GREAT RIVERS | GREAT ROUTES
GREAT escapes

ALTON | COLLINSVILLE | EDWARDSVILLE | GLEN CARBON | GODFREY | GRAFTON
MADISON | JERSEY | CALHOUN | MACOUPIN | MONTGOMERY | GREENE COUNTIES

SPRING GUIDE 2020
ESCAPE the lingering hold of winter and discover Spring in a land full of rivers and scenic roadways. Where the past mingles with the present. And the sound of rushing river waters harmonizes with the rumble of cars cruising down historic highways.

DISCOVER hidden landscapes cloaked in the greens, pinks and yellows of spring.

SAVOR a crunchy bite of a fried fish sandwich or linger over a hand pulled soda at a historic pharmacy.

DRINK in the sunshine at a riverside table beside the Mighty Mississippi River. Marvel at giant statues and unearth new treasures in whimsical shops.

PICTURE YOURSELF HERE – Just outside St. Louis – in the Great Rivers & Routes region of Southwest Illinois where a memorable Spring escape is waiting.

Cover Photo: @petemccarty; Inside photos: The Nature Institute, John Locus, Mike Cruz, Scott Evers, Marty McKay, Megan Fairless, Emma Franklin, Amy Chartrand, Candice Watson
Escape to the GREAT OUTDOORS

HOP ON A BIKE. TAKE A BRISK WALK. FLY A KITE. SCALE A ROCK WALL. RISE OVER RIVER BLUFFS ON A SCENIC SKY LIFT. PACK A PICNIC AND RELAX ON GRASSY HILLS IN SWEET SMELLING PARKS.

Re-discover the wonders and delights of Spring in the wide-open spaces of the Great Rivers & Routes region which extends along the southern leg of Route 66 from Springfield to St. Louis and includes the Great River Road running from St. Louis north to just outside Quincy, IL.

There’s no end to the adventures available for a quick weekend getaway or simply taking a day away from the hustle and bustle of daily life and discovering a relaxing escape.

{BIKE}

Celebrate Spring with a bike ride or walk along the more than 130 miles of carefully curated bike trails and walking paths linking local communities. Mile after mile of paved or oil and chip surfaces weave through the region along the mighty Mississippi River and Route 66 including a spectacular route on the picturesque Old Chain of Rocks Bridge connecting Illinois to Missouri. With old growth forests, residential neighborhoods, lakes, ancient bluffs, rivers and prairies highlighting the diverse paths, Spring is the perfect time to discover a new route. Trails loop throughout the area including the nine hallmark trails of the Madison County Transit System which offer journeys of varying lengths. Bike or stroll along the levees beside the Mississippi River just outside St. Louis or venture further inland on the great American Bottoms with trails that stretch from Edwardsville and adjacent Southern Illinois University Edwardsville north to Staunton and New Douglas.

It’s all about the views along the Sam Vadalabene Bike Trail which links the river communities of Alton and Grafton with Pere Marquette State Park. Walk or bike alongside ancient limestone river bluffs, remnants of a long-extinct ocean on the trail that parallels the mighty Mississippi River. Be sure to visit the petroglyph of the Piasa Bird along the trail just outside Alton. Other highlights on the trail include the Village of Elsah, downtown Grafton and a cross commemorating the journey of Father Marquette and Louis Joliet in 1673.

For mountain bike enthusiasts, Lake Lou Yaeger in Litchfield offers a 6.6 mile trek around the lake designed to test all levels of a biker’s skill set. A practice loop is available at the far end of the trail complete with obstacles bicyclists may encounter on the route. Hikers can enjoy a leisurely stroll along the Route 66 Trail at the lake or at the nearby Shoal Creek Conservation area. Spend a day exploring what each portion of the recreation area has to offer.

{CAMP}

Get back to nature and rough it a bit with camping at Lake Lou Yaeger, Beaver Dam State Park and Pere Marquette State Park in Grafton. From primitive sites, to RV facilities and even, in some cases, equestrian facilities, there are plenty of outdoor options available.

