



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

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**GOV. BLAGOJEVICH ANNOUNCES \$37,000 OPPORTUNITY RETURNS
MARKETING GRANT TO CAPITALIZE ON TOURISM APPEAL OF ROUTE 66 AND
SPUR ECONOMIC GROWTH IN CENTRAL REGION**

CHICAGO – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today announced a **\$37,000** grant to the Illinois Route 66 Heritage Project, Inc. to develop Route 66 as a viable tourism destination in Illinois. The funding, which comes from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, will be used to market Route 66 and help link many communities along the route together, enhancing their ability to promote its historic and cultural appeal in a coordinated effort. Maps, guide books, audio tape tours, special events, exhibits and cooperative marketing strategies are being established through this project to brand the Illinois Route 66 identity. This project encompasses twelve counties and 90 communities stretching from Chicago to Madison and St. Clair Counties. These communities encompass 65% of Illinois' population. This important project is part of his *Opportunity Returns* program for the Central region – Governor Blagojevich's pro-active, comprehensive plan to promote economic growth and create more jobs throughout the region.

"As a state deeply rich in heritage, Illinois has a great natural allure that visitors want to celebrate and share in. Route 66 is woven into the fabric of American pop culture and has become an iconic symbol of our country's rugged independence and adventurous spirit. This grant is so important because it will help ensure that the great tourist potential of Route 66 is fully realized, while preserving a road that holds great charm and sentimental appeal for so many people in our state and nation," Governor Blagojevich said.

The marketing grant was announced today at the kick off of the annual International Route 66 Mother Road Festival being held this weekend, September 24-26, in Springfield. This premiere annual event is attended by thousands of people from around the world and features hundreds of classic vehicles, live entertainment and celebrities, dozens of food booths, one-of-a kind exhibits, the world's largest sock hop, and more.

"The goal of *Opportunity Returns* is to stimulate economic growth by capitalizing on the region's existing assets. Tourism is an important component of economic development and an asset whose potential has not yet fully been realized here in the Central region. This grant will help enhance the drawing power of Route 66, bringing more visitors and revenue into Central Illinois, and paying significant economic dividends down the line," DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

Route 66 is viewed as one of the most famous highways in the world and an important passageway that helped shape American culture. Route 66 winds more than 2,000 miles from Chicago to Los Angeles. Once the definitive road that connected the country, Route 66 has now become a legend. Since 1926, this ribbon of

asphalt and concrete has provided a unique way for travelers to follow their dreams of adventure. No other highway has been so immortalized in song, prose, or film.

(more)

Route 66 license plates can currently be purchased through the Illinois Secretary of State's Office.

Governor Blagojevich's *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development plan is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs in Illinois' history. Since a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development just doesn't work, the Governor has divided the state into 10 regions – finding areas with common economic strengths and needs, and developing a plan with specific actions for each region. This grassroots effort for the region was the product of significant outreach over several months with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. *Opportunity Returns* contains tangible actions to make each region more accessible, more marketable, more entrepreneurial and more attractive to business.

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