



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on August 21, 2017

## Carbondale, Illinois Seizes Eclipse Opportunity to Boost Its Economy

Two years ago Carbondale, Illinois' mayor Mike Henry learned of the epic cosmic event headed his way and decided not to say, "Oh, no!" but [instead said, "Oh, yes!"](#):

Right at the beginning we said: "We cannot fail at this. We're going to overplan. We're going to overspend. We're going to do everything possible so that every single person [coming to view the eclipse on Monday] has the best experience that they can have."



With the assistance of the city manager, Gary Williams, and Kyle Harfst, the executive director of economic development at Southern Illinois University (SIU — the city's largest employer), Henry has invested nearly \$2 million in a city beautification project called "Eclipse Crossroads of America." Williams called it "a massive opportunity. It's an unbelievable economic potential for our businesses" while Harfst, looking on at the ribbon-cutting that took place on Friday added: "The transformation they've finished in just the past week has been incredible."

Carbondale, a town of 25,000 located 300 miles southwest of Chicago, has been hurting financially for years, with student enrollment down and budget cuts from Springfield impacting its economy negatively. The town is expecting its population to at least double on Monday and has done everything that \$2 million could do to get ready: repaving sidewalks, beautifying the city's landscape, repaving and updating its public parking facilities and improving street lighting.

The city also invested in small business seminars to suggest just how the town's restaurants, cafes, and hardware stores might best take advantage of the influx of visitors. Restaurateurs were advised to keep their menus simple while suppliers of hard goods were given suggestions on just what those visitors forgot to bring. It's already working for George Sheffer, the owner of the Murdale True Value hardware store. He is selling record amounts of bottled water, duct tape, entrance and exit signs, and tanks of propane. He has also rented several tents to the city for use during the various festivals planned around the event. And, he has sold 5,000 pairs of those very necessary protective eclipse glasses.

The ripple effect of the influx of sun gazers has already been felt. Homeowners with guest bedrooms have been offering them on Airbnb, often at \$400 a night. The university's 17-story dormitory has been sold out for months. Owners of hay fields are hosting visitors with tents and RVs, each paying for the privilege. Cristaudo's Café is doubling up on its "eclipse" cookies while SIU's Saluki Stadium's 14,000 seats have been sold out, with tickets going at \$25 a pop. There will be all-day festivities which some are calling the world's largest catering event.

And of course, there are the inevitable T-shirt entrepreneurs making up special designs just for the occasion. One is Matt Sronkoski, who has been selling hand-painted eclipse T-shirts for months, boasting hundreds of individual designs he has created. He told Reuters that he has been selling them not only to local residents but to buyers from "England to the South China Sea."



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The crowds headed for Carbondale on Monday could easily exceed the mayor's expectations. Just 40 miles away is the Shawnee National Forest where an estimated 300,000 people are expected.

All of which bodes well for the city's coffers: Total new revenues are expected to top \$8 million on Monday, a four-to-one return on the city's investment. An add-on advantage is this: Carbondale will host the next total eclipse in 2024, just seven years away.

The city will start planning for that event first thing Tuesday morning.

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