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VOL. 85 • NO. 47

YOUR FREE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 15, 2023



SUBMITTED PHOTO *Rock Valley Publishing*

## McConnell American Legion presents leadership award

Commander David Jordan (left) of Post 1225 receives a Commander Award for his leadership and years of dedication to McConnell American Legion. He has been Post 1225 commander for many years. Congratulations, David!

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# Obituaries

## ARNOLD WOOD

Arnold M. "Jim" Wood, 92, passed away on Nov. 6, 2023. Jim was the youngest of 10 children of Lee and Leota (Cosier) Wood, born at home near Granite Falls, MN, on Sept. 14, 1931. He went to Parnell No. 5 country school near Elkton, SD, and completed his high school in Brookings, SD.

Jim was married to Betty Paulson, his high school sweetheart and the love of his life for 65 years. She passed away on Jan. 17, 2015.

Jim served honorably in the US Army during the Korean War. He was a member of Post 449 American Legion in Stockton. After completing college at South Dakota State, Jim worked for Kraft as a Dairy Farm Specialist for thirty-seven years. Jim was a lifetime member of the Antique Airplane Association. He had a flight instructor rating and taught flying for fourteen years. He was a charter



member of Stockton Blackhawk Athletic Boosters and Tyler's Justice Center. He was a member of the Volunteer Hospice and Friends Forever Humane Society. Jim was a member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Warren, IL. He served many positions in Christ Lutheran and St. Paul's Lutheran churches on the church council and teaching Sunday School. Jim served 18 years on the Stockton town board, eight of which was as town President.

Jim enjoyed working with wood and did many carpenter projects. He helped build houses and garages, did roofing, and refinished and refurbished old wood furniture. Jim is survived by his daughter, Jeanie (Stan) Krok, of Celebration FL, granddaugh-

ter, Megan Durica, Chicago, IL, grandson Jason Krok, Celebration FL, three great granddaughters, two goddaughters, nieces, nephews, and many very good friends. He is predeceased by his wife, all of his siblings, several nieces and nephews, his parents and his in-laws Hans and Petra Paulson.

In lieu of flowers, a memorial for St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital or a charity of your choice in Jim's name.

There was a visitation on Monday, Nov. 13, 2023, which began at 10 a.m. and was followed by a service at 11 a.m. at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Warren, Illinois with Pastor Steve Kottke officiating.

Thank you to Rebecca Myers, Lily Curtiss, Dan and Peggy Korth, Daylon and Diane Niemann and FHN Hospice for your wonderful care. Obituary written by Arnold (Jim) Wood.

## DEAN KEMPEL

Dean M. Kempel, age 90, of Lena, IL passed away on Sunday, Nov. 5, 2023, at the Lena Living Center surrounded by his family. He was born March 23, 1933, in Kent, IL to Milfred and Dorothy (Krienke) Kempel. Dean served his country in the U.S. Army from 1955-1957. He married Margaret Harrenstein on May 14, 1960, at St. Thomas Catholic Church in Freeport, IL.

When he was younger Dean worked for the State Highway Department for several years, until Dean and Margaret purchased the family farm. Where he spent the rest of his life farming in the Lena area.

Dean is survived by his wife-Margaret of Lena; children-Donald (Kristen Keith) Kempel, Gary (Amy) Kempel,



Phillip Kempel, William (Codi) Kempel, Nicholas Daws, Ariel (Noah) Zellmer, Samantha Kempel, Andrew Kempel, Emily Kempel; 1 great-grandchild Oliver Kempel and 3 on the way. He is preceded in death by his parents, brother in infancy, daughter-in-law Martha Kempel and son-in-law Jon Daws.

A visitation was held on Friday, Nov. 10, 2023, at the Leamon Funeral Home in Lena, IL. A Catholic Funeral Mass was

held with a visitation on Saturday, Nov. 11, 2023 at St. Josephs Catholic Church in Lena, IL. Father Andrew Hernandez officiated the service. Interment will take place at St. Josephs Catholic Cemetery in Lena. A memorial has been established in his name. Condolences may be sent to the family at [www.leamonfh.com](http://www.leamonfh.com)

The family would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. McFadden and staff, FHN Memorial and Staff, Lena Living Center, and Leamons Ambulance service. They would also like to thank the many family members and friends who came to help Dean and Margaret during Dean's illness.

See you in Heaven Dean  
Love you, Margaret

## DOROTHY DITZLER

Dorothy Ditzler, 97, of Pearl City, IL went to be with her Lord, with her children by her side, on Sunday Nov. 5, 2023. Dorothy was born on June 27, 1926, to T. Arthur and Amy (Buss) Ellis in Winslow, IL. She graduated from Winslow High School, she then attended the Nursing Cadet Corps Training through St. Francis Hospital in Freeport, where she met her husband Theron E. Ditzler. Theron and Dorothy were united in marriage on July 2, 1949, at her parents' farm.

Dorothy worked for St. Francis Hospital in Freeport as a surgical nurse, emergency room nurse, and a hospice nurse. She then worked as a private nurse, a school nurse, and retired from nursing from Honeywell. Dorothy also worked as a nurse at home, mending many of her husbands "accidents."

Dorothy enjoyed playing cards, especially euchre with her children, grandchildren, and friends. She even beat them, right up until she passed. Jigsaw puzzles, word searches, and reading kept Dorothy occupied. Dorothy loved to travel. They trav-



eled to all 50 states. Theron and Dorothy spent 50 years taking camping and fishing trips to Canada, they also took each of their grandchildren. She was a six-time cancer survivor. She loved bright colored flowers, especially her daffodils. Right out of her window, she enjoyed watching the deer, squirrels, and other animals, and loved looking at the woods surrounding her home. She was a member of St. John's Lutheran Church, and the Legion Auxiliary Post 1014 in Pearl City.

Dorothy is survived by her children; Bob (Cindy) Ditzler of Pearl City, JoAnn (Rick) Blackmore of Apple Canyon Lake, and Kim (Pat) Boyle of Pearl City, grandchildren; Stacy (Eric) Gustafson, Adam (Heidi) Ditzler, Becky (Shawn) Guentner, Wendy (Ryan) Bean, Derek (Nicole) Blackmore, Bradlee Blackmore, Heather Blackmore, Cliff (Melissa) Calderon, Tory (Josh Stewart) Calderon, and

Angie Boyle, greatgrandchildren; Emma, Boden, Shy, Laney, Charlee, Olivia, Jack, Payton, Kayla, Ben, Alice, Amelia, Maddox, Jace, Hayden, Tanner, Korrie, Jenna, Kayden, Patience, Rickie, Chayse, and Bella, and one great-great granddaughter Naylani, as well as, numerous nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, her husband Theron, brother Merwyn Ellis, sister Corabelle Reuber, and grandson Troy Boyle.

Memorial services were held on Monday, November 13, 2023, at the St. John Lutheran Church in Pearl City, IL. Pastor Interim Dave Schweppee officiated the services. Private family burial will take place at a later date. Dorothy was very proud of her decision to donate her body to science to further medical research.

The family wishes to thank all of the friends and neighbors for all the help and love shown to Dorothy and Theron over the years, it has been heartfelt and appreciated. A memorial has been established in her memory. Condolences may be sent to the family at [www.leamonfh.com](http://www.leamonfh.com).

## VIVIAN OTTE

Vivian (Kleckner) Otte, 101, of Lena passed away peacefully on Sunday, Nov. 5, 2023. She was born on Jan. 13, 1922, on the home farm in Pleasant Valley Township near Stockton, IL. Vivian was the third daughter of Mary (Staub) and Ernest Kleckner. She attended Neutral Ridge Grade Rural School all eight years in a one room, one teacher school. She graduated from Stockton High School in 1940 and then was employed at Kraft Cheese in Stockton.

Then, as the story goes, Vivian met Don Otte through a friend of a friend. It was the start to a love that would have no end. They first met each other at the Freeport Fair. Next time she saw him sitting in a barber's chair... And so it began. Vivian married Don on Oct. 4, 1941. Don and Vivian farmed the William Otte farm in Kent Township for 17 years. They then bought the Heyer Feed Mill in Lena. They owned and operated the mill for 50 years, later changing the name to Lena Feed Mill. Vivian lost her life partner and best friend when Don preceded Vivian in death in 2011. They were married for 69 years and always had a loving relationship that their family admired.

Vivian is survived by three daughters - Bonnie Guthrie of Lena, Patty (Robert) Noller of Branson, MO and Pamela (Michael) Kalinosky of Virgoqua, WI, five grandchildren - Gregory (Kathy) Gahm and Matthew (Donna) Gahm, both



of Lena, Angela Gahm of Colorado Springs, CO, Jennifer (Jeff) Cape of Woodridge, IL and Halvin (Staci) Gahm of Boerne, TX, six great grandchildren - Dylan (Angela) Gahm, Heidi (Ryan) Hoepner, Heather (Trevor) Sexton, Victoria Gahm, and Halli and Brooke Gahm, three great-great grandchildren - Josiah and Gracelynn Gahm and Ashton Hoepner, two step grandchildren - Dana Noller and Danielle (Kevin Phillips) Van Huizen, six step great grandchildren - Kelli Mathews, Adam (Angie) Mathews, Kerri (Kevin) Maess, and Austin, Jacob and Tyler Van Huizen, nine step great-great grandchildren - Makayla and Austin Fisher, Mya, Giovanni and Myles Greco, Cole and Nora Mathews, and Henry and Ivy Maess and many nieces, nephews and friends.

Vivian was the last surviving child of Earnest and Mary. Preceding her in death were her sisters and brothers Genevieve (Donald Russell), Marjorie (Russell Roberts), Gladys (Laverne West), Berl (Lori), Owen (Lillian), Robert (Shirley), Richard (Ruth), Donald, Allen (Jeanette) and Jeanette (Allen Haas).

Vivian was a member of Salem United Church of Christ, Lena since marrying Don. She lived to see her 100th birthday

and enjoyed a party in her honor that was attended by her daughters, their families and nieces and nephews.

Vivian's hobbies included cooking and baking (and she was such a great cook), keeping a spotless home, cross stitching, crossword puzzles, "judge" TV shows, traveling with Don - in particular loving visiting Las Vegas and other casinos - and hosting family gatherings. Thanksgiving and Christmas were her specialties, and the food was not only delicious but in abundance. She was a joyous talker and a true friend, kind and caring. Vivian spent her last years at the Lena Living Center where she has blossomed and made many friends. Special thanks to those there for making her feel at home for many years and also to the staff of FHN Lena and Unity Hospice for her care. She was a wonderful grandmother and cared about her grandchildren more than anything. She was devoted to her 10 siblings. She was a generous, thoughtful mom that was always supportive of her girls. She was a very special lady that those who knew her were blessed to have in their lives.

Funeral Service were held at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 11, 2023, at the Leamons Funeral Home in Lena, IL. Pastor Christopher Ham officiated the service. The burial took place at Lena Burial Park. A memorial has been established in her name. Condolences may be sent to the family at [www.leamonfh.com](http://www.leamonfh.com).



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# Operation Connect a Vet

By Steve Stein  
 SHAW LOCAL NEWS NETWORK  
*Editor's Note: This story is part of Shaw Local News Network's Thank You, Veterans project honoring military veterans throughout northern Illinois.*

Just in time for Veterans Day, Illinois Joining Forces (IJF) is launching an effort to connect veterans with services they may need. The effort is called Operation Connect a Vet. People are asked to contact IJF through the end of the year to request a wellness check – either a single check-in or on an ongoing basis – for a veteran, service member or member of their family.

The wellness checks will be made by veterans who help fellow veterans for a living. One is Michael Pedroza, a U.S. Navy veteran who served from 1989 to 1993. He's a veteran care coordinator specialist for IJF. "Veterans we'll be calling doesn't necessarily have to be experiencing a crisis," Pedroza said. "At the very least, we want to let them know there's someone to talk to, another veteran, and they're not alone."

Most calls Pedroza takes from veterans do uncover a crisis. And that crisis is usually financial, he said. A recent report by the United States Department of Agriculture noted that 11% of working-age veterans live in a food-insecure household. There are a multitude of financial problems veterans face, Pedroza said. "Rent. Mortgage. Life issues, like deciding between fixing a broken-down vehicle or getting meds," he said. "We're not going to give veterans a hand out, but a hand up. We want to meet their needs using a holistic approach."

Veterans' financial issues often are caused by the difficulties of resuming civilian life after serving in the military, Pedroza said.

There could be a job loss because of a breakdown, episodes, survivor's guilt or invisible injuries, he said.

Veterans are often reticent about asking for help, Pedroza said. "That's because of the military culture," he said. "You learn to

be self-sufficient, to improvise, to adapt to overcome whatever problem you're facing. Veterans are just too humble to reach out. "I tell them I want to work with them to get them and their family, if they have one, in a better place," he said. "Once that self-sufficient roadblock comes down, they usually can't thank me enough."

In addition to providing help with finances, Pedroza can guide veterans and their families to find help with housing, food, employment, health care and other needs.

Illinois Joining Forces is a nonprofit organization launched in 2012 through an agreement between the Illinois Departments of Veterans' Affairs and Military Affairs.

It's a statewide public/private network of military and veterans-serving organizations that work together to improve services for veterans, service members, and their families.

According to its website, IJF helps veterans, service members and their families navigate the "sea of goodwill" to find the support they need when they need it. "No one organization can do it all, but veterans shouldn't have to wander from office to office – or website to website – to determine who does what and (who) can best meet their needs," the IJF website statement reads.

### To connect a Vet

Requests can be made calling the IJF Care Coordination Center at 833-463-6453, sending an email to [callcenter@illinoisjoiningforces.org](mailto:callcenter@illinoisjoiningforces.org), or filling out Connect a Vet form on the IJF website, [illinoisjoiningforces.org](http://illinoisjoiningforces.org).



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# Turning 65? Know your Medicare options

If you will soon be 65 and you don't have health insurance through your employer or your spouse's plan, you'll need to start looking into Medicare – so you should know your options. And your first big choice will likely be whether to go with original Medicare or Medicare Advantage. Which is right for you? For starters, there's no one "correct" answer for everyone. Your choice will depend on a variety of factors, including your own health care needs, financial situation, preference for a particular provider, and so on. In any case, you'll need to know the basics of the two programs to even begin evaluating your options. Here's a quick overview:

### Original Medicare

Original Medicare includes Part A (hospital insurance) and Part B (medical insurance for doctor's visits and covered preventive services). You pay about \$165 per month for Part B (or possibly more, depending on your income level). You can then choose to add Part D, which covers prescription drugs, for about \$40 per month and Medigap, which may cost between \$150 - \$250 per month to cover gaps in Parts A and B. You may also want to pay for private coverage for dental and vision care.

