

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: David Yepsen
618-453-4009

JACKSON/WILLIAMSON COUNTY SURVEY RELEASED WEDNESDAY

A new poll of residents in Jackson and Williamson Counties shows mixed feeling about life, education and work in Southern Illinois.

The survey, taken for the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, was released Wednesday and shows less than 15 percent of residents believe local business conditions are better than they were a year ago and only 7 percent rate their county as an excellent place to do business.

According to the report, the survey “provides a tremendous amount of insight into the attitudes of Jackson County and Williamson County residents. Overall, these individuals think southern Illinois is a good place to raise children, live, and retire. They rate their schools positively (both K-12 schools and SIU and local community colleges) and express confidence in local leaders to effectively address local issues. Two-thirds of southern Illinois residents believe things are generally on the right track in southern Illinois.”

“However, residents still express significant concerns about the economy,” the report said. “The majority of Jackson and Williamson County residents did not rate southern Illinois positively in terms of a place to work. They support economic initiatives to increase job growth and encourage business expansion in the region. In addition, they appear committed in their support for workforce training programs and post-high school institutions.”

The poll will be featured at a free economic development conference sponsored by the Institute next week. “Building a Creative Economy in Southern Illinois” will meet from 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. Tuesday, April 29 at the Carbondale Civic Center. The meeting is designed to plot strategies for improving the region’s economic growth by making it a more attractive place to live.

The report also notes:

*One fourth of residents report litter is a big problem.

*There are 34.8 percent of residents who are “very concerned” about the quality of water in the area. Another 27.4 percent are “somewhat concerned.”

*Over a third of residents called their leaders “weak,” but over 45 percent called them “strong.” A third said they were “not very confident” or “not at all confident” in their local leadership.

*There are 66 percent of residents who believe things are generally on the right track while 24 percent say they aren’t. Similarly, 60 percent say that as a place to live, things are “about the same” as a year ago. There were 15 percent who said things were getting better and 18 percent who said as a place to live, the two-county area was getting worse.

*Of employed workers, 27 percent said they felt “underemployed.”

*Also, while 81.9 percent say they have access to Internet service, 43.8 percent say expanding high speed Internet access is a much needed infrastructure improvement.

The poll of the two-county area was taken for the Institute by the Survey Research Office at the Center for State Policy and Leadership at the University of Illinois Springfield (UIS). The survey of 592 local residents in the two counties was taken between Feb. 20 and April 4. The UIS group conducted a similar survey in Sangamon County last year. The survey was paid for by non-state dollars using proceeds from the Institute’s endowment fund and by a grant from the Southern Illinois Community Foundation.

“There’s good news and bad news in this for the two counties,” said David Yepsen, the director of the Institute. “People are generally content with life here, but they also want to see some improvements. These numbers can help policy makers, business leaders and others make good decisions about what’s needed to improve life in the area.”

The results were unveiled Wednesday morning at a breakfast co-sponsored by The Southern Illinoisan at John A. Logan Community College. A copy of the 49-page report can be downloaded at the Simon Institute’s website: paulsimoninstitute.org.

To RSVP for the Building a Creative Economy in Southern Illinois conference, call Carol Greenlee at 618-453-4078 or email rsvp@paulsimoninsitute.org.