{CLIMB}

Rock climbing fans can scale the limestone bluffs along the Illinois River at Pere Marquette State Park. Or enjoy a heart pumping experience with Grafton Zipline Adventures located in the tree line high over the confluence of the Mississippi and Illinois rivers. Enjoy a ride on the Grafton SkyTour, an aerial lift that ascends the river bluffs to the top of Aerie’s Resort.

{RIDE}

For those who want to experience the outdoors from a different vantage point, take a 45-minute journey through Pere Marquette State Park on horseback. The Pere Marquette Riding Stables has trail rides Wednesday – Monday from May to October. Reservations are requested.

{CRUISE}

Enjoy a more laid back outdoor adventure on the rivers. Grafton Harbor has weekend river cruises on board the 49-passenger excursion boat, Hakuna Matata. Both sightseeing and themed cruises are available.

TRAVEL TIP:

Personalized guided bike tours are available throughout the region courtesy of Crossroads Bike Tours. Three day and five day biking adventures can be booked by calling: 314-656-6229.

For more outdoor escapes go to RiversandRoutes.com
**Spring Fever?**

**ESCAPE TO SPRING FESTIVALS**

WHEN SPRING FEVER STRIKES, THE BEST CURE IS TO SPEND A DAY OR WEEKEND IN THE GREAT RIVERS & ROUTES REGION IN SOUTHWEST ILLINOIS CRUISING ALONG HISTORIC ROUTE 66 OR STROLLING THROUGH HISTORIC TOWNS DRINKING IN THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF LOCAL FESTIVALS.

Meander through Alton at a new street fair, **Meander on Market**, slated for Saturday, April 18, or indulge in history, music and food at the annual **Elsah Spring Festival** planned for late April. A variety of festivals celebrating mushrooms, Native American art and American Blues are also on tap this Spring.

Travel back in time to the historic Village of Elsah during this year’s **Elsah Spring Festival April 25 and 26**. The entire village is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a scenic backdrop to a festival of food, music and crafts. Explore the Village Hall with its museum of the village’s river history and the Ice House, one of five which once served the tiny village. Enjoy toe tapping live music including rock and folk in the gazebo behind **The Green Tree Inn Bed & Breakfast** and browse for special one-of-a-kind finds from hand woven historic pieces, hand-thrown pottery, paintings, hand woven baskets, glass bead jewelry and more. Walking tours of the village are also available both Saturday and Sunday.

“You can feel like you are in a different place and time when you are spending time in the village,” said Connie Davis, one of the festival organizers. “The backdrop of the Village is what makes this festival special.” For more details, go to: [EscapetoElsah.com](http://EscapetoElsah.com)

Journey to **Pere Marquette Lodge & Conference Center** and hunt for the fabulous fungus, the morel mushroom, during the annual **Mushroom Festival, Sunday, April 19**. The highlight of this annual event is the “Great Morel Hunt” which kicks off at 1 p.m. Join fellow morel hunters (weather and morels permitting of course) for a discovery journey to bring back the most (or smallest and even biggest) morels to win a free night’s stay at the Lodge. Additional activities include wine tastings featuring local wines, live music, a variety of vendors and activities for the kids. **Free admission**.

Discover Native American art on the site of the largest Native American mound system in the United States – **Cahokia Mounds**. The **annual Spring Indian Market Days** takes place **April 17 – 19** on the historic grounds. Browse through the interpretive museum then check out the more than 30 Native American vendors. **Free admission**.

Ladies – put on your biggest and best hat and head to **Mac’s Downtown** in Alton for the annual **Kentucky Derby Party, Saturday, May 2**. The Fabulous Thunderbirds will provide entertainment on the Belle Street stage. **Free admission**.

Kick back for a weekend of the blues at **Grafton Winery The Vineyards**. Legendary St. Louis blues bands like NGK, the Ivas John Band, and musicians Billy Peek and Larry Gwaltney take the outdoor stage throughout the two day **Blues Festival** held **May 23-24**. Sip a Grafton Winery award-winning wine, take in the views and enjoy live music. **Free admission**.