### Medicare Advantage

Medicare Advantage, also known as Part C, is offered by private plans and essentially replaces Medicare Parts A, B and Medigap. Because you must stay enrolled in Medicare Part B with Medicare Advantage, you pay the same \$165 per month as you would in Medicare (again, subject to additional charges for higher incomes). Some Medicare Advantage plans have no premiums, while others may charge up to about \$60 per month. Most Medicare Advantage plans include prescription coverage and many also include dental and vision. It's not always possible to make an apples-to-apples comparison of Original Medicare and Medicare Advantage. Generally speaking, if you have Original Medicare with Part D and Medigap, you could expect less restrictive networks, making it easier to see the doctors of your choice, and less restrictive coverage – that is, you might be less likely to need pre-authorization for certain services as you might with Medicare Advantage. Furthermore, unlike Medigap plans, Medicare Advantage plans are not standardized – there's a great deal of variation in provider networks, drug coverage, premiums, deductibles,

copays/coinsurance and out-of-pocket maximums. And some plans have reputations for denying claims. When you're shopping around for Medicare Advantage plans, you may want to talk to your friends and relatives who have them. You might also ask your doctors about their office's experience with different Advantage plans regarding coverage of treatments and prompt payment of claims. And you might want to visit [www.medicare.gov/plancompare](http://www.medicare.gov/plancompare) for help in finding plans. (For other Medicare-related questions, you could contact your state's State Health Insurance Assistance Program at [www.shiphelp.org](http://www.shiphelp.org).) One last point to keep in mind: Each year, during the open enrollment period, which, in 2023, runs from October 15 through December 7, you can switch from Original Medicare and Medigap to Medicare Advantage, or vice versa. However, if you switch to Medicare Advantage, you may face limits and restrictions on returning to your Medigap plan, should you ever desire to do so. As you can see, choosing the right type of Medicare coverage will take some research and comparisons – so leave yourself enough time to make the selection that best fits your needs.

This article was written by Edward Jones.

# President Biden visits Belvidere auto plant

President Joe Biden visited Belvidere on Thursday, Nov. 9, to celebrate the plans to restart the idled Belvidere auto plant and to support the United Auto Workers (UAW). The President gave a speech to local UAW leaders at the Community Building Complex of Boone County in Belvidere. Other speakers included Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker, UAW President Shawn Fain and Local 1268 President Matt Frantzen, a 30-year veteran of the Belvidere Assembly Plant.

The UAW won an agreement during the strike to again have vehicles built in Belvidere

after the plant was closed on March 7, 2023, leaving approximately 1,200 hourly workers either without a job or forced to transfer to another plant far away from Belvidere. The plant is now due to reopen as an assembly plant in 2027, building a new midsize pickup truck. It will also start making batteries for electric vehicles and serve as a parts depot for the company.

According to the Chicago Tribune, Stellantis has committed to invest nearly \$5 billion to transform the plant for new production. Some of the details are as follows:

### New midsize pickup

Stellantis will allocate \$1.5 billion to enable it to produce 100,000 units of an all-new midsize pickup truck scheduled to begin in 2027 with two shifts.

### EV battery plant

The company plans to spend \$3.2 billion to construct an EV battery plant. The plant

is expected to create 1,300 jobs and is set to launch in 2028. Stellantis has partnered with another business entity for this venture.

### Distribution center

Stellantis will invest an additional \$100 million to create a "megahub" parts distribution

See VISIT, Page 6

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# OPINION

**ILLINOIS  
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GAS TAXES  
IN THE U.S.**

*ERIC ALLIE  
ILLINOIS POLICY*



## Slices of life

# Part 2: If trees could talk, surviving a great fire

In part one, Tree grew tall and firm in the forest in the mid-1800s, only to be felled by a human and cut into boards used to build a house. While most would see boards and call them such, Tree continued to see itself as a tree, because one never travels far from ones roots.

Whereas bunnies, squirrels and deer used to encompass Tree's days, now interests included humans called



By **JILL PERTLER**  
Columnist

Dad, Mom and a very small seedling referred to as Mary. Tree watched little Mary grow taller. And soon another little tree-human named Mikey was

added to the mix.

Tree was fond of these beings and took pride in keeping them safe from heat and cold and rain and snow. Tree loved the laughter in the house and found it hard to remember the days when rabbits and squirrels were the height of its existence.

This all happened around 1910 to 1918. Life was good during those years. And then came The Fire.

Tree didn't know much about the fire until it was right upon them. The early evening went from windy and dry to fiery and dangerous. Tree didn't even consider its own well-being. It was concerned about the humans, especially Mary and Mikey.

But there wasn't much it could do, being a tree and all.

Dad doused the roof and perimeter of the house with water before leaving with the rest of the humans. Tree understood Dad wanted to protect its walls and was glad. Then all Tree could do was wait.

It was a scary time. The minutes ticked by. Then hours. The wind whipped this way and that and the great fire reciprocated. Tree watched as neighboring houses succumbed to the blaze, lighting up the night sky. Tree was sad.

Tree had lost neighbors and family. What had been such a happy time became sorrowful. Devastating, even.

The days ticked by slowly. The fires dissipated and finally became smoldering piles of lost dreams.

Tree was despondent. And then, there was movement on the street outside—familiar movement. It was the humans called Dad and Mom and best of all they had with them Mary and Mikey. It was the first time, and perhaps the only time, tree wished it had a voice. It would have called out to its humans - to welcome them back. To say thank you for the water, which had undoubtedly saved its wooden being from being taken by the fire.

Instead, tree stayed silent, and gave thanks for the humans who loved him (and who Tree loved in return.)

Mary and Mikey grew to be teenagers (a hilarious yet trying time for Tree). They moved out of the house. Shortly after, Dad and Mom left and another set of humans (Tree had learned they are called family) inhabited the house. They had little humans of their own, and tree grew to love them nearly as much and maybe even more than Mary and Mikey. This happened over and

over. Humans replaced humans. Tree was amazed and saddened at the brevity of human life. One just gets to know the humans inhabiting itself and they up and leave or, worse yet, die. Tree witnessed three humans die and felt immense sadness when this happened, while understanding this was how it is supposed to be. Death here on earth is only a rebirth of some sort, much like Tree's rebirth and metamorphosis from branches to boards.

Tree has cultivated the ability to sense when a human death is near and has come to realize that death is

not ugly, but beautiful. The humans witnessing the death don't typically see this, so Tree employs a tactic it has come to know as "pray" to connect with its roots and the humans in proximity. Tree prays for the humans to see the unfolding of the universe's grand plans—including the beauty of death and a celebration of a life well-lived.

If trees could talk, the tree at 758 Lilac St. could recite volumes. But that's not how it's supposed to be.

Trees don't talk.

**See TREES, Page 5**

## FREELANCE REPORTERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS NEEDED



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No letters directed to a third party will be accepted for publication.

**We reserve the right to edit a letter for reasons of clarity, space restrictions and libel.**

# Weekly connection

## When football becomes a way of life

There's something pretty special about the Black Hawk Warren High School Football program. Last Friday night they won their level four football playoff game over Reedsville and now will play at Camp Randall in Madison, Wisconsin on Thursday against Edgar for a Division 7 state title. This is about the seventh trip to state for the Warriors. When I was in grade school in the late '60's the Black Hawk School district in South Wayne first came into existence bringing five little towns in southwest Wisconsin together to form one new school district. The first season of football had already begun that year when head coach, Dennis Murphy, was hired. The principal appointed the young twenty-one-year-old coach towards the field where the team was practicing with some of the assistant coaches and said,



By **SCOTT CERNEK**  
Columnist

"there's your team". We grade school kids couldn't wait for Friday nights when the Red and Black boys took the field. Coach Murphy was our gym teacher and when we saw him out there coaching on the sideline we couldn't wait until we got to play for him on Friday nights as well.

When that day finally came for me and my friends a few years later we were ready to go. We were chomping at the bit to play for Coach Murphy. We tuned up our games at recess and in gym class and every other chance we could. When we

got into high school, we talked football continually and couldn't wait for our first practice each year. I remember running and running in the summer to make sure I was in shape to pass the first day mile-run test. If one was a running back, then the requirement was to run the mile in under six minutes. If one was a lineman, then they got an extra thirty seconds. If we didn't make the time, then five seconds were added, and we had to run it again the next day. This went on for the entire first week of practice. Because of that, my friends and I trained hard in the summer running and lifting to be ready, so we didn't have to run that mile more than one time.

Coach held quarterback meetings in the evening the whole week before the first practice and we QB's were

coached to be leaders as well as to know the offense like the back of our hands. Almost every young man in the school lived to play football. Coach worked hard in those early years to build the program and we all bought in. There was a hunger in our hearts to know the game and it came from his enthusiasm. In my three years of varsity football in the late seventies before the seven-division playoff system, we only lost four games including an undefeated season my junior year in the fall of '78. That year we missed the playoffs because they only took the top four ranked teams in the state in three separate divisions and even though we were undefeated we were only ranked fifth that year. That still stings.

When I finished my high school career, I was blessed

to be asked to come back and coach with Coach Murphy for seven years before I took a job in Clinton, Wisconsin where I poured my heart into our football program there for twenty-seven more years. I was always trying to bring that same mojo that I had grown up with at Black Hawk to the athletes at Clinton and we were blessed to make the playoffs several of those years.

The last two years I have had the privilege of teaching half-days back at Black Hawk and it has been pretty cool to see that the look in the eyes of the young men is the same as it was when I played here over forty years ago. They want nothing more than to get a good clean hit on somebody whether that be on defense or offense. This Thursday is going to be special as both Darlington and Black Hawk are playing

for state championships.

I think the greatest thing about coaching is being a part of the hopes and dreams of so many kids over the years. Each one is special, and the friendships continue year after year. When Jesus walked this earth, in a sense He coached a football team made up of His disciples. He grew close to each one. In fact, each one of them ended up giving their lives for the Savior. Jesus' miracles were real, His death and resurrection was real and the fact that He lives today and is coming soon for His church is real too. In John 14:3 Jesus said, I go to prepare a place for you and if I go, I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am there you may be also. I can't wait for that day. In the meantime, it's a great day to be a football fan and to be a true believer in Christ.

### In my opinion

## Lawmakers must find a bipartisan way forward on farm bill

By Richard Guebert Jr.  
ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU  
PRESIDENT

For many years, I have heard that agriculture policy is one of the few areas in Springfield and in Washington, D.C., that is truly bipartisan. Members of both political parties recognize the need for good farm and food policy.

It is my hope this continues, but I am increasingly disappointed by the lack of civility and level of disrespect occurring in today's politics.

I'm concerned that party leadership, on both sides of the aisle, is forcing lawmakers to vote exclusively along party lines. Large donors and special interest groups also seek to punish any representatives who stray from the party positions and vote for a bipartisan

compromise – even if it's in the best interests of their constituents.

I don't believe this benefits farmers or our country.

Lawmakers must find a bipartisan way forward. Stop the political infighting and work together to better serve all Americans.

Bipartisanship has served Illinois farmers well. As a grassroots, membership driven organization, Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) has forged strong relationships with our local government officials and state legislators, who in turn help us achieve our farm policy priorities.

IFB's Adopt-A-Legislator program has fostered mutual respect and understanding between farmers and Chicago-area lawmakers. More than 50 Illinois county governing bodies approved pro-agriculture resolutions,

solidifying their support for the state's economy's largest industry. These are just a few of the bipartisan efforts our members take to share agriculture's story and how our local, state and federal lawmakers can support our farmers.

I believe elected officials, agency representatives and regulators appreciate the integrity with which IFB operates. We might not always agree on issues, but we are going to be forthright in explaining our position. We listen and show respect to others, even those with opposing points of view.

Our elected officials have an obligation to work together to find responsible solutions for policy issues. With the expiration of the 2018 farm bill at the end of September, we need our lawmakers more than ever to find ways to work together. In my conversations with

fellow farmers, the question I hear the most is "What happens next?"

The farm bill guides U.S. agriculture and food policy over a period of five years and is traditionally rooted in bipartisanship. Congress has passed 18 iterations of the farm bill since its inception in 1933, and the farm bill expired Sept. 30.

Farm organizations have worked collectively for months on a new farm bill, and IFB continues meeting with Illinois House and Senate ag committee members to pass a farm bill that meets the needs of all sectors of agriculture.

Failure to take any farm bill action before year's end would cause serious disruptions: cutting off enrollment in important safety net and conservation programs; pausing research; and reverting back to 1930s farm policy.

IFB understands the realities of the legislative calendar and recognizes that an extension might be needed to avoid serious disruptions, but we also urge Congress to move forward with a new farm bill. The farm bill has a long tradition of bipartisan support and now, more than ever, it's important for lawmakers to work together to ensure America's farmers can continue to provide the safest, most affordable food

supply in the world.

I'm confident that our legislators from Illinois understand the importance of the farm bill and are committed to getting the legislation across the president's desk.

*This op-ed was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit FarmWeekNow.com*

### • Trees (Continued from page 4)

But they can stand near. They can shelter. They can witness. They can love.

And they do. They see comings and goings. They see life and death. They see the world at its best and its worst.

They can grow toward the clouds or they can be cut to their quick. Through it all they stand

by us and support us, albeit silently.

As Tree at 758 Lilac has done—for generations—and will continue to do.

As Tree only hopes. *Jill Pertler is an award-winning syndicated columnist, published playwright and author. Don't miss a slice; follow the Slices of Life page on Facebook.*

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SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

Sawyer Fry, Lucas Holland, Berkeley Mensendike, Ty Spahn, Leah Spahn, Cora Ritchie, Thomas Harms, Brook Bradbury and Bindi Boop attend the 96th National FFA Convention.

# River Ridge FFA attends National Convention

Nine members of the River Ridge FFA Chapter attended the 96th National FFA Convention in Indianapolis Nov. 1 through Nov. 3. There were over 60,000 people attending this year's convention which hosts a variety of events for the students to participate in.

