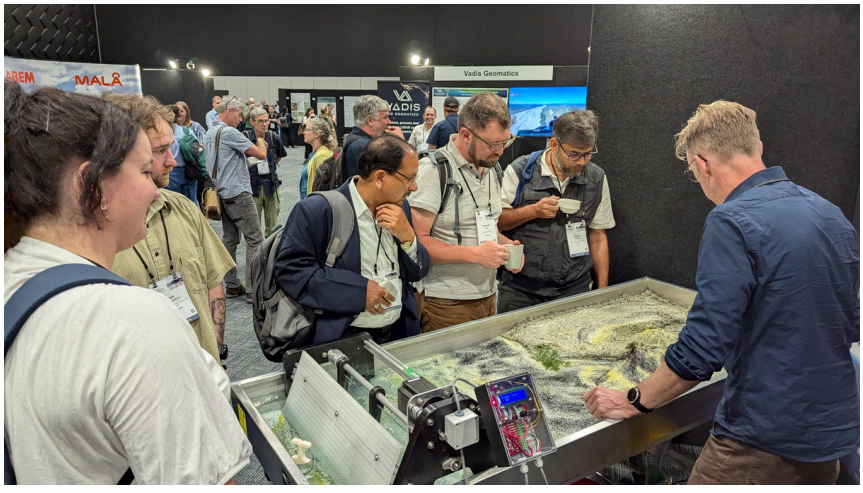
The conference is already creating new opportunities.

"We believe South Korea may become a new market as a direct result of the conference. Because the conference was held in New Zealand, we also strengthened our visibility throughout Asia and Australia. The contacts we made will continue to benefit Emriver for years as those relationships develop into future collaborations and sales opportunities."

According to Louis, export funding programs like ISTEP can be transformational for small businesses.

"For many small businesses, international trade shows are simply out of reach because of cost. Programs like ISTEP allow Illinois companies to showcase their products to global buyers, researchers, and partners. Our goal is to ensure small businesses have access to those opportunities and maximize the return on that investment".





Confidence to Grow Globally

Beyond market research and grant assistance, Poulos says the greatest value of working with the ITC has been having trusted advisors available whenever questions arise.

"The biggest benefit has been confidence and willingness to venture into the international marketplace. International business can be intimidating for a small manufacturer. Having experienced professionals supporting us gives us the confidence to pursue opportunities we might otherwise not have considered."

She also credits the relationship the company has built with the ITC team over the years.

"I cannot say enough good things about the Illinois SBDC International Trade Center at SIUE. We worked with Sylvia for many years, and the transition to Schneidine has been seamless. The entire team has been knowledgeable, responsive, and genuinely invested in our success."

Louis says those long-term relationships are what make the work rewarding.

"*Every company's international journey is different. Our commitment is to be a long-term partner, helping businesses overcome challenges, discover new opportunities, and continue growing in global markets.*"

Looking Ahead

Emriver plans to increase international sales by another 5% over the next three years while expanding throughout South America, strengthening its distributor network in China, and rebuilding its Canadian market.

"*We have found that our models sell themselves. Once we get a few models into a new country, scientists and educators see them in use, and interest begins to grow. That word-of-mouth exposure has been one of our strongest drivers of sales.*"

As Emriver continues its international expansion, the Illinois SBDC International Trade Center will remain a strategic partner by providing export expertise, market intelligence, and connections that help the company reach new customers around the world.



About Emriver

- Headquarters: Carbondale, Illinois
- Founded by: Steven Gough
- President: Katherine Poulos
- Countries Served: 28
- Primary Customers: Universities, research institutions, engineering firms, government agencies, museums, conservation organizations, and educators worldwide.
- Products: Em2, Em3, and Em4 Stream Tables, EmFlume 1.5, and other river simulation models used to demonstrate river dynamics, sediment transport, watershed management, and fluid mechanics.
- Global Impact: Emriver products are used in classrooms, research laboratories, museums, and public outreach programs to help scientists, engineers, educators, and decision makers better understand river systems and environmental processes.