Mark your calendars and check out these activities:
- **Olde Alton Spring Vendor & Craft Fair**, Saturday - March 28
  Alton High School - Alton
- **Spring Fling at Willoughby Farm**, Saturday - May 2
  Willoughby Heritage Farm - Collinsville
- **Lewis & Clark Point of Departure**, May 9 & 10
  Lewis & Clark State Historic Site - Hartford
- **Bonifest**, May 22-23
  St. Boniface Church - Edwardsville

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If it’s April, it’s time for the Grafton Riverside Flea Market. Enjoy treasure hunting at its best alongside the Mighty Mississippi River in Grafton. The market, held the fourth Saturday and Sunday of each month from April through October, boasts some 75 vendors showcasing vintage clothing, antiques, coins, jewelry, and more. The flea market is housed in the historic Boat Works building adjacent to the popular Loading Dock. Admission is free. How much you spend is up to you!

**Grafton Riverside Flea Market**
April 25 & 26  
May 23 & 24  
June 27 & 28  
July 25 & 26  
Aug. 22 & 23  
Sept. 26 & 27  
Oct. 24 & 25

Bring your carts, totes and wagons to Litchfield for the monthly **Pickers Market** held the second Sunday of each month from May through October. Collectibles, antiques and upcycled goods, all made prior to 1980, are here at this open-air market which runs from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The Pickers Market covers 10 downtown Litchfield streets starting at 400 N. State St. More than 120 vendors travel to the market each month. In addition to vendors, there is live entertainment in the downtown Library Park and food booths located at all intersections on State Street. **Free admission.**

Make the first Saturday of each month a Route 66 day and cruise along the Mother Road to Carlinville for the monthly **Carlinville Market Days.** The market is held the first Saturday of the month from April through November. Collectibles, crafts, primitives, shabby chic, jewelry, fashion and more are on hand.

Starting in May, area farmer’s markets come to life with bunches of fresh asparagus, blueberries, strawberries and more. Comb through stalls offering the freshest in locally grown produce and flowers in Alton, Edwardsville, Bethalto and Brighton. Additional farmer’s markets sprout up in June throughout the area.
Head over to the Alton Farmers’ & Artisans’ Market each Saturday starting May 9. The markets run through Saturday, Oct. 17. From 8 a.m. to Noon local farmers, crafters and bakers set up stands showcasing their wares.

Browsing through farmers’ markets has become a popular activity for local residents as well as visitors. Sara McGibany, Executive Director of Alton Main Street which organizes the Alton event, notes the market has become a social gathering as well as shopping experience.

“It’s very important for people to be able to meet the people growing their foods,” McGibany says. “But today it is as much a social experience as a shopping experience.”

The Alton Farmers’ and Artisans’ Market will expand this year to include food trucks each Saturday and hot meals will be available through local vendors on June 6 and Oct. 10.

Fresh local honey, lettuce, herbs, in-season fruits, organically grown crops, baked goods, grass-fed beef, farm fresh eggs and more fill the stalls at the market held at the intersection of Landmarks Blvd. (U.S. Route 67) and Henry Street. A large assortment of hand-crafted artwork including pottery, stained glass, soap, candles and beadwork are on hand. A scaled down version of the market is also held Wednesday evenings from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Free admission.

The 24th Annual Land of Goshen Community Market in Edwardsville also opens for the season on Saturday, May 9. Downtown Edwardsville comes to life during this vibrant community market. More than 80 regular vendors greet 2,000-plus customers each week on the city’s streets. The market includes live music, live demonstrations and kid-friendly activities. The market is committed to sustaining and enhancing Edwardsville’s downtown experience by educating consumers about locally grown food. The Market Sprouts program is held weekly and focuses on educating children about locally grown food. The Market Sprouts program is held weekly and focuses on educating children about locally grown food. The Market Sprouts program is held weekly and focuses on educating children about locally grown food. The Market Sprouts program is held weekly and focuses on educating children about locally grown food. The Market Sprouts program is held weekly and focuses on educating children about locally grown food. The Market Sprouts program is held weekly and focuses on educating children about locally grown food. The Market Sprouts program is held weekly and focuses on educating children about locally grown food.