One of the events that the students enjoyed was the college fair which included universities, community colleges, technical colleges and private colleges from across the country. In addition to the college fair there is a trade show with some of the biggest agriculture companies represented such as Merck Animal Health, Caterpillar, Lily Endowment Inc,

Cargill, Bayer, Tractor Supply, John Deere, and Dow AgriSciences. Students had the opportunity to visit with these and many other companies throughout the week.

In addition to the career and college fair, students went on tours of local agribusinesses. They toured Ozark Fisheries, a koi and goldfish production facility in Indiana as well as Goat Milk Stuff (GMS). GMS is a working dairy goat farm that processes its fluid milk into over 40 different kinds of soaps, lip balms, toothpaste and detergents. It was a great experience for students to see the variety of careers within the agriculture industry.



SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

Ty Spahn, Lucas Holland, and Bindi Boop helping package goat soap during the "Goat Milk Stuff" tour.

your source for on-line news:  
**RVPNEWS.COM**

## • Visit (Continued from page 3)

center for its Mopar parts. This will reportedly replace existing Mopar parts and distribution centers across the country and close the parts distribution center in Milwaukee as part of the overall agreement.

A spokesperson for Stellantis said the State of Illinois pur-

chased 170 acres of land next to the idled Belvidere plant last July, according to Capitalfax. The acquisition was made in July, 2023 as Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker stepped up efforts to save the 5,300,000 square-foot Belvidere plant that once employed 4,500 union work-

ers. The current idled plant site is on 280 acres.

The reopened auto plant property along with the 170 acres purchased by the State of Illinois, should ensure Belvidere benefits from the fast-growing EV market well into the future.



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Berkeley Mensendike holds a snail from the Ozark Fisheries tour.

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## Holiday Preview Open House

**Friday, Nov. 17 from 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.  
Saturday, Nov. 18 from 8:30 a.m. - noon**

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Open House Holiday Drawing  
Sale on Fall Items*

446918



SONYA WILLIAMSON PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

Community members gather at the 5k for Karli, dressed up and ready to run, to show their support for Karli Weltzin.

# 5K for Karli more than doubles its goal

As the auction bidding continued, the red paint kept rising on the cardboard thermometer until there was no more cardboard to paint! At the end of the day on Oct. 29, the final amount being donated to the Karli Weltzin family settled on \$11,230. Besides silent and live auction items, money streamed in from fun run participants and donation jars – the event's theme was Halloween and Generosity.

The Stockton High School Servant Leaders are grateful for the following people who

all pitched in to host an extremely successful benefit.

Terry Dieken (and Peggy) didn't hesitate when being asked to help with this fundraiser, and they absolutely refused any kind of reimbursement. Holy Cross Catholic Church was a huge help along with Julie Baysinger, Connie Larson, Kathy Broshous, the ladies who baked all of the desserts, and Fr. Mike Morrissy for the never-ending supply of nachos from The Pit Stop. Terry Haas, Neill Cahill, and Becky Cahill kept

everything running smoothly. Sonya and Trace Williamson were the Servant Leadership's personal photographer, meeting room provider, and creator of the Karli Video. Ann Harnish, Cherri Love, Hannah Smith and Laurie Gothard-Zueger are always willing to help with every event, every year. Thank you to all the auction item and cash donors, the Halloween Fun Run participants, and to all the bidders. The event was a huge success thanks to everyone involved.

## ROEDER IMPLEMENT

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## DECEMBER AUCTION - Accepting Consignments in November

# Hwy 64 Auctions Consignement Auction

## December 1, 2023 • Starting at 8:00 AM

**Timed Auction: December 3rd - Lots Closing at 8:00 AM**  
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446267



SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

## Little Blackhawks

Pictured are this week's Little Blackhawks. These students have been recognized by their teachers for their great behavior and excellent work. Congratulations for continuing to do great things at school!

## Sinagra recaps 2023 River Ridge Volleyball season

By Trenten Scheidegger  
CORRESPONDENT

The River Ridge Wildcats saw their volleyball program take another step in the right direction in 2023. After eclipsing the 20-win mark in 2022, the Wildcats took it a step further with 24 wins this year.

The 2023 season featured many ups and downs for the Wildcats. From losing skids, to winning streaks, to a tough loss early in the postseason, the Wildcats went through it all. River Ridge head coach Brittany Sinagra took the time to share her thoughts on the season. "Overall, I feel we had another successful season even though we didn't have the postseason run that we had surely hoped for," Sinagra shared shortly after the team's playoff loss. The Wildcats fell to a 22-win Orangeville team in regional play.

Late in the season, River Ridge started to hit their stride. The Wildcats went on an eight-game winning streak late in the year, which had their hopes at an all-time high entering the postseason. The Wildcats wound up dropping two of their three final regular season games, however. That seemed to be the issue for the 2023 Wildcats. Their inconsistent high-level of play

wound up costing them in the long run. Sinagra shared her thoughts, stating, "We were definitely hot and cold coming into each matchup early in the season. I feel we hit our hot streak a little too early. We put on one of our strongest performances against East Dubuque in the first round of Regionals and unfortunately just didn't come out with the same fire when it was time to play Orangeville."

Sinagra is hoping the postseason loss can be a teachable moment for the program moving forward. "Ultimately, I think it was a learning lesson for all. Last year, we were coming into the postseason as the underdogs, but this year there was a pressure of knowing some were betting on us to come out on top against the higher seed. I think it was a type of pressure we hadn't faced much, and ultimately it got the best of us in the most crucial point of the season," Sinagra explained.

A special senior class led the way to River Ridge's revival over the last two seasons. Amie Richmond, Gwen Miller, Evie Walters, Morgan Flynn, Macey Fulton, and Addison Albrecht each paved the way for one of the winningest classes at River Ridge. Sinagra spoke about the se-

niors in depth. "This group of seniors is something I will never forget. I have never been surrounded by such a motivated, yet motivating group of athletes. They were dedicated to the sport in every aspect, always finding a way to stay self-motivated to get better, while also pushing those around them to push past their limits as well. Although the ending to this particular season is not the one they are going to want to look back on, they have done a remarkable job bringing life and fire back into our program. It feels as though the spark has electrified not only through the program, but the entire school and our tightknit community. We are seeing younger and younger students as well as community members who have no attachment to the team in attendance at the games, which screams to me that the word is out. These girls really do 'got it going on'. The hype is real, and these seniors will be missed more than they know. I cannot thank them enough for all they have done and I'm just so thankful to have been a small part of their high school career," Sinagra stated.

Both Albrecht and Miller were Unanimous First Team All-Conference selections this year, and they led the

way to River Ridge receiving the Sportsmanship Award, as well.

After losing such an impressive class, Sinagra knows they have some big shoes to fill for next year. "We will definitely have some big holes on the floor to fill. This will be the first year since I've been around that the majority of the team won't have had a lot of varsity experience as an underclassman. We will definitely be looking to Laiken [Haas] and Ava [Ketelsen] to take reigns in leadership roles to help guide and encourage along the way as they both have had some of those high-pressure experiences as underclassmen," Sinagra shared. Haas earned an Honorable Mention on the NUIC All-Conference team, this year.

"I strongly believe that our underclassmen are more than ready and willing to take on the new level of ball and put in the work it takes to be successful. They have had amazing role models in their years so far, and they know that I'm expecting them to continue setting that bar high for those now looking up to them. I'm confident they will continue to make a name for River Ridge volleyball," Sinagra closed with.

## Black Hawk/Warren beats Reedsville

The Black Hawk/Warren High School varsity football team faced off against Reedsville in a neutral playoff game on Friday, Nov. 10. The game was part of the 2023 Wisconsin High School Football Playoff Brackets: WIAA - Division 7 tournament. The final score was Black Hawk/Warren IL 38, Reedsville 28. Their record stands at 12-1. Congratulations Black Hawk/Warren High School.

## Snow program in need of funds before Christmas

Looking for a new way to give during the holidays? Need a tax write-off before the end of the year? Want to honor someone's memory by helping those in need? Consider donating to the Student Nutrition Outreach Works (SNOW) program. The Stockton SNOW program is low on funds and with the holidays approaching, the organization is reaching out to the community for help.

This year the program has been supporting 16 families (31 children) within the Stockton school district. Besides providing bags of non-perishable food that are sent home each week from school, the program deliv-

ers a special Thanksgiving meal to each family and fills Christmas wish lists for every child involved.

Since the price of food and other necessities has soared, the SNOW program budget is approaching \$10,000 per year. The Stockton H.S. Servant Leaders have done the footwork to make this wonderful project continue for more than a decade, and they hope to continue it for many more years.

If interesting in helping, please consider a monetary donation today. Checks can be written to "SNOW" and mailed or dropped off at the Stockton High School office during school hours.

# River Ridge-Scales Mound Wildcats look promising ahead of 2023-2024 basketball season

By Trenten Scheidegger  
CORRESPONDENT

The River Ridge-Scales Mound Wildcats were an impressive team last year when they finished with an overall record of 26-6. The Wildcats also went 8-2 in conference play, which was good enough for a second-place finish in the NUIC-West.

The Wildcats will have to replace a few key players, but they return a majority of last year's squad. RR-SM head coach Dave Wiegel is in his twelfth season with the program. At the end of last year Wiegel saw his career record improve to 166-138. Mickayla Bass, Sydney Driscoll, and Sadie Fry each played key roles in the Wildcats racking up their 26 wins. This year, Wiegel and the Wildcats are hopeful to remain one of the top teams in the conference as they replace that trio.

On paper, it's easy to see why the expectations remain high for RR-SM. From the start, junior guard Laiken Haas stands out. Standing five feet, nine inches tall, Haas is a sizeable player with great ball handling skills. Haas put those skills on display last year when she earned a Unanimous First Team-All Conference selection as a sophomore. Haas posted a stat line of nine points per game, four rebounds per game, and over three steals per game. The guard's length gives her an advantage both offensively and defensively, and the Wildcats will look to her to lead the way this season.

Addison Albrecht also returns as a five foot, nine-inch-tall guard who earned a First Team All-Conference selection last year. Albrecht posted nine points, four rebounds, and three steals per game, in a very similar stat line to Haas'. Albrecht and Haas provide the Wildcats with an effective duo up top, and they will have some experience down low to draw some attention away from them.

Annie Werner, a six-foot tall senior post player, returns after earning a Second Team All-Conference selection as a junior. Werner put up seven points and four rebounds per game last year. The Wildcats also return Gwen Miller, a five foot, ten-inch senior forward who earned Second Team All-Conference last year. Miller posted seven points, five rebounds, and two

steals per game last year. No other NUIC-West team returns as many All-Conference players as the Wildcats do this year.

The Wildcats also have a strong group of returning letterwinners. Emily and Ava Wiederholt, Abigail Frank, and Ava Travis all return as seniors for this season. With only five starting spots available, the Wildcats should have one of the more experienced benches in the area. The Wildcats have high expectations for these players. Wiegel shared the team is "excited to see what Emily will do this year with extended playing time." The RR-SM coach also shared that Frank will be in the primary rotation with an opportunity to maximize her talent. On Travis, Wiegel called her a great teammate who will help tremendously with her post defense and rebounding. On Ava Wiederholt, the team relies on her "good knack for the ball" and will need her to "get some offensive putbacks."

RR-SM will also rely on a few newcomers in a trio of sophomores. Guard Kaci Patterson, and a pair of forwards in Sarah Winter and Berkely Mensendike should see some opportunities this year.

Wiegel took the time to discuss the current state of the team ahead of the 2023-2024 season. "This year's group features a talented mix of upperclassmen that are hopeful to be a highly competitive team. We have six seniors and two juniors, and we will lean on all of these players to be successful," Wiegel shared.

In order to continue their competitive ways, Wiegel says the team will need to have a defensive focus and to rely on their strengths. "We will need to be able to play great defense, limit scoring opportunities, and rebound the basketball. Our strength will be our athleticism, togetherness, and experience.

The Wildcats anticipate a playing rotation of eight players, a majority of which have great game experience from our previous season. "We returned 75 percent of our scoring from a team that averaged 53 points per game last year. Filling the rebounding void with the graduation of Sydney Driscoll will be imperative, but I believe we have the talent and numbers to make up this loss," Wiegel added.

Although the Wildcats and Wiegel come in with high expectations, they understand the grueling schedule of playing in the NUIC. Wiegel discussed the conference stating, "Until some team beats the Galena Pirates, they have to be the favored team to win the NUIC-West. The East Dubuque Warriors return three All-Conference players. Stockton will be a competitive team this year due to Mammoser being healthy and having a good mix of talent in grades nine through 12, that includes an unending supply of Wrights," Wiegel joked. In addition to the conference, Wiegel added, "Warren has lower numbers, but they do not lack talent. They return Addy Bohnsack, who was Second Team All-Conference last year, and will be bringing in a talented group of freshmen this year, and the next few seasons as well."

The Wildcats opened their season on Tuesday, Nov. 14, when they traveled to face off with Pearl City. The night of Nov. 16, the Wildcats travel to face off with the Durand Bulldogs at 5:30 p.m. RR-SM plays their first home game on Friday, Dec. 1 when they play host to the Orangeville Broncos. Conference play begins on Friday, Jan. 5 when RR-SM plays host to the Eastland Cougars.



SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

Stockton WA TAN YE members ride in the Stockton Homecoming Parade on Sept. 28.

## Stockton WA TAN YE news

The Stockton WA TAN YE (WTE) has been busy the last several months. The August meeting was held at Massbach Ridge Winery. It is always fun to enjoy wine tasting and the beautiful scenery there. Several members signed up to attend the show, "Jersey Boys" at Timber Lake Playhouse. Plans were made to have a Brat Stand at Sullivan Food on Sept. 9 to raise money for our treasury.

WTE held their annual

steak fry at the Corner Tap on Sept. 7. Dan Bergman made the evening delicious and entertaining. The October WTE Convention that was held on Oct. 13 through 15 at Cresco, IA was discussed and planned. Mary Stayner and Victoria McKenzie made the display for convention. Several members attended the convention, auction baskets were prepared, and the Stockton WTE flag was packed. The Brat Stand raised over \$350 thanks

to the gals who manned the stand. We joined in the Stockton Homecoming Parade on Sep. 28. Elaine Schlichtning rode a second year as the reigning "1951 Homecoming Queen". She was followed by 10 other members on a float as they tossed candy and waved greetings to the crowd.

Stockton WA TAN YE will be having a holiday bake sale on Saturday, Nov. 18 from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. inside Stockton Ace Hardware.

