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Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau Awarded \$1.5 million grant for Route 66 Revitalization



Route 66 sign at the Joliet Area Historical Museum

Joliet, IL - The Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), in coordination with over a dozen municipalities, has been awarded a \$1.5 million grant under the Route 66 Grant Program administered by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and the Illinois Office of Tourism. The grant program was open to Illinois' Certified Conventions and Visitors Bureaus and funding will develop or enhance sites along Route 66, while prioritizing projects focused on future transportation and tourism trends such as electric vehicles.

“I’m absolutely thrilled about being awarded a Route 66 Grant from DCEO,” said Bob Navarro, President/CEO of the Heritage Corridor. “As we prepare for the centennial anniversary of Route 66 in 2026, I’m excited this grant program will allow for domestic and international marketing, new exhibits and roadside attractions along The First Hundred Miles, creation of a new Route 66 Welcome Center in Joliet, and EV stations in two both Wilmington and Pontiac.”

To mark the Route’s 100th anniversary, the Heritage Corridor worked with the Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway, Visit Springfield, and Great Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau to develop an integrated state-wide marketing campaign, exciting new projects, and enhancements to existing attractions that set the stage for an incredible journey along all 300 miles of the road within Illinois. These initiatives will elevate the Illinois Route 66 experience for tourists from all over the world, enabling them to take epic road trips within the state for years to come.

Projects in the CVB’s application included a new Route 66 Welcome Center celebrating The First Hundred Miles of Illinois Route 66, two EV parking lots along the Mother Road, a series of fourteen interactive signs in communities along the Route, new exhibits and signage at three museums, and state-wide marketing efforts in conjunction with partners across the state.

"As Pontiac prepares to celebrate the past 100 years of travel on Route 66, we are excited to jump into the future by offering free level 2 charging in our downtown, thanks to funding from the state grant for projects along historic Route 66," said Liz Vincent, Director of Tourism in the City of Pontiac. Pontiac will be installing an electric vehicle charging station along Route 66.

- **State-Wide Integrated Marketing Campaign**
 - The marketing campaign includes trade shows, FAM (familiarization) tours, sales missions, travel campaigns, use of print, website and digital advertisements, email, and social media platforms, targeted at both domestic and international travelers and tour operators.
- **Community Route 66 Shield Sculptures**
 - 3D “Route 66” Shield sculptures will be placed in communities along The First Hundred Miles - perfect photo ops to commemorate the journey on the Mother Road in Illinois.
 - There is currently one sculpture in Joliet and an additional twelve (12) sculptures are planned throughout Will, Grundy, and DuPage counties.
- **New museum exhibits**
 - “Fuel the Future” - A new mobile exhibit created by the Oak Lawn Children’s Museum will look back on the history of Route 66 and highlight what lies ahead for the road as a beacon for tourists of tomorrow driving electric vehicles.
 - “Joliet: Prison City” and “Joliet Champions Gallery” - Two compelling new exhibits, focusing on the Old Joliet Prison and hometown accomplishments, will be open for new visitors marking the Route 66 Centennial and beyond.
- **Transportation, Arts, and History Legacy Mural**

- A 42' x 8' mural on the facade of the legendary Rialto Square Theatre in Joliet will commemorate the twin centennials of the magnificent theater and Illinois Route 66, as well as their intertwined history.
- **Landmark Signage for the New Illinois Rock & Roll Museum on Route 66**
 - This museum celebrating Illinois' musical history and heritage will open its doors Summer 2022. The project includes a massive guitar-shaped sign above the entrance that will draw visitors for one-of-a-kind photos and boost museum attendance and business at surrounding shops, restaurants, attractions, and hotels.
- **The First Hundred Miles of Route 66 Welcome Center**
 - A state-of-the-art, Route 66 themed Welcome Center in Joliet will feature an Illinois Made Gift Shoppe showcasing artisans and businesses from throughout the state.
- **New EV Stations in Wilmington and Pontiac**
 - Both cities are popular stops along Illinois Route 66. EV stations are not currently located in the downtown areas of these communities and these features would allow visitors to linger longer to shop, dine, and explore while charging their EV on their road trip experience.

The CVB thanks local legislators and community partners for their commitment to the projects that will revitalize and preserve Route 66.

"Route 66 has been a vital job creator for the Joliet area and the entire state for nearly a century, and that is worth celebrating," said Rep. Larry Walsh, Jr. "As a member of the Route 66 Centennial Commission, I know that our partners at the Convention and Visitor Bureaus will be ready and able to brighten attractions, improve navigation and get the Mother Road in top shape for its 100th birthday."

"Funding from the Route 66 Grant program supports Joliet's many contributions to the lore of Route 66, including the iconic Joliet Prison Historic Site and the Museum's beloved Route 66 Welcome Center," said Greg Peerbolte, CEO of the Joliet Area Historical Museum & Old Joliet Prison Historic Site. "Grant support further powers the economic development engine of the tourism industry in our region and State, and converts hours spent in Illinois into days."

About the Heritage Corridor Convention & Visitors Bureau

The Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) ignites, influences, and impacts the visitor experience through tourism partnerships within the communities and counties along the historic I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor. Starting just a few miles southwest of Chicago and extending southwest through Starved Rock Country. The Bureau is the officially certified bureau for the following counties: Bureau, Grundy, LaSalle, Princeton, Putnam, and Will.

Visit HeritageCorridorCVB.com for more information.

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