Market in the Park takes place in Central Park in Bethalto each Sunday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The unusual Sunday farmer’s market includes weekly themes. Market in the Park kicks off on Mother’s Day, Sunday, May 10. The market will run through Oct. 11.

The Village of Brighton holds its weekly Farmer’s Market every Thursday starting May 7 and running through Oct. 8. The market is held in Schneider Park from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

UPCOMING FARMER’S MARKETS

- Jersey County Farmers & Artisan Market
  Every Thursday
  June 25 – September 24
  (Outrageous Outdoors Parking Lot, 902 S State St.)
- Litchfield Farmers Market
  June 4 – July 30
  (Downtown Litchfield, 400 N. State St.)
- Maryville Farmers Market
  Every Thursday • May 28 - October
  (Fireman’s Park in Maryville)
- Staunton Farmers Market
  Saturdays • May – October
  (Corner of Union and Mill St.)

For more local markets go to RiversandRoutes.com
THICK CRUST. THIN CRUST. STUFFED. DEEP DISH. FLATBREAD. ADD A LAYER OF SAUCE, SOME THICK, HOT MELTED CHEESE, SPRINKLE ON MEAT AND VEGGIES AND THE PERFECT PIZZA IS JUST A MOUTH-WATERING BITE AWAY.

GRAB YOURSELF A SLICE OF THE PIE

IF PIZZA IS YOUR GO-TO FOOD, THEN THE GREAT RIVERS & ROUTES REGION HAS YOU COVERED.

From square sliced pies to more traditional pie shape pieces. Marinara sauces to salsa and alfredo sauces. Whatever your pizza craving, restaurants throughout the area have become destination points for pizza connoisseurs.

“What makes pizza really good is when everything is made fresh, in-house,” says Mike Cool, manager of Joe’s Pizza in Godfrey. “We make our own sauces, cut the vegetables and cook the meat into the pizza so the flavors sink deep into the pie.”

Peel Wood Fired Pizza in Edwardsville has consistently been the gold standard of creative, tasty wood fired pizzas. Owners Patrick Thirion and Brandon Case are trained chefs and bring their talents for European and Asian inspired pizza blends to the forefront.

Johnson’s Corner in Alton added personal pizzas to its menu more than six years ago as a way to expand options for families, said Jimmy Johnson, owner of the popular neighborhood pub and restaurant. “Nothing goes better with pizza than beer and we got the beer down. We decided to try the pizza thing.” The rest, as they say, is history. Pizzas have become a staple on the menu and diners are encouraged to build their own.
Take the Route to Pizza

From the tiny community of Virden, just south of Springfield, to Collinsville, minutes from downtown St. Louis, the number of pizza stops are just as numerous as are the whimsical sites along the Mother Road. Here are some must-try pizza spots along Route 66:

**VIRDEN:**
- Dicarlos Pizza • 330 N. Springfield St.

**CARLINVILLE:**
- Full Throttle • 11578 Shipman Rd.;
- Reno’s • 518 N. Side Sq.

**LITCHFIELD:**
- Nancy’s Pizzeria • 121 E. Union Ave.;
- Gianni’s Pizza & Italian Ristorante • 301 W. Union Ave.

**STAUNTON:**
- Cavatào’s Restaurant & Pizzeria • 101 S. Edwardsville St.;
- Little Italy’s Pizzeria • 305 W. Main St.

**EDWARDSVILLE/GLEN CARBON:**
- Dewey’s Pizza • 112 E. Vandalia St.;
- Peel Wood Fired Pizza • 921 S. Arbor Vitae;
- Sugo’s Spaghetteria • 243 Harvard Dr.;
- Bella Milano • 1063 S. State Rt. 157;
- Foundry Public House • 126 N. Main St.;
- Edison’s Entertainment Complex • 2477 S. State Rt. 157;
- Pantera’s Pizza • 1522 Troy Rd.;
- 222 Artisan Bakery • 222 N. Main St.;
- EdgeWild • 1071 S. State Rt. 157;
- Big Daddy’s • 132 N. Main St.;
- Gilliganz Bar and Grill • 7257 St. James Dr.;
- The Cabin at Judy Creek • 3730 S. State Rt. 157