## Stockton FFA American Degree recipients



SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

Congratulations to Jenna Haas and Joseph Brudi on earning the American FFA Degree at the 96th National FFA Convention. This is an honor that less than one percent of FFA members will receive from the National FFA Organization. To earn this degree, members must have shown a record of satisfactory involvement in the FFA organization, maintained a successful SAE project, maintained good grades with a "C" average or higher, have a record of outstanding leadership abilities, and recorded a minimum of 50 hours of community service. Congratulations to these deserving recipients.

# VIEWPOINT

## Helmets to Hardhats helps veterans transition into civilian life, careers

By Tim Drea  
For many veterans, moving into a meaningful career can be challenging, even alienating. Zara Jefferies' union made the transition from helmet to hard hat smooth and

rewarding. Zara joined the military out of high school, after trying college and learning it wasn't a good fit. She jumped into an HVAC training program and ultimately became a staff

sergeant in the Air National Guard – U.S. Air Force, where she serves today. United Association (UA) Local 137 Plumbers and Steamfitters Union in Springfield reached out when they

learned Zara was looking for an HVAC career. Knowing her background in HVAC, they proposed she join the union's apprenticeship program to train as a plumber through the national Helmets

to Hardhats program that helps provide the licensing, certificates and professional training to veterans in a career similar to their military job.

Veterans name finding a job as the greatest challenge in transitioning to civilian life. Many employers see military service as a resume gap and others shy away from hiring active servicemen for fear that they will be deployed. On Veterans Day, Zara had the flexibility to take time off for drills and deployments. Through her union, Zara knows that her job is protected when she is called for duty.

Zara knows the other union members serving in her squadron. They share a bond, seeing each other at union meetings, on job sites, and even taking trips together on the weekends. They created a deeper connection, personally and professionally. When her military time eventually ends, these connections will help her transition into civilian life full time.

As Zara Jefferies works happily toward her plumbers license and certificate while serving our country, many other veterans and servicemen without the added support of a union are not so lucky.

Veterans struggle to convert those skills they learned in the military into rewarding, meaningful careers back at home. They lack the professional networks needed to find the right career fit. They are unemployed or underemployed, even after showing the work ethic and discipline to serve proudly.

The Helmets to Hardhats program is organized labor's commitment to make those

connections easier for our veterans.

We share a common purpose of a higher duty to service. Veterans often share the core values, specific training and an unrelenting focus on getting the job done right that makes them a success in union construction jobs. GI bill benefits allow veterans to go through on-the-job training – debt-free schooling where the benefits can be used as a monthly housing allowance during apprenticeships.

Across the United States for the past 20 years, Helmets to Hardhats has helped more than 41,000 military service members find high-quality careers and training in the construction industry. Today, the affiliate union and partner contractors operate more than 1,600 U.S. training centers. H2H identifies areas where veterans have a career interest, and then it connects them with appropriate apprenticeships to match those skills and interests in a location that works for them and their families.

Join us in honoring our military service members and veterans by thanking them for their service, and take it a step further: if you know of a veteran who needs a better career direction, urge them to consider the Helmets to Hardhats program. Our veterans have proven they have what it takes to be successful, and organized labor wants to make sure they follow through on that promise.

*Tim Drea is president of Illinois AFL-CIO in Springfield and is a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps.*

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Zara Jefferies

# FROM LENA'S KITCHEN



The not so skinny cook

We are having one more week of warm weather. It is nice to have the fall weather because I think we have had an Indian summer. We haven't had one in a long time. The fields are getting harvested and fall cooking is at an all-time high. This week there are several recipes you can use for the holidays. Have a great week cooking!

## Cranberry Barbeque Cocktail Hotdogs

This great appetizer is good for the entire holiday season; you will want to save it for the Super Bowl too! You don't use hotdogs, you use smoked cocktail sausages. You could use hotdogs, but the sausages work better. You can substitute 2 T. of Hot Tabasco sauce for the chipotle peppers.

- 1 can (14 oz.) jellied cranberry sauce
- 1 C. barbeque (Sweet Baby Rays is the best)
- 2 t. lemon juice
- 1 T. Dijon mustard
- 1 coarsely chopped chipotle peppers
- ½ t. ground allspice
- 3 pkg. (14 oz. each) miniature smoked cocktail sausages

Stir together the cranberry sauce, barbeque sauce, lemon juice, mustard, peppers, and allspice in a 3½ or 4 qt. slow cooker. Add the sausages and stir to combine. Cover and cook on High 2 to 2½ hours or on Low 4 to 5 hours. Serve immediately or keep warm on Low up to 2 hours.

## Cranberry Wild Rice

I love wild rice and think it is a great starch substitute. This unique combination of cranberries and wild rice can be a great side for the holidays. I use the regular Uncle Bens if you can't find traditional wild rice. It is the best, but Uncle Bens will work also. Also, if you don't have pine nuts, you can substitute toasted almonds that are sliced or slivered.

- 4 C. water
- ¾ C. uncooked wild rice
- 1 small chopped red onion
- ½ C. dried cranberries
- 1 t. dried thyme
- 1 T. olive oil
- 2 minced garlic cloves
- 1 t. toasted pine nuts

Bring water to a boil and add rice. Bring to a second boil. Reduce to a simmer, uncovered for 50 to 60 min-

utes or until rice is tender. Set aside. In a small skillet place onion, cranberries, thyme and olive oil. Cook until onion is tender. Add the garlic cloves and cook 1 minute longer. Drain rice if needed. Stir in onion mixture and pine nuts. Place in serving bowl.

## Slow cooked Pork Tenderloin

This easy pork tenderloin recipe has very few ingredients. It is an easy prep because the slow cooker does all the work, McCormick makes a great Montreal Steak Seasoning.

- ¼ C. olive oil
- 2 T. soy sauce
- 1 T. Montreal Steak seasoning
- 2 pork tenderloins (1 lb. each)

In a 5 qt. slow cooker, mix oil, soy sauce and steak seasoning. Add pork and turn to coat. Cook covered on low until a thermometer inserted in pork reads 145 about 1¾ to 2¼ hours. Let stand 10 minutes before slicing. Serve cooking juices over mashed potatoes. It also would be great with the Cranberry and Wild Rice.

## Chicken Cacciatore

I have had chicken cacciatore recipes that were made on the stove top and in the oven, but I think this is the first slow cooker one I have found. Usually, it is made with a chicken breast and doesn't have potatoes. This one has the veggies and the addition of olives. Enjoy this unique chicken recipe.

- 1 lb. baby potatoes, halved
- 8 oz. mushrooms
- 2 cloves garlic, sliced
- 4 each bone in chicken thighs and drumsticks, about 3½ lbs.
- 1/3 C. flour
- 1 can (8 oz.) tomato sauce
- 2 T. balsamic vinegar
- 1 t. Italian seasoning
- ½ t. salt
- ¼ t. pepper
- 2 C. cherry tomatoes
- 1/3 C. drained, pitted Kalamata olives

Coat a 6 qt. slow cooker with cooking spray. Place potatoes, mushrooms, and garlic in bottom of slow cooker. In a large bowl, toss chicken pieces with flour to coat, shaking off and reserving excess flour. Place chicken over vegetables. Stir together tomato sauce, vinegar, Italian seasoning, salt, pepper, and reserved flour in bowl. Spoon over chicken. Cook on Low for 4½ hours. Add tomatoes and cook on Low for 1 hour. Skim and discard fat from juices in slow cooker. Stir olives into chicken mixture. Garnish with oregano and serve with crunchy bread.

## Autumn Fall Bread

If you still have some pears left, this bread is a good one. You can freeze it for your holidays too.

- 2 C. flour
- 1 C. sugar
- 1 t. baking powder
- ½ t. baking soda
- ½ t. salt
- 1/8 t. nutmeg
- ½ C. cold butter
- 2 large eggs, room temperature
- ¼ C. buttermilk
- 1 t. vanilla
- 1 C. finely chopped peeled ripe pears

Preheat oven to 350. In a large bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt and nutmeg. Cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Combine the eggs, buttermilk and vanilla in a 2-quart measuring cup. Stir the egg mixture into the flour mixture just until moistened. Gently fold in pears. Spoon into 2 greased 5 x 3 x 2 loaf pans that have been sprayed with cooking spray. Bake at 350 for 35 to 40 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into center comes out clean. Cool for 10 minutes before removing from pans to wire racks to cool completely.

## Pumpkin Spice Cupcakes

Yes, this is another pumpkin recipe. Pumpkin is the ingredient of the day. These cupcakes have an extra special frosting. Enjoy these for the holidays. If you aren't a pie baker, these are a great fill in.

- ¾ C. butter, softened
- 2½ C. sugar
- 3 eggs room temperature
- 1 can (15 oz.) pumpkin
- 2 1/3 C. flour
- 1 T. pumpkin pie spice
- 1 t. baking powder
- 1 t. cinnamon
- ¾ t. salt
- ½ t. baking soda
- ½ t. ground ginger
- 1 C. buttermilk
- Frosting
- 1 pkg. (8 oz.) cream cheese, softened
- 1 stick butter
- 4 C. powdered sugar
- 1 t. vanilla
- 2 t. cinnamon

Preheat the oven to 350. In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add pumpkin. Combine the flour, pumpkin pie spice, baking powder, cinnamon, salt, baking soda, and ground ginger in a separate bowl. Add flour mixture to pumpkin mixture alternately with buttermilk, beating well after each addition.

Fill 24 paper lined muffin cups three-fourths of the way full. Bake 20 to 25 minutes

or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes before removing from pans to racks to cool completely.

Frosting: In a large bowl, beat cream cheese and butter until fluffy. Add powdered sugar, vanilla and cinnamon; beat until smooth. Frost cupcakes; refrigerate leftovers.

## Final Thoughts

We now have reached the middle of November. Thanksgiving is fast approaching, and then it is Christmas. If you are looking for a great Christmas gift, the Lena Area Historical Society is once again selling cheese and meat boxes. They are \$30.00 a box; the gift box contains three types of cheese (Muenster, Colby Jack, and Swiss) plus a beef log. The cheeses and meat come from local businesses, so not only do you help the Historical Society, but you are also supporting Lena Area businesses. You can order your box from Cindy Drye at 815-369-4030 or Eleanor Holmes at 815-238-2372. The boxes will be ready on Dec. 9 at the museum. They will be ready in time to mail before the deadline. December will bring Breakfast with Santa and the Hometown Christmas.

We begin the quest for Christmas cookies. If you have some favorites, we would like to publish them. If you have some Christmas recipes you would like to share, you can contact us in person, by mail at From Lena's Kitchens, *The Shopper's Guide* at 240 W. Main St. or email us at scoopshopper@rvpublishing.com.

# Church news

## Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

All are invited to worship at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 118 E. Mason St. Lena, IL for Sunday worship on Nov. 19 at 9:30 a.m. Holy Communion will be celebrated in worship. The reading will be from Matthew 25:11-30.

On Wednesday, Nov. 22 Peace Corps Quilting group will meet from 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. No quilting experience is necessary.

The office will be closed on Thursday, Nov. 23 in observance of Thanksgiving. All services will be recorded and available on the church's Facebook page and website. Please visit <http://goodshepherdlena.org/> or and Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/GSLCLenaIL> for more information. Please contact the church office at 815-369-5552 with any questions.

## St. John's Lutheran Church

St. John's Lutheran Church, Pearl City will celebrate the twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost on Sunday, Nov. 19 at 9 a.m. There will be three baptisms that day, the Chancel Choir will sing, and the Harvest Home Collection

will be blessed and taken to the food pantry.

The November Grace Meal is Nov. 19 and will include turkey, dressing, sweet potatoes, green beans, cranberry, and dessert. Reservations are due to the church office by 5 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 16. A major source of funds for the meal comes from a generous grant from the Foundation of Northwest Illinois.

The Healthy Wolves group will be packing backpacks on Thursday, Nov. 16 at 3 p.m. If interested in donating to this ministry, reach out to the church office for more information.

The Social Ministry Committee has started the Harvest Home Collection. This is a collection of food items for the Pearl City Food Pantry. This collection will continue through Nov. 12. Monetary donations are accepted as well.

The Church Council will meet Wednesday, Nov. 15 at 7 p.m. There will be cards and dominoes in Luther Hall on Tuesday, Nov. 30 at 1 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran Church of Pearl City is an ELCA parish and is located at 229 First St. in Pearl City. We are handicapped accessible. To contact the pastor or church please call 815-443-2215.

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# Diet soda consumption risks oral/overall health

Last week I spoke about the rising levels of obesity and diabetes in our Nation. As we strive to avoid these issues, many Americans mistakenly turn to diet sodas as a way to avoid sugar, diabetes, and the consumption of calories. Sadly, research shows us that your body's response to low or no calorie sweeteners can harm both your oral and overall health. Just like regular sugar, artificial sweeteners can trigger insulin release, which reduces blood glucose levels and increases appetite. These insulin spikes in the blood can lead to decreased insulin sensitivity over time and can eventually raise blood sugar levels. This helps explain why research studies on people who are trying to lose weight by drinking artificially sweetened drinks, especially diet sodas, are instead gaining weight, developing glucose intolerance, metabolic



By **DR. STEPHEN PETRAS**  
Illinois Licensed  
General Dentist

syndrome, diabetes, and other adverse health effects.

While controlling body weight is a crucial step in managing or avoiding type 2 diabetes, drinking diet soda is definitely not the answer. The latest research studies show us that diet soda drinkers are more likely to develop metabolic syndrome. Metabolic syndrome is a group of factors that increase your risk of developing diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. These factors include: low levels of "good" cholesterol (HDL), high blood sugar levels, belly fat, high levels of triglycerides, fatty liver and

high blood pressure.

Even though several artificial sweeteners (Erythritol, Agave and Xylitol) do not affect blood sugar levels, this does not mean that they do not pose other health risks. Recent research data demonstrates that Erythritol may increase cardiovascular problems like blood clotting and heart attack, Agave has been linked to metabolic syndrome and excessive consumption of Xylitol (more than fifty grams per day) can irritate the kidneys and liver.

Artificial sweeteners can also affect the balance of healthy bacteria in the intestines. Sorbitol and xylitol can cause gas, bloating, and diarrhea. Stevia can not only cause nausea, vomiting and bloating, but has been shown to negatively interact with medications such as blood pressure pills and lithium. Aspartame increases cortisol

levels and alters the activity of the digestive tract's microbiome.

