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Six episodes of the PBS travel series "Samantha Brown's Places to Love" have been designated an Official Route 66 Centennial Project. PROVIDED BY SAMANTHA BROWN

PBS series spotlights Route 66 as centennial nears

Janis Reeser
Springfield State Journal-Register
USA TODAY NETWORK

Six episodes of the PBS travel series "Samantha Brown's Places to Love" have been designated an Official Route 66 Centennial Project, according to a community announcement.

The episodes, hosted by two-time Emmy Award-winner Samantha Brown, take viewers on a journey along the full length of Route 66, highlighting the people, communities and hidden gems that define the historic highway.

The designation recognizes the series' role in celebrating Route 66 as it approaches its 100th anniversary in 2026.

A journey through America's heart

Brown, who has hosted travel shows for more than 20 years, described trav-

eling the entirety of Route 66 as one of the most meaningful experiences of her career.

"To take a trip so unique is to feel the beating heart of the United States personally," Brown said in the announcement.

The episodes feature stories from towns along the route, showcasing local culture and attractions. The designation recognizes the series' impact in bringing global attention to Route 66 and encouraging travelers to explore the highway's historic towns, roadside attractions and vibrant local cultures.

Celebrating Route 66's legacy

Bill Thomas, chair of the Route 66 Road Ahead Partnership and commissioner for the Route 66 Centennial Commission, welcomed the designation.

"Samantha Brown's Places to Love"

beautifully captures the spirit of Route 66 and the people who keep its stories alive," Thomas said in the announcement. "These episodes help inspire travelers to experience the Mother Road for themselves while celebrating the communities and culture that make it so special."

Brown has logged more than 2.5 million miles, explored cities across 65 countries and filmed more than 250 travel episodes. Her show, now in its ninth season, continues to connect viewers with destinations around the world.

The Route 66 episodes are available at samantha-brown.com/route66.

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Community colleges fuel \$799.6M in economic impact locally

Nida Tazeen
Galesburg Register-Mail
USA TODAY NETWORK

Four area community colleges contribute nearly \$800 million to the region's economy, according to a community announcement.

Sandburg, Spoon River College, Illinois Central College and Heartland Community College generate a combined \$799.6 million in economic impact and support 10,464 jobs across western and central Illinois, according to the announcement.

The study found the largest share of the impact, \$645.6 million, comes from former students now working in the regional economy. These individuals earn more than they would without their credentials and spend those wages locally. The colleges' operations and capital spending account for another \$130 million, while current students contribute \$22.9 million through housing, food, transportation and other living expenses.

Regional workforce impact

The four colleges support one out of every 47 jobs in the region. Their day-to-day payroll and purchasing flow directly to local businesses, vendors and contractors, while capital projects put construction and infrastructure dollars to work across the 20-county area, according to the announcement.

"Our colleges demonstrate the concrete value of continued investment in community colleges as a driver of workforce development, regional growth, and long-term opportunity for students and communities," Sandburg President Seamus Reilly said in the announcement. "From the broader perspective, we contribute to statewide economic growth and social benefits of added income and public and private sector savings. Our students are earning more and reinvesting by largely staying here in the communities we serve."

Students who complete credentials

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How Knox students fund study abroad with the Gilman Scholarship

Nida Tazeen
Galesburg Register-Mail
USA TODAY NETWORK

Knox College students interested in studying abroad could get some financial help from the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program, which offers up to \$5,000 for undergraduate students with financial need, according to a community announcement.

The Gilman Scholarship is designed to help Pell Grant recipients participate in academic studies or internships abroad by covering expenses such as tuition, airfare, housing, books, and visa fees. At Knox, 50 students have received

the scholarship since 2004.

The program is competitive, with about 20% of applicants awarded.

How Knox supports students applying for the Gilman Scholarship

Laura Bush, TRIO academic coordinator at Knox College, has been advising students on the Gilman Scholarship application process since 2015. She helps students craft compelling essays and understand what makes a strong application.

"My biggest role is to help students find their authentic voice and ensure their program choices are well-justi-

fied," Bush said. "For most, that's never a problem. Knox students are invested, curious, and always thinking critically about the world around them."

Bush also serves as a Gilman selection panelist and Advisor Ambassador, giving her insight into what distinguishes successful applicants.

"The essay requirements have changed over time. Now, there are four essays of about 500 words each," she said. "They focus on a student's purpose for studying abroad and how it connects to their career. Students also must describe what skills they'll bring and develop, and how they plan to pay it forward—whether at Knox or with another organization to help others access study

abroad opportunities."

Recent Gilman recipient uses scholarship for Peru trip

Lissette Adame, a Knox College junior, is the most recent recipient of the Gilman Scholarship. She used the funds to participate in a cultural immersion course in Peru, led by Professor Julio Noriega, director of Latin American studies.

Adame initially planned to study in Japan but shifted her focus to Peru with the help of Bush and Tim Foster, director of the Stellyes Center for Global Studies.

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