**COLLINSVILLE:**
- Mungo’s Italian Eatery • 100 E. Main St.;
- Old Herald Brewery & Distillery • 115 E. Clay St.;
- Friday’s South Bar & Grill • 106 E. Main St.;
- Sloan’s Pub House • 119 W. Main St.;
- Horseshoe Restaurant Lounge • 410 S. Louis Rd.

Take the road less traveled for some great tasting pizza. Roma’s Pizza in Bethalto is a local favorite and has been serving their hot, cheesy family recipe pizza since 1973. Imagine taking a bite of the Tony’s Special and savoring the cheese, sausage, pepperoni, bacon, tomato and a nip of Jalapeno pepper. Roma’s may have put Bethalto on the pizza map, but there are three other restaurants serving up specialty pies. Check out Geno’s 140 • 120 W. Bethalto Blvd., Laux Brickhouse Grille • 212 N. Prairie St., and High Flyers Grille • 16 Terminal Dr.

**PIZZA HOT SPOTS IN JERSEYVILLE –**
- 1880 Pizza & Pasta • 208 S. State St., and George’s Local Brew • 205 S. State St., serve up pizza and all the toppings.

**MORE PIZZA ...**

**WHITE HALL:**
- John’s Pizza • 102 Olive St.

**HILLSBORO:**
- Gianni’s Pizza & Italian Ristorante • 209 S. Main St.

**CARROLLTON:**
- Alfonso’s Pizza • 514 N. Main St.

**TROY:**
- Alfonso’s Pizza • 611 Edwardsville Rd.

Want More?

For over 60 years, Tony’s Steakhouse and Bar, 102 W. 9th St., Alton, has served up what some call the perfect pizza. With its sweet marinara sauce topped with fresh meats and spices, the pizzas have become a signature dish for this family-owned and operated restaurant. Great tasting pizza can also be found at these Alton and Godfrey restaurants:

**Old Bakery Beer Co.**
- 400 Landmarks Blvd.;
- Regal Beagle • 3043 Godfrey Rd.;
- Decarò’s • 602 E. 3rd St.;
- Great Rivers Tap & Grill • 3559-B College Ave.;
- Alton Sports Tap • 3812 College Ave.;
- Mac’s Downtown • 315 Belle St.;
- Bossanova • 112 W. 3rd St.;
- Town Club • 2400 E. Broadway

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“Spring is a great time to witness the incredible migration and nesting of hundreds of bird species,” said Michelle Wiegand, Education Manager at the Audubon Center at Riverlands. “Anyone who comes to the Center can view birds and enjoy the wonders of nature while using the Center’s high-powered spotting scopes from inside the Center. Or go outside and walk the 8-plus miles of paved and unpaved trails.”

The Audubon Center trails open for the season on Saturday, April 18. A family-friendly celebration is held to kick off the opening with guided bird and naturalist walks, craft activities, ecosystem exploration stations, archery and more. *Admission is free.*

More than a dozen different birds are expected to arrive at the Audubon Center this Spring including the Dickcissel, Killdeer, Baltimore Oriole, Eastern Kingbird, Spotted Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Northern Bobwhite and the Great Blue Heron. Flocks of American White Pelicans use the Mississippi Flyway, the birds' version of a super highway, to travel from their winter homes in the south to their northern summer habitats. The pelicans use the waters of the Mississippi River as a stopping off point on their journey for several weeks in March and April.

Bird walks are hosted by the Audubon Center at Riverlands on Saturdays. Scheduled walks are planned for April 4 & 18; May 2, 16 & 30.