Drinking diet soda also appears to alter your brain's sweet-sensing reward center. Modern research reveals that people who drink diet soda have higher activity in the area of the brain associated with the desire to eat foods that are sweet and high in fat. These changes in your brain chemistry and gut microbiome, which slows your metabolism, while increasing your addiction to sweet foods, helps to explain the increased weight gain, belly fat and higher body mass index (BMI) scores seen in people who regularly consume artificially sweetened sodas.

Artificial sweeteners are not the only negative additives in soft drinks. Brominated vegetable oil (BVO) is a food additive primarily used in fruit-

flavored sports drinks and sodas to keep ingredients from separating. Although it took them from 2013-2020, Coca-Cola and Pepsi (which also manufactures Mountain Dew and Gatorade), slowly replaced this ingredient in their products because of its potential harm to the liver and heart. Chronic exposure to bromine can also cause memory loss, tremors, slurred speech, and a variety of other neurological symptoms (referred to as Bromism disease). Unfortunately, BVO is still present in some ninety food products in America, most of which are sodas. Sodas that contain BVO include certain Great Value, Food Lion, Dollar General, and Sun Drop varieties. This month, the FDA proposed a ban on BVO after recent studies revealed that this ingredient is also toxic to the thyroid gland, which plays a key role in

regulating blood pressure, heart rate and metabolism. It is notable that while the FDA has known since 1970 that BVO was not safe for use as a food additive, it is only just now seeking to ban its use. Conversely, The United Kingdom banned its use in 1970s, India in 1990s, the European Union in 2008 and Japan in 2010.

Since artificial sweeteners are added to so many of our processed foods, it is easy to consume excessive quantities of these harmful and addictive additives. This makes quitting the habit of over consumption of sweetened sodas even more important when trying to preserve both your oral and overall health. To help ease your transition away from diet sodas, you may try keeping a pitcher of fresh berries, cucumbers, or other fruits in fluoridated water in the refrigerator.

## News briefs

### Veterans' Pantry in need of items

Items listed below are needed for the Veterans' Pantry in Freeport. The support of the community has been tremendous, and we are grate-

ful for the support.

- Shaving Cream
- Mouth Wash
- Wash cloths
- Hand towels
- Bath towels

- Laundry soap
- Dish soap
- Paper towels
- Toilet tissue
- Hand can openers
- After shave
- Crest toothpaste

- Men's deodorant
- Women's deodorant
- Socks
- Body wash
- Body Lotion
- Warm gloves, hats, and coats for the winter

### Upcoming class offers winter decorating tips

Join the University of Illinois Extension and the Freeport Park District for "Evergreen Porch Pots" on Tuesday, Nov. 28 at 5:30 p.m. at the Krape Park Community Building. In this class, students will learn tips and tricks to turn container gardens into eye-catching winter decorations. As part of the class, participants will get to make a decorative porch pot to take home with them; all supplies are provided. Registration is required to attend and can be completed at [atgo.illinois.edu/jsw](http://atgo.illinois.edu/jsw) or by calling the U of I Extension at 815-235-4125. Registration cost is \$30.

### Highland Big Band to perform fall concert

Enjoy a night of fall melodies and music of the classics with the Highland Big Band at a concert at 7 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 17 in the Fine Arts Theatre at the Ferguson Fine Arts Center, 2998 W. Pearl City Rd., Freeport, Ill.

Music will include "Big Swing Face" and "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" from the Buddy Rich Band. John Hartman will sing the Dean Martin classic "You're Nobody 'til Somebody Loves You" and a new song written by Gary Brubaker will be performed.

For more on Highland Fine Arts, visit [highland.edu/box-office](http://highland.edu/box-office).

### Blackhawk Unit of Home Extension meeting

The November meeting of Blackhawk Unit of Home Extension will be held on Thursday, Nov. 16, 2023, at 1 p.m. at the Pearl City Library. Roll call will be, "What is your favorite soup?". The major lesson, Bone Broth-Best Ever Broth, will be given by Colleen Brown. Final plans will be made for the Christmas meeting. Anyone is welcome to attend.

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# Lady Broncos hopeful to continue building

By Trenten Scheidegger  
CORRESPONDENT

With fall sports coming to an end, winter sports are right around the corner. For the Orangeville Broncos, they are hoping their girls basketball team can continue the success the program has found in recent years.

Ever since the 2021 season, the Orangeville Broncos have dominated the court. In 2021, the team finished with an overall record of 27-5. In 2022, they increased their win number by one as they finished the year 28-5. The Broncos also took their game to the next level by capturing an NUIC Conference Championship and a Regional Championship in the postseason.

After a disappointing ending with a 48-17 loss to Galeana, the Broncos and their head coach, Jay Doyle, couldn't wait to be back. The 2022 team lost just one senior in Leah Baker. Although Baker leaves big shoes to fill, the Broncos are up for the task.

A pair of First Team All-Conference players return to lead the way in Whitney Sullivan and Laney Cahoon. Joining them is Second Team All-Conference selection, Nadalee Doyle. On top of that, the Broncos also return Kaylynn O'Haver and Addie Wheeler, who split starts last year. Both O'Haver and Wheeler are expected to step into the starting lineup full time in 2023. Makayla Mock and Bailey Jordan were first off the bench last year, and that should continue this season.

It is clear that returning experience will be Orangeville's strength in 2023. The Broncos return the most experienced team in the conference, and they bring a winning reputation with them. Sixth year head coach Jay Doyle recognized that stating, "The team will bring back a lot of experience that has been in big games and a long season."

Jay is hoping to see the 2023 team show a continued desire of success. The opportunity is right there in front of them.

According to the Jay, the team just needs to "continue to improve and play [their] best basketball at the end of February."

As the head coach, it's Jay's job to make sure the team is prepared for those opportunities. This year, Jay is hoping a tougher regular season schedule can help the team be better prepared for the postseason. "I have front loaded our schedule early with a lot of tough games," Jay said, adding that the team will also be playing in the Boylan Shootout this Christmas.

The Broncos open the 2023 season in the Forreston Tournament. They are set to face off with Forreston on Nov. 16, then Stillman Valley and Eastland on Nov. 18. They will take on Stockton on Nov. 20, and Winnebago on Nov. 21. Excluding Stockton, who had a 5-24 season in 2022, the other four teams the Broncos will face finished with a combined record of 88-35.

If a tough Forreston tournament doesn't get the Broncos going, their regular season schedule will. On Dec. 1, the Broncos travel to face off with the River Ridge-Scales Mound Wildcats. Last season, RR-SM racked up 26 victories. On Dec. 5, the Broncos travel to face off with an Aquin squad that returns off an 18-win season. The Broncos don't host their first home game until Dec. 7, when they play host to the Lena-Winslow Panthers. Last year, the Panthers went 22-9 and one of those victories just happens to be one of the Broncos' five losses. A slew of other challenges lie throughout the 2023 season for Orangeville.

Jay recognizes the obstacles he's laid in front of his team, and he hopes to see it benefit them in the long run. "Our record may suffer, but we need to continue to push our kids to get better to prepare us to play and compete for a conference title and a regional title again," Jay shared.

# Amendt recaps 2023 Lena-Winslow volleyball season

By Trenten Scheidegger  
CORRESPONDENT

The Lena-Winslow Panthers recently completed another exceptional volleyball season which was one of the best in the program's history. This year, the Panthers racked up 37 victories, which was 10 more than their 27-10 season in 2022. Not only that, but they broke the school win record and eventually broke it again with 37 victories in 2023.

This historic Le-Win team was led by a tremendous group of seniors that had a special relationship with their head coach, Sue Amendt. Sue has been with Le-Win long enough to set her own win records, but it meant much more to do it with the senior class of 2024. "This group of seniors is special to me because they are Molly's [Amendt] friends. We started our adventure of volleyball together when they were in third grade!" Sue shared. Now that it's all said and done, the Panther coach can't believe how fast it went by. "It seemed at the time, I would have forever with them, but it's amazing how quickly time has gone," Sue explained.

This year's seniors made their mark on the program over the last four years. It all led up to their 37 wins in their final year. Kaidynce Lynch, Grace Groezinger, Janessa Esser, Natalie McNutt, Isabelle Paulsen, and Molly Amendt led the way as one of the deepest senior classes in all of the NUIC. A handful of these seniors were recognized outside of the program for their play in 2023. Both Lynch and Molly were named First Team All-Conference. Groezinger was also named Second Team All-Conference. Lynch was eventually named Second Team All-State by the Illinois Volleyball Coaches Association. Molly was also named First Team All-State by the IVCA. On top of that, Lynch and Molly were both named All Region by the American Volleyball Coaches Association.

Despite all the accolades and the wins on the court, Sue is most proud of the things these student-athletes have accomplished off the court. "I am most proud of the wonderful women they have become. Students, leaders, friends, volunteers, musicians, etcetera... And the list can go on and on. Most of them are three-sport athletes and put their heart and soul into everything they attempt," Sue shared.

Although the 2023 Panthers experienced more success than most high school volleyball teams ever do, it all came down to an emotional ending. Battling through injuries, the Panthers fell short in the Sectional Championship with an 0-2 loss to a tough Galeana squad. Sue spoke about the postseason run, and the obstacles the team had to face. "Our postseason run was one of ups and downs. Our team was going into regionals injured because of the loss of Mia Diffenderfer in the regular season. Replacing her became our focus during the end of the season and into regionals," Sue shared.

Most teams will rely on the next man up mentality, which the Panthers tried to do. In hindsight, the loss of Diffenderfer hit harder than the team originally expected. "I think the blow of her coming back and then becoming re-injured in the regional semifinal took its toll on our team more than we would like to admit. We did overcome adversity, however, and make a big push, but Mia's absence left a hole and we never quite recovered," Sue explained.

All in all, 2023 was a step in the right direction and although the Panthers will have a lot to replace, their future remains bright. Sue is confident in next year's squad, calling it "a great Nucleus." Before adding that Alyssa Daughenbaugh, Rachael Setterstrom, Eden Dietz, Mia Diffenderfer, and Maddy Chiles will be back. Even with such a strong senior class, each of those listed players have made notable impacts during their high school careers. Most recently, Setterstrom was named Second Team All-State by the IVCA, and earned an Honorable Mention in the NUIC. Daughenbaugh set personal records for assists, and Diffenderfer was clearly missed in the postseason. Dietz and Chiles will be expected to take major steps forward next year as well.

Despite Molly graduating from the program, Sue is ready for another year at the helm of the program. "I will be back!" Sue responded, when asked about her future after Molly. Even after a 37 victory season, the future of Le-Win volleyball remains as exciting as ever.



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# Lady Wolves hopeful for growth on the basketball court in 2023-2024 season

By Trenten Scheidegger  
CORRESPONDENT

The Pearl City Wolves are going to look like a completely different team for their 2023-2024 girls basketball season. After losing a handful of key players last year, the Wolves are looking to build toward the future this season. Pearl City head coach Brock Musser is in his fourth year with the program. Last year, Musser saw his team finish with an overall record of just 11-21. It was another step forward for the program,

after earning just 10 wins in the 2021-2022 season, and going winless in the 2020-2021 Covid year. The 11 wins was the most the program saw since 2017 when the team finished 14-14.

This year, if the Wolves want to keep moving forward, they will have to replace some key players. Brea Musser, Kenzee Evans, Emma Boyer, and Laine Rosenstiel each graduated from the program. Now the Wolves are going to have to endure some growing pains as they look to establish

their identity for the future. This year Pearl City has just one senior on the team in post player Ava Bremmer.

With just one senior, plenty of underclassmen are going to get an opportunity to play at the varsity level. Musser understands the team is going to have to live through their mistakes in the early parts of the season. The Pearl City head coach acknowledged that stating, "With only one senior on the team, we will need to use the first half of the season to find each player's role and

where each player can provide the best contribution to the team."

The 2023-2024 Wolves are going to have to experiment with different lineups, different rotations, and perhaps some different things schematically if they want to see growth before the end of the season. Returning players and newcomers should get ample opportunity to prove themselves at the next level.

For now, the main expectations are on Bremmer and returning guard, Fallyn Endress. Last year the duo saw significant playing time and they will be counted on to lead the way this season. A handful of newcomers will step up to the varsity level, however. Guard Kendra Kuhlemeier, guard Kady Miller, guard Elizabeth Dinderman, guard May Boyer, and post player Danica

Stager will all get their opportunities.

It's safe to say the Wolves will rely on their guards in the 2023-2024 season. With Bremmer returning as the only experienced post player, Pearl City will lean on their guards unless Stager can establish a presence down low. Musser acknowledged the team's speed should be one of their strong suits.

For Musser and the program, the goals for this year are simple. With just one senior, they are hoping the team's experience this year can lead to more success in the future. For now, Musser is hoping the team can get a taste of that success by accomplishing the team's goal of reaching double digit wins and earning a regional victory. Personally, Musser explained his goal as a coach is

to see "improvement throughout the season that the program can build upon for years to come."

Thus far, the Wolves' head coach is pleased with what he has seen in practice. "The team has really come together well and are all working hard for the same cause. We are blessed with a tremendous amount of basketball talent in this area, and it shows by the amount of success the area's teams have had in the postseason. We have more work to put in to ensure we can compete with these teams," Musser explained.

The Wolves will open their season on Monday, Nov. 20, when they travel to face off with Aquin. Nine days later, the Wolves play their first home game as they host the Forreston Cardinals on Nov. 29.

## Highland Big Band to perform fall concert

Enjoy a night of fall melodies and music of the classics with the Highland Big Band at a concert at 7 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 17, in the Fine Arts Theatre at the Ferguson Fine Arts Center, 2998 W. Pearl City Rd. in Freeport.

feature some outstanding soloists and many fine musicians playing jazz band classics," said Bill Petersen, director.

Music selections will include "Big Swing Face" and "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" from the Buddy Rich Band. John

Hartman will sing the Dean Martin classic "You're Nobody 'til Somebody Loves You," and a new song written by Gary Brubaker will also be performed.

For more on Highland Fine Arts, visit [highland.edu/box-office](http://highland.edu/box-office).

## Stephenson County Farm Bureau news

By Victoria Hansen

I am notorious for ruining almost every surprise I plan. I often get too excited and want to tell the gift or plan for an event or a special activity. An example of this was last year for Christmas I bought my husband some concert tickets. I had bought these in September and had told him about them by the end of November, which for me was a pretty decent run. The past month or so we have been working diligently on planning and organizing trips for 2024. We had planned on releasing this information in January, but we are just too enthusiastic about sharing what we have planned. We are still working on a few other trips, but we wanted to share what we had so far. I am also going to include trips for 2024 that you may have already heard about.

