

CRITICAL SKILL SHORTAGES INITIATIVE:

Here's Why Healthcare Professionals Should Choose Rural Southern Illinois

Health care professionals have many good reasons to live and work in rural Southern Illinois. With the increased growth in the region and the job opportunities offered at various health care facilities, the advantages are immense.

Four Documented Reasons:

1. Area hospitals and clinics have numerous job opportunities:

Southern Illinois Healthcare hospitals and clinics are thriving and growing. {**Herrin Hospital**, for example, is currently expanding with a \$20 million construction project.} Nursing and other healthcare related jobs are available at all SIH medical facilities including **Memorial Hospital of Carbondale**, **St. Joseph Memorial Hospital of Murphysboro**, **Miners Memorial Health Center of West Frankfort**, as well as **Herrin Hospital**.

Hamilton Memorial Hospital District, located in McLeansboro, is a small healthcare provider which provides general healthcare services to the residents of Hamilton County and surrounding areas. The organization consists of a 25-bed hospital, a 60-bed intermediate care nursing center, a home health agency, a physician's clinic, and a number of specialty physicians who provide an array of care to the local residents.

St. Mary's Good Samaritan is preparing for the future by expanding services and facilities throughout the region. As one of the largest healthcare organizations in Southern Illinois, St. Mary's Good Samaritan consist of two regional hospitals located in Mt. Vernon and Centralia, eight Family Health Centers, and numerous specialty programs.

Harrisburg Medical Center is a progressive hospital with 86 beds and over 40 physicians on staff. Ever growing, the hospital recently completed an expansion which includes an oncology & infusion unit, and a geriatric unit in the Behavioral Health Services Department, which was added to their



Herrin Hospital - Herrin, IL



Hamilton Memorial Hospital - McLeansboro IL

in-patient and out-patient behavioral health services. "There are always healthcare jobs," comments Tracey Bragg, RN, BS. Bragg has over 20 years experience as a nurse and works as a case manager for Southern Illinois Healthcare. "Yes, there is a nursing shortage, but people will always need healing and care, and there are so many settings: home health, hospitals, case management and doctors' offices."

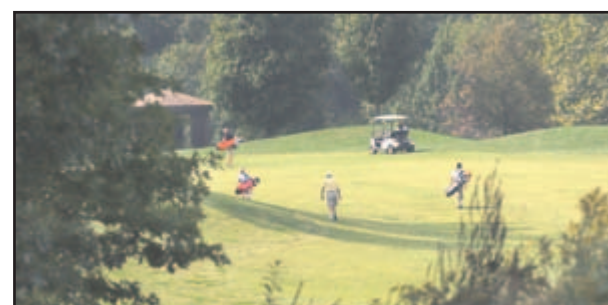
2. Lifestyle in Southern Illinois is very attractive.

The region is bounded by the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, and dotted with accessible lakes nestled in the great hardwoods and hills of the Shawnee National Forest.

Southern Illinois is rich with state parks, including Giant City State Park and Lodge, Garden of the Gods, Bell Smith Springs, and Little Grand Canyon.

OTHER BENEFITS

- Boating, sailing, fishing, hiking and rock climbing are all available.
- Horse and bike trails for the adventurous.
- Over 25 golf courses.
- Dozens of wineries.
- Many beautiful bed and breakfast facilities available for weekend trips.
- Music festivals.
- Local fairs
- Historical attractions
- Unique shops and towns.
- Fine restaurants with local and international cuisines.



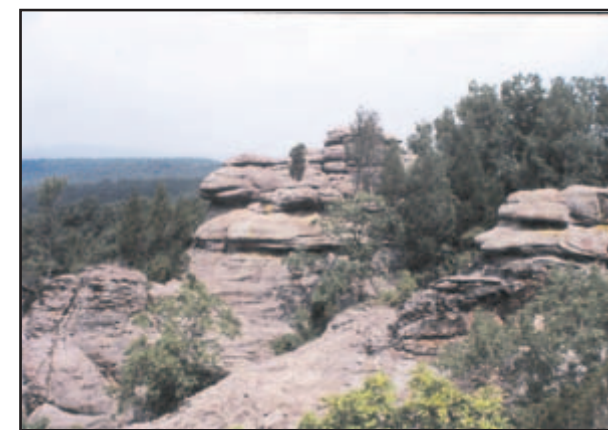
Hickory Ridge Golf Course - Carbondale, IL



Rend Lake Recreational Complex



Blue Sky Vineyard - Makanda, IL

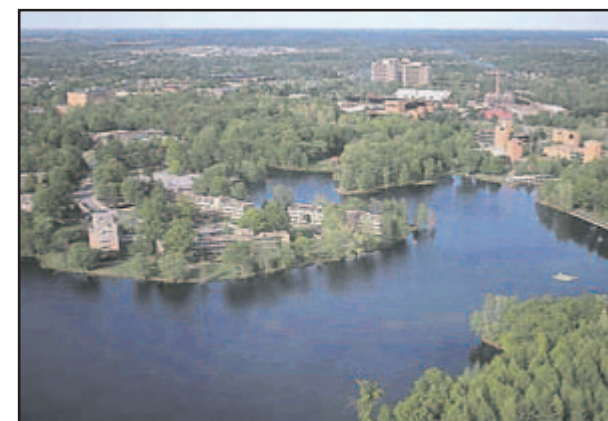


Garden of the Gods Recreation Area

"By staying here to work, I get a more peaceful lifestyle than the city," Bragg explained. "If you want to unwind, you can take a drive on any of a thousand gravel roads and see a beautiful countryside. People in the city have to travel far to see what we see right out our windows." The outdoor life is right at hand, but it is also never too far from town. "I sit on the porch at night and listen to the crickets. It's so relaxing, but, I can be in town within minutes to shop or eat."