**The Bremer Sanctuary** in Hillsboro, home of the Hickory Hills Chapter of the Audubon Society, is a protected area and home to scores of birds and animals. The sanctuary hosts thousands of Eastern Bluebirds each year. Enjoy walks along the trails and watch for blue flashes of birds darting through the trees and grasslands of the 203-acre site. A *Spring Bird Walk* is planned at 7 a.m. on Saturday, April 18.

Take a ferry ride to the Two Rivers Wildlife Refuge in Brussels to see spring birds. The refuge is located between the Mississippi and Illinois rivers in scenic Calhoun County. The 9,225 acre area includes a mosaic of wetlands, open water, bottomland forests and prairie, a great spot for the more than 300 bird species that call the area home. March and April are typically the best months to see large groups of waterfowl, shorebirds and warblers. Walk the three mile gravel trail at Gilbert Lake to enjoy uninterrupted bird watching.

**Spring is a great time to witness the incredible migration and nesting of hundreds of bird species.**

**Turn your eyes to the sky this spring and enjoy the show as thousands of migrating birds soar through the Great Rivers & Routes Region.** From the visually stunning white pelicans threading their way through the air to the brilliant blue Eastern Bluebirds flitting through the tall prairie grasses, Spring is a bird watcher’s paradise.

**For the birds**

For more bird watching venues go to [RiversandRoutes.com](http://www.riversandroutes.com).

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**For the American White Pelican**

**Facts**

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<tr>
<th>Larger than a</th>
<th>Length: 50 to 65 inches</th>
<th>Snowy white in color with black flight feathers visible only when the wings are spread</th>
<th>They are the heaviest flying birds in the world</th>
<th>They travel long distances in flocks by soaring and using air thermals</th>
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*For more bird watching venues go to RiversandRoutes.com*
THAT’S ENTERTAINMENT!

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT, VINTAGE CAR SHOWS, HORSE RACING AND A NEW SPORTSBOOK GAMING FACILITY ARE ALL AVAILABLE THIS SPRING FOR UNPARALLELED ENTERTAINING ESCAPES.

Spend a weekend around all things motorsports and Route 66 related during the first-ever Mother Road Rendezvous at the World Wide Technology Raceway (formerly Gateway Motorsports Park). The weekend begins Friday, May 8 and runs through Saturday, May 9. Qualifying drag racing time trials and a Party in the Pavilion will be on tap Friday with Mother Road centric activities taking place Saturday.

The main event includes nostalgic racing featuring Gassers, Super Stockers and more. Races will take place on the drag track. There will also be a traditional hot rod and custom car show. Take a step back in time during the pin-up girl contest, a vintage (pre 1972) camper corral and nostalgia vendors on the racetrack midway. Throughout the day three Vegas headlining Rockabilly bands will perform in the midway pavilion. Capping off the day is a cruise of vintage cars to the historic Chain of Rocks Bridge. wwtraceway.com

Argosy Casino Alton recently unveiled its new Sportsbook facility – the first of its kind outside St. Louis. The Sportsbook, located inside Alton’s riverfront casino, has 25 big screen TVs, betting windows and state of the art self-service kiosks.

“We are excited to be the first to introduce sports betting to the region,” said Steve Peate, Argosy Casino Alton Vice President and General Manager. “Our all new Sportsbook integrated with our Hops House Restaurant & Bar will provide a unique experience for our guests to dine, bet and enjoy all the action.” Argosyalton.com

Head over to the historic Wildey Theatre in downtown Edwardsville for top notch live music. Every weekend, the Wildey is home to the music of the Eagles, Jason Aldean, Tina Turner and more. On Friday, April 3, Wheels Rollin, a tribute to Jason Aldean, comes to the theater. Make plans to attend That Arena Rock Show on Friday, April 17 or enjoy a tribute to the Allman Brothers on Friday, April 24 and Saturday, April 25. On Saturday, May 16, Simply the Best, a tribute to the music of Tina Turner, takes the stage. Reminisce about the Hotel California with the Original Eagles Tribute on Saturday, May 23. Go to wildeytheatre.com for more information and tickets.