- Murder on the Orient Express at Circa 21, Sunday, Feb. 18
- Charleston, Savannah and Jekyll Island, March 15-21 (Lindstrom Travel)
- Shipshewana Amish Country, June 10-12
- Canadian Rockies, Lethbridge and the Calgary Stampede, July 3-9 (Tri State Travel)
- Wisconsin State Fair, Thursday, Aug. 8
- Danube Explorer, Aug. 24-Sept. 3 (Lindstrom Travel)

As summer approaches we will have more information regarding baseball bus trips. We are also looking at a few more family friendly trips. If you have any suggestions, please let Victoria know, Stephenson County Farm Bureau 815-232-3186 or Carroll County Farm Bureau 815-244-3001. Additional details for all scheduled trips can be found on our county Farm Bureau websites [www.stephensoncfb.org](http://www.stephensoncfb.org) and [www.carrollcfb.org](http://www.carrollcfb.org).

### Stephenson County Farm Bureau annual meeting

Members of the Stephenson County Farm Bureau are invited to attend our annual meeting on Monday, Nov. 20 at 7 p.m. Light refreshments will be provided as well as door prizes. Registration is not required but appreciated by emailing [office@stephensoncfb.org](mailto:office@stephensoncfb.org) or calling 815-232-3186.

### Nuts and Candies available for purchase at Carroll County Farm Bureau

We now have Terrie Lynn nuts and candies for sale at the Carroll County Farm Bureau Office, 811 South Clay Street, Mount Carroll, IL. Items will be sold on a first come first serve basis. Our office is open Monday through Thursday 9 a.m.-1 p.m. or by appointment.

Items for sale include Giant Cashews 11b bag: \$13 Member Price, Black Walnut Pieces 11b bag: \$17 Member Price, Fancy Mammoth Pecan halves 11b bag: \$15 Member Price, Milk Chocolate Pecan Clusters 9 oz box: \$12 Member Price, Milk Chocolate Malted Milk Balls 11b bag: \$11 Member Price, Sweet and Salty Trail Mix 11b bag: \$11 Member Price.

If you have questions, please reach out to our office at 815-244-3001 or by email at [carrollcfboffice@gmail.com](mailto:carrollcfboffice@gmail.com)

### Carroll and Stephenson County Farm Bureaus Thanksgiving hours:

Carroll County Farm Bureau will be closed on Thanksgiving and the day after. Stephenson County Farm Bureau will close at noon on Nov. 22 and remain closed until Monday, Nov. 27 at 8 a.m. If you have questions, please contact your County Farm Bureau. =

*A Great Big*  
**THANK YOU TO OUR READERS**

who have sent a donation to help underwrite the Scoop Today/Shopper's Guide. For those of you who haven't done so in the past year, but enjoy this newspaper and would like to help us pay for its operation, please send a donation in any amount to:

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# LEGAL NOTICES

The summary must be published in the local newspaper.

Copies of the detailed Annual Statement of Affairs for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2023  
Individuals wanting to review this form should contact:

will be available for public inspection in the school district/joint agreement administrative office by November 30 annually.

<b>Lena Winslow CUSD 202</b>	<b>401 Fremont St Lena, IL 61048 8610</b>	<b>8156680801</b>	<b>7:30-4:00</b>
School District/Joint Agreement Name	Address	Telephone	Office Hours

Also by January 15 annually the detailed Annual Statement of Affairs for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2023

will be posted on the Illinois State Board of Education's website at www.isbe.net.

**SUMMARY:** The following is the Annual Statement of Affairs Summary that is required to be published by the school district/joint agreement for the past fiscal year.

**Statement of Operations as of June 30, 2023**

		Educational	Operations & Maintenance	Debt Services	Transportation	Municipal Retirement/Social Security	Capital Projects	Working Cash	Tort	Fire Prevention & Safety
Local Sources	1000	4,669,984	1,414,500	344,939	52,590	118,131	1,423	21,305	109,859	106,983
Flow-Through Receipts/Revenues from One District to Another District	2000	0	0		0	0				
State Sources	3000	2,565,711	121,247	0	245,145	0	0	0	0	0
Federal Sources	4000	867,314	635,513	0	2,553	448	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Direct Receipts/Revenues</b>		<b>8,103,009</b>	<b>2,171,260</b>	<b>344,939</b>	<b>300,288</b>	<b>118,579</b>	<b>1,423</b>	<b>21,305</b>	<b>109,859</b>	<b>106,983</b>
<b>Total Direct Disbursements/Expenditures</b>		<b>7,730,014</b>	<b>2,072,974</b>	<b>366,269</b>	<b>846,384</b>	<b>245,321</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>147,390</b>	<b>530,196</b>
Other Sources/Uses of Funds		-1,326,119	1,300,000	26,119	243,138	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Beginning Fund Balances without Student Activity Funds - July 1, 2022</b>		<b>5,688,446</b>	<b>1,655,408</b>	<b>12,820</b>	<b>883,076</b>	<b>406,443</b>	<b>57,052</b>	<b>556,948</b>	<b>168,959</b>	<b>488,703</b>
Other Changes in Fund Balances		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Ending Fund Balances without Student Activity Funds - June 30, 2023</b>		<b>4,735,322</b>	<b>3,053,694</b>	<b>17,609</b>	<b>580,118</b>	<b>279,701</b>	<b>58,475</b>	<b>578,253</b>	<b>131,428</b>	<b>65,490</b>
<b>Ending Fund Balances (all sources) with Student Activity Funds - June 30, 2023</b>		<b>5,065,713</b>	<b>3,053,694</b>	<b>17,609</b>	<b>580,118</b>	<b>279,701</b>	<b>58,475</b>	<b>578,253</b>	<b>131,428</b>	<b>65,490</b>

Person, Firm, or Corporation	Aggregate Amount	Admin Partners
<b>GROSS PAYMENT FOR CERTIFIED PERSONNEL</b>		
<b>Salary Range: Less Than \$25,000</b> Belander, Sarah; Brandt, Thompson; Butler, Matthew; Dowdall, Janet; Ferguson, Emily; Fernstaedt, Stacy; Gerbode, Joy; Goeke, David; Hillmer, Katherine; Jogerst, Nancy Jean-Paige; Kuhlmyer, Susan; Matz, Olivia; Maurer, Hannah; Meador, Mary; Moest, Barbara; Ortmeier, William; Pontnack, Linda; Rickels, Austin; Scheider, Susan; Schneiderman, Steven; Schulz, Bethany; Searby, Barbara; Simler, Linda; Sullivan, David; Trost, Mae; Unger, David; Weegens, Allison; Werhane, Adam; Wilks, Tiffanie; Yeager, Justin <b>Salary Range: \$25,000 - \$39,999</b> Carus, Megan; Hayes, Chelsea; Jakel, Morgan <b>Salary Range: \$40,000 - \$59,999</b> Anderson, Rebecca; Baldauf, Brooke; Blakely, Jessica; Blakely, Matthew; Duchow, Tiffanie A; Feiner, Jane; Fink, Jorjann; Fry, Tabitha; Geiseman, Michael; Gift, Jerrid; Hasselman, Jessica; Jones, Kristin; Kent, Lindsey; Killian, Lindsey; Lazzara, Jamie; Leamon, Kimberly; Linden, Andrea; Lyvers, Alison; Meyers-Matz, Stephanie; Modica, Mary; Monigold, Debra; Ortiz, Jacqueline; Parkinson, Christina; Raab, Katy; Sauer, Sue; Schoeny, Tracy; Schultz, Katelyn; Snyder, Jesse; Spidahl, Allison; Stodden, Lindsay; Tiesman, Kristin; Werhane, Katherine; White, Emily; Wirtz, William <b>Salary Range: 60,000 - \$89,999</b> Amendt, Susan; Arand, Richard; Benson, Heather; Benson, Kyle; Blakely, Mark; Bonebright, Sara; Chrisman, Holly; Daughenbaugh, Tamarah; Freedlund, Brianne; Hahne, Ryan; Linnemann, Katrina; March, Jason; Milder, Kevin; Milder, Kimberly; Pieper, Kelli; Price, Leslie; Richardson, Erin; Robinson, James; Sargent, Stacy; Schultz, Renee; Smargiassi, Brenda; Smargiassi, Thomas; Snook, Jacob; Stevens, Catherine; Voreis, Linda; Werhane, Nicholas; Woodley, Jamie <b>Salary Range: \$90,000 and Over</b> Chiles, Thomas; DeZell, Ann; Kuehl, Mark; Lobdell, Andy	Advanced Technologies Inc 5,241.00 AFLAC 5,273.39 AFLAC AFLAC 4,700.67 ALL AMERICAN SPORTS CORP. 13,747.29 Amazon Capital Services 7,967.03 AMAZON.COM 39,929.52 B&H 5,507.82 Baker Group 4,925.00 Barry's Collision Center 16,927.48 BENNING GROUP LLC 18,800.00 Blakely, Jessica Lyn 4,200.00 BLICK ART MATERIALS 2,863.97 BRINCK POP LLC 3,515.00 BRINKER'S Tire & Auto Inc 4,637.92 Calibrant Energy 51,787.52 CDW GOVERNMENT, INC. 35,952.98 Chef's Deal 2,992.25 ComEd 19,105.95 Comfort Inn and Suites 6,882.44 Community Bank 1,011,303.00 COMMUNITY BANK HSA 48,499.84 Costco 6,951.06 Crexendo 16,540.14 Curriculum Associates Inc 12,500.35 Dell Sales & Service 6,182.39 DELTA DENTAL OF ILLINOIS 71,950.33 Dubuque Fire Equipt Inc 3,809.25 Earstgrains Baking Companies, Inc. 11,714.20 Earthseals 190,432.58 EBSCO Information Svcs 2,937.00 Educational Networks 3,600.00 ElectroCoat 19,147.00 Embrace Education 3,880.00 Engie Resources LLC 25,649.40 ENTRE COMPUTER SOLUTIONS 16,412.65 Explore Learning 2,965.50 Follett School Solutions 2,729.19 FREEPORT INDUSTRIAL ROOF 2,845.00 FREEPORT RUG/LINOLEUM,INC 19,800.00 GILL'S FREEPORT DISPOSAL 16,514.22 GM Financial Leasing 4,343.44 Gordon Food Service Inc 171,343.77 GRAINGER 5,362.79 Hahne, Ryan L 3,870.00 Harry London Retail 7,343.62 Health Equity 18,031.38 Helm Group 148,650.00 HORACE MANN 4,853.98 Horace Mann-Supplemental 6,798.25 IL DIRECTOR OF EMP SECURI 3,395.60 ILLINOIS ASSOC SCHOOL BDS 12,443.26 Illinois Fiber Resources Group 8,400.00 ILLINOIS MUNICIPAL RETIRE 172,010.82 Illinois Scholastic Cooperative 715,081.04 Ingram 6,853.78 IPA 3,151.00 ISCorp 3,000.00 Kami 3,090.00 Kent, Lindsey 3,675.00 KEVIN MILDER 3,651.02 KnowBe4, Inc. 4,698.20 Larson & Darby Inc 15,693.14 LEAMON'S AMBULANCE SVCS. 4,500.00 LENA-WIN DENTAL INS 65,845.00 LENA-WIN VISION INS 6,944.15 LENA-WINSLOW HEALTH INS 716,657.67 LE-WIN ATHLETIC BOOSTERS 6,294.00 LE-WIN DIST REVOLVING FD 7,733.13	
<b>Salary Range: Less Than \$25,000</b> Ahrens, Jillian; Albrecht, Linda; Albright, Shannon; Amendt, Gail; Baker, Zachary; Barrett, Erin; Block, Jodi; Bower, Abigail; Brinker, Cathy; Brunner, Kiley; Clark, Tia; Dameier, Hewitt; DeVries, Janelle; Dotson, Brandon; Draeger, Julie; Dunlavey, Valerie; Edler, Grace; Ertmer, Kim; Evans, Kimberly; Gapinski, Susan; Gerbick, Lindsey; Gerbode, Joy; Gruhn, Staci; Guetzke, Nicole; Hastings, Lorna; Hermann, Jared; Hershey, Roberta; Hilaj, Jessica; Hille, Leigh; Hintz, Duane; Holtz, Melissa; Hook-Winters, Lori; Hornung, Donna; Huttenlocher, Dennis; Jensen, Kaylee; Kampmeier, Sandy; Kempel, Kolton; Kent, Lindsey; Kent, Ryan; Klever, LuAnn; Koehler, Leonard; Kraft, Susan; Krogull, Douglas; Kurth, Janis; Leamon, Kimberly; Lindenman, Emily; Lotz, Steve; Luther, Rebecca; Mau, Kaitlyn; McCrary, Jessica; McMahan, Gracie; Milks, Seth; Monigold, David; Myelle Martinez, Elizabeth; Pettinger, Dana; Phillips, Larry; Raab, Tonya; Runkle, Sharon; Salomon, Norma; Scace, Megan; Schrader, Pamela; Schulz, Amy; Schulz, Bethany; Schulz, Riley; Schultz, Roxann; Shumaker, Cynthia; Simler, Linda; Spinhirne, John; Spinhirne, Karen; Taft, Michael; Taylor, Tammy; Then, Adam; Then, Craig; Tootelian, Nicola; Trost, Mae; Wenger, Carol; Werhane, Adam; Werhane, Nicholas; Williams, Christine; Winchel, Steve; Wybourn, Nick; Wybourn, Tammy <b>Salary Range: \$25,000 - \$39,999</b> Ackerson, Sherri; Bonebright, Danielle; Eichmann, Raymond; Lynch, Shaun; Maltry, Jack; Schierloh, William; Smith, Brian; Solverson, Clara; Spinhirne, Dawn; Stamm, Marlen; Wild, Rebecca; Winning, Debra <b>Salary Range: \$40,000 - \$59,999</b> Crothers, Julie; Klaas, Kirk; Schierloh, Darcy; Wild, Joel; Wybourn, Ryan <b>Salary Range: \$60,000 and Over</b> Groezinger, Amy; Reed, Duane; Wybourn, Doug	LE-WIN ESPA 7,788.25 LeWin Flex 16,841.92 LE-WIN H.S. ACTIVITY FUND 3,750.00 LE-WIN TEACHERS' ASS'N 39,576.87 L-W HS REVOLVING FUND 34,975.00 L-W JH REVOLVING FUND 10,435.00 Marco Technologies LLC 26,852.64 MENARDS, INC 8,370.33 Meyers-Matz, Stephanie J 2,680.00 Midland Paper 5,533.97 Midwest Computer Products Inc 27,020.00 MIDWEST TRANSIT EQUIP.INC 123,516.97 Mobility Works 44,542.00 MONTICELLO SPORTS 12,190.00 Mulgrew Asphalt Maintenance 8,713.00 N2Y 2,747.01 NASCO 2,714.90 Nelson Carlson Mechanical 785,677.12 NICOR GAS 12,639.22 NIXON INSURANCE AGENCY 2,716.00 NORTHWEST SP. ED. COOP. 341,803.94 Orangeville School District #203 17,294.65 PEARL CITY CUSD #200 5,854.42 Pearl City Elevator 6,424.50 PQL 3,050.50 Prairie Farms Dairy Inc 36,477.90 Prairie State Insurance Cooperative 112,088.00 Pulse Technology 24,179.65 Quality Inn 2,933.04 QUILL CORPORATION 3,984.57 Raymond Chevrolet Kia 23,641.26 REGIONAL OFFICE OF ED. 4,810.00 RENAISSANCE LEARNING, INC 5,315.70 ROCK VALLEY PUBLISHING 2,544.95 SAMS CLUB 8,634.34 Santander Leasing 104,640.00 SCHOOL SPECIALTY, LLC 8,675.34 SIEMENS BUILDING TECH. 3,883.64 SJ Smith Co Inc 2,909.00 Skyward Inc. 53,936.00 SPabadak Tarpsplus 5,887.15 Sphero 4,699.03 SSM Health Medical Group 7,289.00 Stackhouse Athletic Equipt 3,098.75 STEPHENSON SERVICE CO 67,107.88 STERLING Commercial Roofing 730,725.00 SULLIVAN'S FOODS 4,786.12 Sweep Scrub 7,600.00 Symmetry Energy Solutions LLC 34,759.41 T.H.I.S. FUND 72,888.06 TEACHER RETIREMENT SYSTEM 456,203.41 THE BANK OF NEW YORK Mellon 340,150.00 The Home Depot Pro 29,357.38 TimeClock Plus 4,593.68 Turnitin LLC 2,535.75 Tyler Technologies 17,850.71 UNITED LABORATORIES 3,322.95 Verizon 2,983.42 Veterans Floors Inc 11,670.00 VILLAGE OF LENA 39,887.25 WAL MART STORES, INC 5,095.33 webrestaurantstore 8,665.01 Werhane, Nicholas J 3,150.00 West Music Company 6,326.82 Windstar Lines 4,451.24 Wybourn, Doug 3,870.00 Wyndham Hotel 3,122.42	
<b>Payments over \$2,500, excluding wages and salaries.</b>		
<b>Person, Firm, or Corporation</b>	<b>Aggregate Amount</b>	
Admin Partners	92,809.96	

