

# EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## Havana benefits from Illinois Rural Tourism research

Many small rural towns in Illinois are experiencing an economic downturn due to reasons beyond their control. One town, [Havana, Illinois](#), is taking the bull by the horns to turn their community around economically. The local chamber of commerce and city officials partnered with University of Illinois Extension and the U of I [Department of Recreation, Sports and Tourism](#) to participate in an Illinois Rural Tourism research project focused on outdoor recreation activities, led by Dr Suiwen (Sharon) Zou U of I assistant professor.

The research resulted in a rural tourism development toolkit accessible to any community interested in growing their local tourism sector. "The toolkit allows a community to review its look at tourism and develop sustainable tactics to grow the industry sector," says [Richard Proffer](#), community and economic development educator serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties.

The research project included interviews with several sectors of the community to ensure a well rounded picture was developed. It also lead an in-person visioning workshop. Then the study surveyed the visitors to Havana and the area with the goal to understand their expectations before their visit, their satisfaction after the visit, and their thoughts on how to attract more visitors.

The preliminary findings address topics that can help the city of Havana be prepared for the potential growth in the areas of leadership, community, and tourism. The report detailed strengths and challenges while providing recommendations in the areas of planning and development of tourism opportunities, how individual attractions can improve their profitability, methods to tell Havana's unique story, work with volunteers, collaboration with outside partners to grow potential tourism opportunities, and integration of Native American history to the story of the area.

Overall, the report indicated that Havana is well positioned to capitalize on the growing trend of outdoor tourism because they have the assets to make it happen. Proffer said, "the real work begins now with the implementation of the findings and actually growing the Havana economy."

Proffer is in the process of reconvening the initial volunteer group and adding more people to the project. "This group will work to find ways to implement the recommendations and keep the work sustainable for the future," he explained. The group will use the findings of the research project to help make decisions, plans, and investments to grow Havana. University of Illinois Extension will take the lead facilitating the project with community involvement. The long-term goal is to transfer full leadership of the project to the community.

The study was also conducted in the Illinois communities of Galena, Graton, and Savannah.

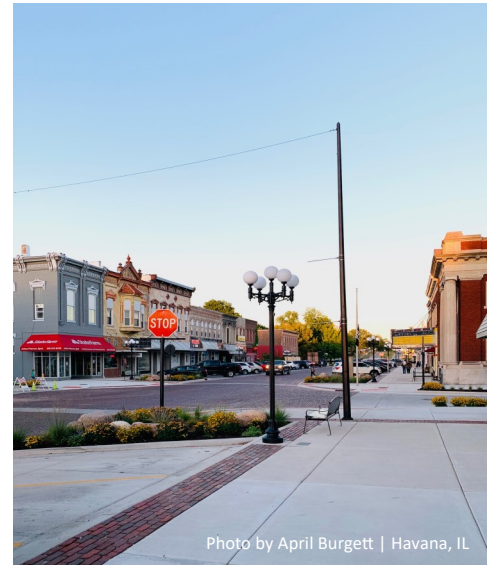


Photo by April Burgett | Havana, IL

*Havana, Illinois participated in a rural tourism research study in partnership with U of I Extension and U of I Department of Recreation, Sports, and Tourism. The findings will be used to help the city continue its investments into growth in its economy, community, and tourism.*

### Richard Proffer

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