Live theater is on tap when Alton Little Theater presents the classic production of Brigadoon. This romantic tale from the golden age of beautiful music and storytelling takes the stage May 8 – 17 at the Alton Little Theater Showplace. altonlittletheater.org

For more great entertainment ideas go to RiversandRoutes.com
HAUNTED SPRING escapes

DO YOU BELIEVE IN GHOSTS? WISPS OF SHAPES APPEARING IN THE WINDOWS OF LONG-EMPTY AND HISTORIC BUILDINGS. THE PHANTOM SCENT OF PERFUME LINGERING ON A STAIRCASE. A SHARP COLD SPOT IN AN OTHERWISE WARM ROOM.

Enjoy a spring escape cloaked in the mystery and chills of a haunted tour in Alton. Spend an afternoon exploring an authentically haunted hotel. Or plan an evening roaming the streets of the city learning about the history and spirits that both define and linger in the area.

Savor a Sunday afternoon exploring the Mysterious Mineral Springs Hotel with a historic walking tour of the famously haunted hotel. Join Dave and Donna Nunnally, caretakers of the 105-year-old building, at this event. The tour is a combination of a historic walking tour and a paranormal investigation. Explore the sub-basement slaughterhouse (yes, really!) to the most active (paranormal) areas of the building including the once exclusive indoor warm spring pool, the Jasmine Lady Staircase, and Pearl’s Room. The tour covers all corners of the five story, block long hotel including locations of known deaths and suicides.

All necessary paranormal investigation gear is provided. The tours are $25 per person and begin at 1 p.m. Tour dates include: April 19, May 3, and May 24. For more information, call (618) 717-0546 or go to Eventbrite.com for tickets.

One of the longest-running haunted tour providers in Alton, Alton Hauntings, has a series of special dinner and spirits tours, evening tours and special events planned throughout the spring. Reservations can be made at: Altonhauntings.com

Dinner and Spirits Tour Experiences are planned for April 18 and May 16 by Alton Hauntings. These tours include a dinner at Bluff City Grill in Alton followed by guided ghost hunts at two of Alton’s most haunted locations.

Special events with nationally known haunted historian Troy Taylor are also on tap. Be entertained with “An Evening Among the Missing” at the Mineral Springs Hotel on April 4. This dinner event explores the unsolved disappearances, supernatural vanishing and people who went missing without a trace. Troy Taylor also delves in to the infamous axe murderess with “An Evening With Lizzie Borden” on May 9. “An Evening with the Watseka Wonder” explores the most bizarre spirit possession in American history on May 23. The true story of an exorcism is presented on May 30 with “An Evening with the St. Louis Exorcism” detailing the 1949 event.

Haunted History Walking Tours are also held throughout April and May and hosted by Alton Hauntings. Journey through the streets of the historic community with an experienced guide Saturday, April 25, May 9, May 23 and May 30.

Ghostly apparitions are everywhere at the historically haunted McPike Mansion. Situated at Mount Lookout Park, Alton’s highest point, the long abandoned yet stately building is home to several documented spirits including the McPike family, servants and others. It’s not uncommon to find orbs, balls of lights and even figures standing in windows in photos taken at the mansion.

Monthly haunted activities are held at McPike Mansion and led by owner Sharyn Luedke. The funds raised from the events are used to restore the mansion.

Explore McPike Mansion on Saturday, April 25 with the “Honoring Mother Earth Tour” which begins at 7 p.m. On Saturday, May 16, the mansion will host the “Armed Forces Tour.” To register for tours, go to: mcpike mansion.com

For more information go to: RiversandRoutes.com
2020 MARKS A MILESTONE IN HISTORY – IT’S BEEN 100 YEARS SINCE WOMEN WON THE RIGHT TO VOTE. AND THAT MARKER HASN’T GONE UNNOTICED BY WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS IN THE GREAT RIVERS & ROUTES REGION OF SOUTHWEST ILLINOIS.