# LEGAL NOTICES

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE 15TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT JO DAVIESS COUNTY - GALENA, ILLINOIS U.S. BANK NATIONAL ASSOCIATION Plaintiff, -v.- MELISSA S. TURNER et al Defendant

and plaintiff makes no representation as to the condition of the property. Prospective bidders are admonished to check the court file to verify all information.

If this property is a condominium unit, the purchaser of the unit at the foreclosure sale, other than a mortgagee, shall pay the assessments and the legal fees required by The Condominium Property Act, 765 ILCS 605/9(g)(1) and (g)(4). If this property is a condominium unit which is part of a common interest community, the purchaser of the unit at the foreclosure sale other than a mortgagee shall pay the assessments required by The Condominium Property Act, 765 ILCS 605/18.5(g-1).

IF YOU ARE THE MORTGAGOR (HOMEOWNER), YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN IN POSSESSION FOR 30 DAYS AFTER ENTRY OF AN ORDER OF POSSESSION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 15-1701(C) OF THE ILLINOIS MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE LAW.

You will need a photo identification issued by a government agency (driver's license, passport, etc.) in order to gain entry into our building and the foreclosure sale room in Cook County and the same identification for sales held at other county venues where The Judicial Sales Corporation conducts foreclosure sales.

For information, examine the court file, CODILIS & ASSOCIATES, P.C. Plaintiff's Attorneys, 15W030 NORTH FRONTAGE ROAD, SUITE 100, BURR RIDGE, IL, 60527 (630) 794-9876 THE JUDICIAL SALES CORPORATION

One South Wacker Drive, 24th Floor, Chicago, IL 60606-4650 (312) 236-SALE

You can also visit The Judicial Sales Corporation at www.tjsc.com for a 7 day status report of pending sales.

CODILIS & ASSOCIATES, P.C. 15W030 NORTH FRONTAGE ROAD, SUITE 100 BURR RIDGE IL, 60527 630-794-5300 E-Mail: pleadings@il.cslegal.com

Attorney File No. 14-22-09717 Attorney ARDC No. 00468002 Case Number: 2023 FC 2 TJSC#: 43-3282 NOTE: Pursuant to the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, you are advised that Plaintiff's attorney is deemed to be a debt collector attempting to collect a debt and any information obtained will be used for that purpose. Case # 2023 FC 2 I3231812

(Published in The Scoop Today Nov. 1, 8 & 15, 2023) 446110

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIFTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT STEPHENSON COUNTY, ILLINOIS U.S. BANK NATIONAL ASSOCIATION, PLAINTIFF, VS. UNKNOWN HEIRS AND LEGATEES OF PATRICIA L. RATKOVICH; TRICIA A HALTER; ROBERT J RATKOVICH; BRIAN R RATKOVICH; ILLINOIS HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY; UNKNOWN OWNERS AND NON-RECORD CLAIMANTS, DEFENDANTS. NO. 2023FC53 145 NORTH WHISTLER AVENUE FREEPORT, IL 61032 JUDGE PRESIDING JUDGE

NOTICE BY PUBLICATION NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN TO YOU, Unknown Heirs and Legatees of Patricia L. Ratkovich Robert J Ratkovich Unknown Owners and Non-Record Claimants defendants, that this case has been commenced in this Court against you and other defendants, asking for the foreclosure of a certain Mortgage conveying the premises described as follows, to wit:

THE NORTH SIXTY (60) FEET OF LOT TWENTY-EIGHT (28) IN POWELL AND WADDELL'S SUBDIVISION OF THE EAST HALF (1/2) OF THE NORTH-EAST QUARTER (1/4)

OF SECTION 36, TOWNSHIP 27 NORTH, RANGE 7 EAST OF THE FOURTH PRINCIPAL MERIDIAN, THE PLAT OF WHICH SUBDIVISION IS RECORDED IN BOOK 26 OF DEEDS ON PAGE 267 IN THE RECORDER'S OFFICE OF STEPHENSON COUNTY, ILLINOIS; SITUATED IN THE TOWNSHIP OF FREEPORT, COUNTY OF STEPHENSON AND STATE OF ILLINOIS.

Commonly known as: 145 North Whistler Avenue Freeport, IL 61032 and which said Mortgage was made by, Patricia L Ratkovich Mortgagor(s), to Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc. as nominee for Academy Mortgage Corporation Mortgagee, and recorded in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds of Stephenson County, Illinois, as Document No. 202000178076; and for other relief.

UNLESS YOU file your answer or otherwise file your appearance in this case, on or before December 1, 2023, A JUDGMENT OR DECREE BY DEFAULT MAY BE TAKEN AGAINST YOU FOR THE RELIEF ASKED IN THE COMPLAINT.

You have been sued. To participate in the case, you MUST file an official document with the court within the time stated on this Notice called an "Appearance" and a document called an "Answer/Response". The Answer/Response is not required in small claims or eviction cases unless ordered by the court. If you do not file an Appearance and Answer/Response on time, the court may decide the case without hearing from you, and you could be held in default and lose the case. After you fill out the necessary documents, you need to electronically file (e-file) them with the court. To e-file, you must create an account with an e-filing service provider. For more information, go to ilcourts.info/efiling. If you cannot e-file, you can get an exemption that allows you to file in-person or by mail. You may be charged filing fees, but if you cannot pay them, you can file an Application for Waiver of Court Fees. It is possible that the court will allow you to attend the first court date in this case in-person or remotely by video or phone. Contact the Circuit Court Clerk's office or visit the Court's website to find out whether this is possible and, if so, how to do this. Need help? Call or text Illinois Court Help at 833-411-1121 or go to ilcourthelp.gov for information about going to court, including how to fill out and file documents. You can also get free legal information and legal referrals at illinoislegalaid.org. All documents referred to in this Notice can be found at ilcourts.info/forms. Other documents may be available from your local Circuit Court Clerk's office or website. ¿Necesita ayuda? Llame o envíe un mensaje de texto a Illinois Court Help al 833-411- 1121, o visite ilcourthelp.gov para obtener información sobre los casos de la corte y cómo completar y presentar formularios.

PURSUANT TO THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT, THE PLAINTIFF'S ATTORNEY IS DEEMED TO BE A DEBT COLLECTOR ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE. McCalla Raymer Leibert Pierce, LLC Attorney for Plaintiff 1 N. Dearborn St. Suite 1200 Chicago, IL 60602 Ph. (312) 346-9088 File No. 23-16149IL-968558 I3231843

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ble that the court will allow you to attend the first court date in this case in-person or remotely by video or phone. Contact the Circuit Court Clerk's office or visit the Court's website to find out whether this is possible and, if so, how to do this. Need help? Call or text Illinois Court Help at 833-411-1121 or go to ilcourthelp.gov for information about going to court, including how to fill out and file documents. You can also get free legal information and legal referrals at illinoislegalaid.org. All documents referred to in this Notice can be found at ilcourts.info/forms. Other documents may be available from your local Circuit Court Clerk's office or website. ¿Necesita ayuda? Llame o envíe un mensaje de texto a Illinois Court Help al 833-411- 1121, o visite ilcourthelp.gov para obtener información sobre los casos de la corte y cómo completar y presentar formularios.

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(Published in The Shopper's Guide Nov. 1, 8 & 15, 2023) 446109

STATE OF ILLINOIS IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIFTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT STEPHENSON COUNTY-IN PROBATE In Re the Matter of the Estate of: JAMES H. EVERS, Deceased. No. 2023PR66

death of James H. Evers, of Freeport, Illinois. Letters of Office were issued on October 19, 2023, to:

Joel T. Evers c/o Anthony V. Coon Attorney At law 10 N. Galena Ave., Ste.210 Freeport, Illinois 61032

as independent Administrator of the Estate of James H. Evers, whose attorney is

Anthony V. Coon Attorney At law 10 N. Galena Ave., Ste. 210 Freeport, Illinois 61032

The estate will be administered without Court supervision unless, under Section 28.4 of the Probate Act (755 ILCS 5/28-4), any interested person terminates independent administration at any time by mailing or delivering a Petition To Terminate to the Clerk.

Claims against the estate may be filed in the office of the Clerk of the Court at the Stephenson County Courthouse, 15 N. Galena Avenue, Freeport, Illinois 61032, or with the representative, or both, on or before May 3, 2024, and any claim not filed on or before said date is barred. Copies of a claim filed with the Clerk must be mailed or delivered to the representative and to the attorney within ten (10) days after it has been filed.

Date: October 20, 2023.

Joel T. Evers, Administrator By: Anthony V. Coon, Anthony V. Coon, Attorney At Law

Anthony V. Coon, #6269568 Attorney at Law 10 N. Galena Ave., Ste. 210 Freeport, IL 61032 815-235-2212 Fax 815-232-5500 tonycoonlaw@aol.com

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NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION-CLAIMS

Notice is given of the

# Felony drug and weapons arrest

On Nov. 3, 2023, officers with the Freeport Police Department responded to a tip that stated an individual was currently harboring a runaway in an apartment in the 600 block of N Walnut Av in Freeport. Officers arrived at the apartment and made contact with the resident, 39-year-old Jamie Coleman and a 15-year-old female who previously had been reported as a runaway.

During the investigation into this incident, officers were able to obtain a search warrant for the apartment. During a search of the apartment, officers located

and seized a handgun and a substance that was believed to be cocaine. Jamie Coleman was arrested and felony charges were approved for Possession of a Weapon by a Felon and Possession with the Intent to Deliver to Another Person more than 15 Grams, but Less than 100 Grams of Cocaine.

The juvenile was taken to FHN Hospital where she was evaluated and released back to her family. Jamie Coleman was transported to the Stephenson County Jail, where he is currently being held pending the outcome of a detention hearing.

# Grand Jury indictment for attempted murder

On Oct. 31, 2023, Darion Wheeler was served with an eight-count grand jury indictment stemming from an extensive investigation into a shooting incident that occurred on Dec. 9, 2019. On that date, officers were called to the Willow Housing Projects in the 500 block of N Willow Avenue around 1:25 AM. Upon arrival, officers discovered a 30-year-old victim near the back door of the apartment. The indictment alleged that Wheeler and co-conspirator Arieann Collins entered the victim's residence and shot the victim after a fight ensued. Once the victim had been shot, Wheeler and Collins fled the

apartment.

Darion Wheeler was already in custody at the Stephenson County Jail for unrelated charges. He was served with the indictment which included charges of Attempted First Degree Murder, Aggravated Discharge of a Firearm (2-counts), Aggravated Unlawful Use of a Weapon, Home Invasion (2-counts), Armed Robbery and Aggravated Battery with a Firearm. Wheeler was left in the custody of the Stephenson County Jail, where he was later ordered to be detained until his trial date.

On Nov. 2, 2022, Arieann Collins was found guilty of

charges consisting of Attempted Murder, Aggravated Discharge of a Firearm, Aggravated Unlawful Use of a Weapon and Aggravated Battery with a Firearm after a jury trial. On Aug. 22, 2023, Collins was sentenced to serve a total of 30 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections: 23 years for the Attempted Murder Charge which will run consecutive with a seven-year sentence for the other four charges.

The public is reminded that the defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial, at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

## LEGAL NOTICES

### STATE OF ILLINOIS IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIFTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT STEPHENSON COUNTY-IN PROBATE

Clerk must be mailed or delivered to the representative and to the attorney within ten (10) days after it has been filed.

Date: October 24, 2023.