Many rural areas benefit from having a college or university nearby. They bring big-city style culture without the hassles of the big city. Southern Illinois University Carbondale has top-ranked academic and sports programs, especially in football, basketball, and softball, and it offers a full schedule of theaters, live music, operas, and other events at the historical Shryock Auditorium as well as McLeod Theater.

John A. Logan Community College is just 10 minutes from SIU, and is one of the top ranked community colleges in the country. In addition to John A. Logan College, there are five other great community colleges: Frontier Community College, Rend Lake College, Shawnee Community College, Southeastern Illinois College, and Wabash Valley College.



SIUC Campus - Carbondale, IL

These community colleges offer many educational and cultural activities including theater, music, expositions, and sports.

3. People are friendly.

"Folks are folks around here," Bragg said. "Everyone is kind and friendly; strangers wave at each other and people will stop to help you. There are a lot of trusting, caring people in Southern Illinois."

4. Healthcare workers are desperately needed.

Bragg further comments: "Rural areas like Southern Illinois are so underserved. My heart is here. My whole desire to care for others came from my home and family, and I want to give back!"

Bragg remembers being in high school when her grandmother was terminally ill. "I felt so helpless. I was determined that would never happen again. Any nurse will tell you they like to help people. My greatest accomplishment comes from doing something to help another person. It's the nurturing side in me."



Photo Courtesy of David Thompson Realty - Marion, IL Home located in Anna, IL

OTHER DETERMINING FACTORS:

COST OF LIVING SAVINGS

One may purchase a new home with land and room for horses for less than the price of a home in many other cities.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRANT OPPORTUNITIES ARE AVAILABLE.

Southern Illinois Healthcare implemented a scholarship program in 2000 for its employees and students. The average award covers tuition, books, lab fees, uniforms, and some supplies for a two-year program. If the student needs more funding, SIH will consider amending the contract to include additional needs. The scholarship recipient is required to work for SIH for 2 years (typically) after graduation. The summer of 2003 was the first year SIH had graduating students. During this time period, eleven RNs were graduated from local training programs and hired within the SIH facilities. Thirteen students graduated in 2004, and twenty-two graduated in 2005. In the past year alone, the Southern Illinois Healthcare system has contributed over \$89,500 for the educational expenses of registered nursing students in the Southern Economic Development Region.

Hamilton Memorial Hospital in McLeansboro offers the same type of scholarship program as that offered by SIH. Though Hamilton Memorial is a smaller more rural healthcare system, it fully supports and funds the educational opportunities and advancement potential for its employees and will fund all employee requests for education expenses in certain healthcare-related fields. Any graduating high school senior living in Hamilton County is eligible for this program. The only requirement is that students must complete one full year of employment for each year of study paid by the hospital. Additionally, Hamilton Memorial has collaborated with local high schools and Rend Lake College to promote awareness of healthcare career opportunities and to increase the number of potential nursing candidates.

St. Mary's Good Samaritan, Inc. (SMGSI) in Mt. Vernon has implemented its Forgivable Loan Repayment program. This program pays the full cost of two-year nursing program at Rend Lake College, and requires a two-year work commitment after graduation. The loans pay for the entire nursing education, provides part-time employment and experience while attending school, and guarantees employment upon graduation. If a scholarship recipient fulfills his/her two-year obligation, the loan is forgiven. If a recipient fails to meet his/her two-year commitment, he/she must repay the full amount of the loan.

Harrisburg Medical Center offers a \$5,000 per year scholarship program for five nursing students per year. In addition, the medical center pays the cost of the nursing board exams for graduation provided the student passes on the first attempt. The student is guaranteed a position upon graduation and must agree to work at HMC one year for every year of educational assistance.

Title I funds, under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, provides financial assistance to eligible adults who are 18 years of age or older, authorized to work in the US, compliant with Selective Service and have been recently laid off from a low growth occupation or are not currently sustaining a self-sufficient family income. Through an Individual Training Account (ITA), the cost of tuition and fees for a one-year nursing program and/or a two-year program could be funded. Funds may also be available to assist with supportive services such as mileage, day care, and uniforms, if needed.

Questions about the initiative?

If you would like additional information about the Critical Skill Shortages Healthcare Initiative, please feel free to contact:

Mr. Cary Minnis
 Healthcare Liaison
 Man-Tra-Con Corporation
 3000 W. DeYoung Street, Suite 800-B
 Marion, IL 62959
 Phone: 618/998-0970, Ext. 211
 E-mail: CaryMinnis@mantracon.org



*This is the twelfth of a year-long series of articles that will appear in the Southern Business Journal as part of the Critical Skill Shortages Initiative (CSSI). The Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) as part of Governor Blagojevich's Opportunity Returns Initiative awarded the Southern Economic Development Region (SEDR) a Healthcare Training Grant to support projects aimed at decreasing the critical nursing shortage in southern Illinois. Representatives from healthcare, community colleges, business, K-12 education, labor, economic development and workforce development participated in focus group & consortia committee meetings during the last year to plan and implement these important projects."