Alton restaurant owner Cathy Gross has dreamed of owning her own business since she was 16. Her dream came true 6 ½ years ago when she opened Bluff City Grill.

“I always thought I would own a small bar but Bluff City Grill turned out to be much larger than that,” she says. When she opened the restaurant, it was housed in a smaller building that she leased. An opportunity came up to purchase the former Eagle Lodge on Broadway Street in Alton and Gross jumped at the opportunity. That decision opened up a wider world for the business and Gross.

“I've learned a lot from other women in business like Karen Baker Brncic (Alton Marina) and others,” Gross notes. “I think to be successful, as a woman in business, you have to lead by example. People have so much more respect for you if you work with them.”

For Danell Fogle, owner of Briar Rose in downtown Litchfield, being the owner of a business seemed like a natural step. She had worked for a small electrical business owned by a husband and wife team. It was there she learned the ropes and prepared for her next step. Fogle bought Briar Rose, a consignment shop that also features local crafters and producers, six years ago. Over that time, she has gone on to purchase a 14,000-square-foot historic building in the city. She has also expanded the number of consigners in the shop to over 3,000.

“If a woman wants to own her own business I would encourage them to do it,” Fogle says. “If someone has a dream to do it, I would tell them to go ahead.”

Litchfield is home to several woman owned businesses including the historic Jubelt’s Bakery and Café, located on Route 66; Phyllibena’s, a vendor/consignment shop; MyFormals and Leona and Friends, a wedding and formal dress shop alongside a trendy clothing boutique.

“Women won the right to vote 100 years ago but there is a lot left that needs to happen,” says Lisa Ybarra, owner of Chavas Mexican Grill in Edwardsville. Ybarra left the corporate world seven years ago to open her own business in Edwardsville. That journey has been fulfilling and, in some ways, more difficult than she imagined.

“I was ready to do something else with my life,” Ybarra muses while sitting in her brightly decorated downtown Edwardsville restaurant. The aromas of grilled meat and vegetables linger in the air and the sound of sizzling fajitas served to customers adds to the atmosphere as Ybarra adds, “Owning my own restaurant has been harder in some ways than I had thought. There is an assumption about a woman’s inability to run a business by herself. So you have to be smarter and realize there is the potential for prejudice against women.”

Ybarra has solidified her place in the Edwardsville business community and works to mentor other women who are interested in starting their own business. Hearing from other women who have made it in the world of small business ownership is meaningful, she notes.

“I always ask, “how can I help other women,” she says. “And I tell people women just need to keep their foot on the gas and they will be fine. This is a good time to be a business owner and a good time to be a woman business owner. There is nothing we can’t do. We just have to push the envelope a little bit.”

Lisa Ybarra of Chava’s Mexican Grill
Escape to the Great Rivers & Routes region in southwest Illinois with a great overnight stay. Many hotels and guest houses offer deals and experiences for guests. Take advantage of a hiking package, or celebrate Spring with a Spring Fling. For more details go to: riversandroutes.com/plan

ENJOY A SPRING FLING Get outside this Spring at one of Illinois’ largest state parks – Pere Marquette. The Pere Marquette Lodge & Conference Center in Grafton is offering a Spring Fling Package which includes an overnight stay for two, two drink vouchers, breakfast for two from a select menu and dinner for two from a select menu all for $107 plus tax. This package is available through April, Sundays through Thursdays. Call 618-786-2331 for reservations.

HIT THE TRAILS Adventure awaits with the Best Western Premier- Alton St. Louis Hiking and Biking Package. Enjoy an overnight stay at this Alton hotel for two, a delicious made-from-scratch breakfast buffet, two water bottles, two cooling towels, two bags of trail mix, a local visitor guide and a bike trail map. Enjoy a brisk hike or bike ride and return to the hotel for a relaxing stay. Price: $125 plus tax. Call 618-462-1220 for reservations.

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