



ILLINOIS. MILE AFTER MAGNIFICENT MILE.

FOR REVIEW
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ILLINOIS GREAT RIVERS RIDE SHOWCASES THE BEAUTY OF SOUTHWEST ILLINOIS

*Cyclists are invited to travel along a new route and experience
the state's offerings, Sept. 7-13*

CHICAGO – The fourth annual Illinois Great Rivers Ride offers participants the chance to experience the state's beauty, history and culture along a new route connecting seven cities in Southern Illinois from Sept. 7-13, 2008. The seven-day, 360-mile noncompetitive bike ride is sponsored by Governor Rod R. Blagojevich's Opportunity Returns economic development program, the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Illinois Bureau of Tourism. It was created as a unique way to promote tourism to Illinois by highlighting some of the state's one-of-a-kind attractions.

Each leg of the trip averages 52 miles along a hard surface route, beginning in Hartford, just south of Alton. The route will make stops in Columbia, Prairie du Rocher, Grand Tower, Vienna, Makanda and Sparta before returning back to the Hartford starting point. The rolling hills throughout the scenic ride provide a challenging addition for cyclists as they zigzag through the southwest corner of Illinois.

"Southwest Illinois is a stunning location for the Illinois Great Rivers Ride," said Jan Kostner, deputy director of the Illinois Bureau of Tourism. "The area offers majestic scenery and great historical interest, and the itinerary provides riders with activities that truly showcase Illinois' outdoors as well as a unique opportunity to see and experience areas they may not otherwise visit."

Ride highlights

With an all-new itinerary, this year's ride is rich in history and entertainment, including:

- A ride through Maestown, a town listed on the National Historic Register and noted for its impressive collection of 19th century architecture, followed by a sans-silverware dinner and 1800s period-reenactments at Hartford's Lewis and Clark State Historic Site (Sept. 6)
- Tours of Prairie du Rocher's Fort de Chartres State Historic Site, a reconstruction of one of the original French forts built in the 1700s (Sept. 8)
- Camping at Devil's Backbone Park in Grand Tower. Cyclists can camp along the river and learn about the importance of Devil's Backbone in early river navigation as well as the lore of the region (Sept. 9).
- Exploring Giant City State Park in Makanda, home of the Giant City Lodge, which features over 4,000 stunning acres, including the Giant City Nature Trail (Sept. 11)
- A day of outdoor adventure at the World Shooting & Recreation Complex in Sparta with activities including skeet and trap shooting, and sporting clays (Sept. 12)
- A memorable ending with a gourmet dinner and dancing at the National Great Rivers Museum in East Alton, capped off with a spectacular fireworks display (Sept. 13)

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Registration

The cost for the seven-day ride is \$600 and registration is limited to the first 300 cyclists who sign up before Monday, Aug. 11 at 9:00 a.m. (CST). Registration includes camping, breakfasts, dinners, evening festivities, a shuttle service to all events and attractions and use of a support and gear truck. Lunches will be available for purchase. Hotel accommodations will be available each night at a discounted rate for interested participants at additional cost.

For more information or to register, visit www.illinoisgreatriversride.com or call **877-477-7007 (ext. 217)**.

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About Opportunity Returns

Gov. Blagojevich's *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development strategy 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 – each with a regional team that is empowered and expected to rapidly respond to opportunities and challenges. *Opportunity Returns* is about tangible, specific actions to make each region more accessible, more marketable, more entrepreneurial and more attractive to businesses. It is about upgrading the skills of the local workforce, increasing the access to capital, opening new markets, improving infrastructure, and creating and retaining jobs. *Opportunity Returns* is about successfully partnering with companies and communities, both large and small, to help all of Illinois reach its economic potential.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Media materials and downloadable images are available on the Illinois Bureau of Tourism online media center at www.illinoismediacenter.com. Additional images are available electronically or in slide format and may be obtained by contacting Andrew Smith at andrew.smith@edelman.com, 312-552-1139, or Emma Douglas at emma.douglas@edelman.com, 312-240-2730.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.