



AMERICA'S CENTRAL PORT



*Dennis Wilmsmeyer
Executive Director
America's Central Port*

Transporting a value of \$1.1B+ in freight annually, with access to six Class-I railroads, two multi-modal harbors, 4 U.S. interstates, warehousing, and multiple development-ready sites, America's Central Port, located in Granite City, Illinois, is one of the largest freight hubs in the Midwest.

"We are a special purpose unit of local government," Dennis Wilmsmeyer, Executive Director, says. "Economic development is what we do. That is job creation and the promotion of transportation opportunities, primarily by river but also via rail and truck as well. We've even got a small aviation component on our property here in Granite City."

America's Central Port started out with absolutely nothing other than the designation of a state-created public entity for public purposes. They were formed in 1959 by the Illinois legislature, patterned after the ports of New York and New Jersey. They are a government entity that is solely and totally self-sufficient on the revenues they create on a daily basis.

"We started with very humble beginnings with no money," Wilmsmeyer says. "We started making things happen. We had a couple thousand dollars to help us get going in the early years." They eventually got a lease from the Army Corps of engineers, subleasing some property offices and growing through the years.

"In about 2000, the US Army Support Center in Granite City was closing and we got involved in the transfer of that property to the port district," Wilmsmeyer says. "That's what really catapulted us to the next level."

Today, they have about 2 million square feet of warehouse space, around 70,000 square feet of office space, 150 apartments and the two harbors, one of which was finished in 2016.

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It is a busy time for America's Central Port. They are in the midst of multiple pending construction projects. "Here at the Port, things are heating up," Wilmsmeyer says. "I have two pending building renovations that will be starting shortly. We have some rail track construction coming up, and we have possibility of new building construction as well. It's a great time for the port in terms of the roadmap of what we have to accomplish this year."

America's Central Port hears what the Illinois Chamber says on a daily basis. "We listen to everything from the Two-Minute Drills to the newsletters from the Infrastructure Council," Wilmsmeyer says. "It plays well with what we are trying to do with attracting companies to locate here to Illinois and invest in the property. Since we took over the Army property in 2002, we've attracted about 75 companies to the property. Those companies have hired employees; some are just two to three person shops, but others are hiring 60-70 employees at a time. It's been fantastic and we appreciate the Illinois Chamber out there beating the drum about needing a pro-business environment in this state."

They do receive support from Illinois Department of Transportation as well as infrastructure. "We wouldn't be able to afford all the infrastructure projects without the assistance with grants and funding," Wilmsmeyer says. I'd say it's an 'if you build it, they will come mentality.' We're not building a baseball field out in the corn. We're building a huge industrial park with all of the rail, truck and water components to make manufacturers and distributors very successful. When they locate here, they don't have to replicate that infrastructure themselves. We continue to build more each year. We continue to invest and put our money into infrastructure to support our businesses already here, as well as those who have not yet found us."