In Re the Matter of the Estate of: CHARLES M. LUECKE, Deceased. No. 23-PR-67

Alicia M. DeMichele, Executor By: Anthony V. Coon, Attorney At Law

Anthony V. Coon, #6269568 Attorney at Law 10 N. Galena Ave., Ste. 210 Freeport, IL 61032 815-235-2212 Fax 815-232-5500 tonycoonlaw@aol.com

(Published in The Shopper's Guide Nov. 1, 8 & 15, 2023) 446078

### IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR THE 15TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT STEPHENSON COUNTY - 15 NORTH GALENA AVENUE, FREEPORT, ILLINOIS

ESTATE OF Terry Brady, DECEASED.

23 PR 69

Notice is given to creditors of the death of the above named decedent. Letters of office were issued to Terry J. Brady, 4412 65th Street, Urbandale, Iowa 50322, as Independent Administrator, whose attorney of record is Louis T. Wierenga, Law Office of Louis T. Wierenga, LLC, 3 North Grant Street, Suite 402, Hinsdale, Illinois 60521.

The estate will be administered without court supervision, unless under section 5/28-4 of the Probate Act Ill. Compiled Stat.

1992, Ch. 755, par. 5/28-4) any interested person terminates independent administration at any time by mailing or delivering a petition to terminate to the clerk.

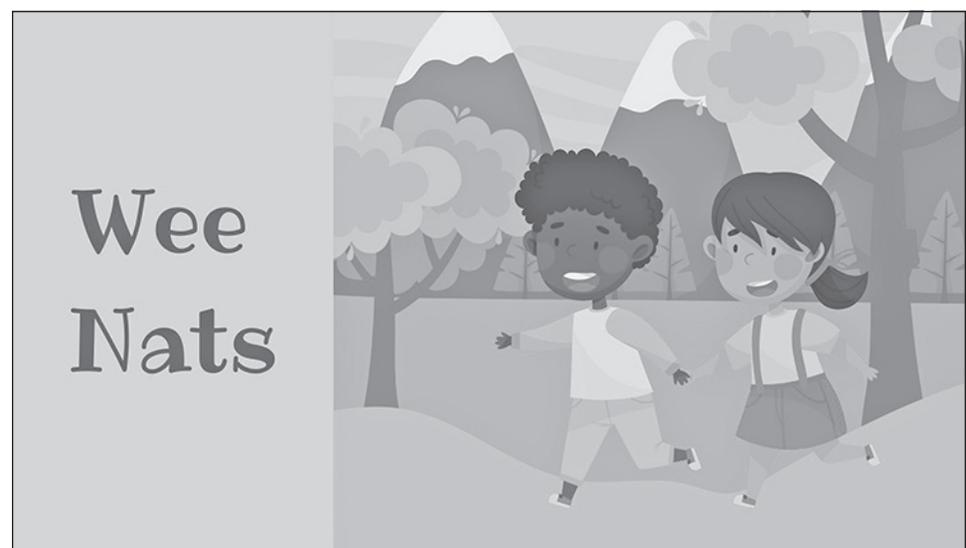
Claims against the estate may be filed with the clerk or with the representative, or both, on or before May 15, 2024, or, if mailing or delivery of a notice from the representative is required by section 5/18-3 of the Probate Act, the date stated in that notice. Any claim not filed on or before that date is barred. Copies of a claim filed with the clerk must be mailed or delivered by the claimant to the representative and to the attorney within 10 days after it has been filed.

E-filing is now mandatory for documents in civil cases with limited exemptions. To e-file, you must first create an account with an e-filing service provider. Visit <http://efile.illinois-courts.gov/service-providers.htm> to learn more and to select a service provider. If you need additional help or have trouble e-filing, visit <http://www.illinois-courts.gov/FAQ/gethelp.asp>.

Louis T. Wierenga Law Office of Louis T. Wierenga, LLC (6297947) 3 North Grant Street, Suite 402 Hinsdale, Illinois 60521 (708)288-8978 13232596

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## Youth Naturalist Program offered by Illinois Extension

Learn about nature at Wee Nats (Wee Naturalists), a fun interactive program for youth ages 4-7, hosted by The University of Illinois Extension for Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties. Kids will learn about different environmental education topics through a story, activity, craft, and hike.

University of Illinois Extension 4-H Youth Educator Kelly Lafferty will offer the program on the second Mon-

day of the month at the Pecatonica Library, located at 400 W. 11th St. #400 in Pecatonica. Each program will be held from 4 to 5:30 p.m. An adult must stay with the child during the program.

Program dates and topics include:

- Monday, Dec. 11: Habitats
- Monday, Jan. 8, 2024: Winter Wonderland
- Monday, Feb. 12, 2024: Stargazing

- Monday, March 11, 2024: March Winds
- Monday, April 8, 2024: Prairies
- Monday, May 13, 2024: Wildflowers

Please dress according to the weather as they will spend time in nature.

Register by visiting the University of Illinois Extension online at [go.illinois.edu/WeeNatsPec](http://go.illinois.edu/WeeNatsPec) or by calling their office at 815-986-4357.



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# State gets ninth recent credit upgrade as administration faces scrutiny for pandemic unemployment handling

By Jerry Nowicki  
CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS

Illinois received another credit upgrade Nov. 7, the same day a legislative committee once again scrutinized Gov. JB Pritzker's administration for its handling of unemployment claims during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The upgrade came from Fitch Ratings, the last remaining holdout of the nation's three major credit reporting agencies to advance the state's status to "A" grade. Collectively, Fitch, S&P Global Ratings and Moody's Investors Service have given the state nine credit upgrades since 2021.

Credit upgrades generally make it cheaper for the state to borrow money, playing a major role in investors' assessment of risk in buying state bonds. Fitch moved Illinois to an A-, up from the BBB+ rating it had given the state last year. Illinois' ratings had been on a general downward trajectory across administrations of both parties since the mild recession two decades ago.

Fitch's review of state finances drew similar conclusions to those that came before it: reserves are growing while long-term liabilities, including pension debt, remain "an elevated but still moderate burden."

"Reserves have improved to historically high levels for the state and provide an important fiscal cushion, but levels remain relatively modest versus other states," Fitch said in its analysis. "Management has eliminated many outstanding budgetary liabilities and established a sustainable pattern of smoother fiscal decision-making."

The state's "rainy day" fund — officially referred to as the Budget Stabilization Fund — had a balance of nearly \$2 billion as of Nov. 7.

Still, the state's unfunded pension liabilities sit at roughly \$140 billion—a number representing what the state would owe if every pensioner sought to collect benefits at once. While an indicator of the pension funds' financial health, it does not reflect their current ability to pay out benefits that are owed.

In recent years, lawmakers have allocated hundreds of millions of dollars beyond statutory requirements to Illinois' pension funds, lessening future liabilities. Fitch called those payments "helpful, but insufficient to address this structural budget gap."

It also warned the rating could once again be lowered if Illinois returns to a point of "irresolute and contentious fiscal decision-making" which had become commonplace over several recent administrations, especially during the two years the state went without a budget between 2015 and 2017.

"We are continuing to right the past fiscal wrongs in our state with disciplined fiscal leadership, and credit rating agencies and businesses alike are taking notice of Illinois' remarkable progress," Pritzker said in a statement.

The upgrade was issued, Fitch noted, because Illinois is planning on issuing bonds next week to continue financing a pension buyout program that's anticipated to shave \$1.4 billion off the state's pension liability over its lifetime.

Also in recent years, Illinois has reduced its "backlog" of unpaid bills to within a 30-day accounts payable cycle. That effort was boosted by an \$898 million allocation to pay off old group health insurance bills last year, which passed as part of a broader plan to pay down debt accrued by the unemployment insurance trust fund during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The unemployment fund was about \$4.5 billion in the red at its lowest point, but lawmakers approved multiple cash infusions to pay off the debt to avoid further massive tax hikes on employers.

## IDES scrutinized

The nature of that unemployment trust fund debt was the subject of scrutiny at an unrelated committee hearing Nov. 7.

The Legislative Audit Commission, a bipartisan bicameral group that reviews state audits, questioned Ray Marchiori, the acting director of the Department of Employment Security who previously served as the

agency's chief of staff before Pritzker appointed him director in January.

The committee was discussing a state auditor general report from July which showed Illinois overpaid unemployment benefits to the tune of \$5.2 billion during the first 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of it went to fraudulent claimants, including hundreds of dead or incarcerated individuals.

During the pandemic, IDES' phone lines and website couldn't handle the sudden spike of individuals trying to file for benefits. State officials scrambled to contract with outside entities to both increase staff and stand up a new federally funded program for people traditionally ineligible for unemployment insurance. That program, called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, was designed to give benefits to people such as gig workers and freelancers, and was the subject of about \$3.2 billion of the overpayments.

The audit found the rush created weaknesses that fraudsters would go on to exploit when the state temporarily halted its process of cross-matching claims against five other databases to verify eligibility.

The audit noted that Illinois failed to follow federal recommendations in May 2020 to prevent some of the fraud. It wasn't until September 2021 that IDES implemented the use of a multi-state crossmatching tool called the Integrity Data Hub, according to the audit.

At many points, the commission hearing served as a venue for lawmakers to air long-stated grievances.

Rep. Fred Crespo, D-Hoffman Estates, criticized what he viewed as the agency's "total disregard for the General Assembly" during the pandemic, citing IDES' unwillingness to share call center data.

But much of the questioning for IDES on Nov. 7 centered on whether it was ready to respond to future crisis events, potentially driven by global political strife.

"Are you prepared right now for the world to go to hell again, or will you be prepared

in a couple more months?" Sen. Craig Wilcox, R-McHenry, asked the department. "What is your—when are you ready to say you can handle the next relatively foreseen crisis in the state?"

Marchiori responded that IDES "scaled up" its server capacity and other information technology capabilities to handle pandemic high-water marks of claims. He said IDES is averaging 1,800-2,000 claims per day in "normal times," but the systems can handle at least 48,000 per day.

IDES has also created an internal fraud task force and is working on other controls, he said, which will be helped by \$30 million in federal grants.

## Good financial news

While Wilcox quizzed IDES on its readiness for another

economic downturn, a recent report from the legislature's Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability painted a positive picture for state finances one-third of the way through the current fiscal year.

Thus far in fiscal year 2024, which began in July, state base revenues are \$742 million ahead of the same period last year, which ended in the state netting \$50.7 billion in revenue. While it marked good financial news, COGFA has frequently noted that the latter months of the fiscal year — especially April when tax returns come in — can often make or break state finances.

The economy, meanwhile, "appears to be humming along," according to COGFA's Chief Economist Benjamin Varner, especially in areas

such as consumer spending.

While Varner noted some economic forecasters "are expecting a slowing of the economy"—potentially related to high interest rates, the threat of a government shut-down, the resumption of the repayment of student loans, and global political strife—such predictions are not new in recent years.

"However, economic slowdowns have been forecasted consistently over the past two years because of similar impediments, yet the economy continues to expand," he wrote. "The question continues to be how long can these potential economic hurdles be avoided before a major slowdown occurs."

Capitol News Illinois' Hannah Meisel contributed to this report.

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## Join SSM Health at Home for a Celebration of Life

Join SSM Health at Home for Celebration of Life, a remembrance service to celebrate and honor the light and love of significant people who have shared our lives. Celebration of Life will be held on Thursday, Dec. 7, 2023, at Monroe United Methodist Church (2227 4<sup>th</sup> Street) in Monroe. The service begins

at 6:00 pm and is expected to last about 45 minutes with a reception to follow.

Registration is not required, and the service is open to all. For those unable to attend in person, the service will be available on the Monroe United Methodist Church (WI) YouTube channel. Please visit [ssm-health.com/Events](http://ssm-health.com/Events) for more information.

Ornaments will once again be sold by Monroe Engraving. Please contact them at 608-329-4111 to place your order. Monroe Engraving will be donating a portion of the proceeds to the Monroe Clinic & Hospital Foundation's hospice fund.

# State police still drafting assault weapons registration rules as deadline nears

Items must be registered before Jan. 1, but confusion lingers about what items are covered under ban

By Peter Hancock  
CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS  
Officials at the Illinois State Police said Nov. 7 they are working to finalize rules for registering assault weapons and other items that are now tightly regulated under the state's new assault weapons ban as a Jan. 1 compliance deadline approaches.

ISP attorney Suzanne Bond told the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, a bipartisan panel that oversees administrative rulemaking, that the agency just completed another round of public hearings this week and is now in the process of trying to answer all the questions it received from the public.

"They were well-attended by the public and various organizations," she said of the hearings. "Those groups have committed to sending us their questions in writing. To the extent possible, if we had answers, we did provide them. We pointed them to relevant FAQs on our website, which have been updated."

The registration requirement is part of the state's new assault weapons ban, known as the Protect Illinois Communities Act, which lawmakers passed in January. It bans the sale, purchase, possession, and distribution of a long list of firearms defined as "assault weapons" as well as various firearm attachments, large-capacity magazines, and certain kinds of ammunition.

The law also states that people who owned those items before it took effect are allowed to keep them, as long as they register them with the Illinois State Police before Jan. 1.

As that deadline approaches, however, ISP is still in the process of finalizing administrative rules that will spell out exactly what items must be registered.

In September, ISP published temporary rules spelling out a registration process, and the agency began accepting online registrations Oct. 1. But many people have complained that those rules are not clear and that it's difficult

to tell what items must be registered and what items are exempt.

Interested parties have until Nov. 20 to submit written comments on the proposed rules. The email address for submitting those comments is [ISP.Legal.PublicComments@illinois.gov](mailto:ISP.Legal.PublicComments@illinois.gov).

As of Nov. 7, according to ISP statistics, 2,906 individuals had submitted registrations under the temporary rules. Those registrations covered 5,450 firearms, 2,871 accessories, and 58 sets of ammunition.

Still others have said they believe the requirement is unconstitutional and they don't believe most gun owners will

comply with it.

"Hundreds of thousands of people will absolutely not comply," state Rep. Brad Halbrook, R-Shelbyville, said at a hearing in Springfield Nov. 2. "It is up to the governor and the legislature to truly decide if they're prepared to declare war on law abiding gun owners or not."

JCAR cochair Sen. Bill Cunningham, D-Chicago, told reporters after the meeting that he understands some of the technical confusion over which items must be registered, but he said the law gives ISP authority to adapt its rules as time goes on.

"The existing statute does contemplate the state police

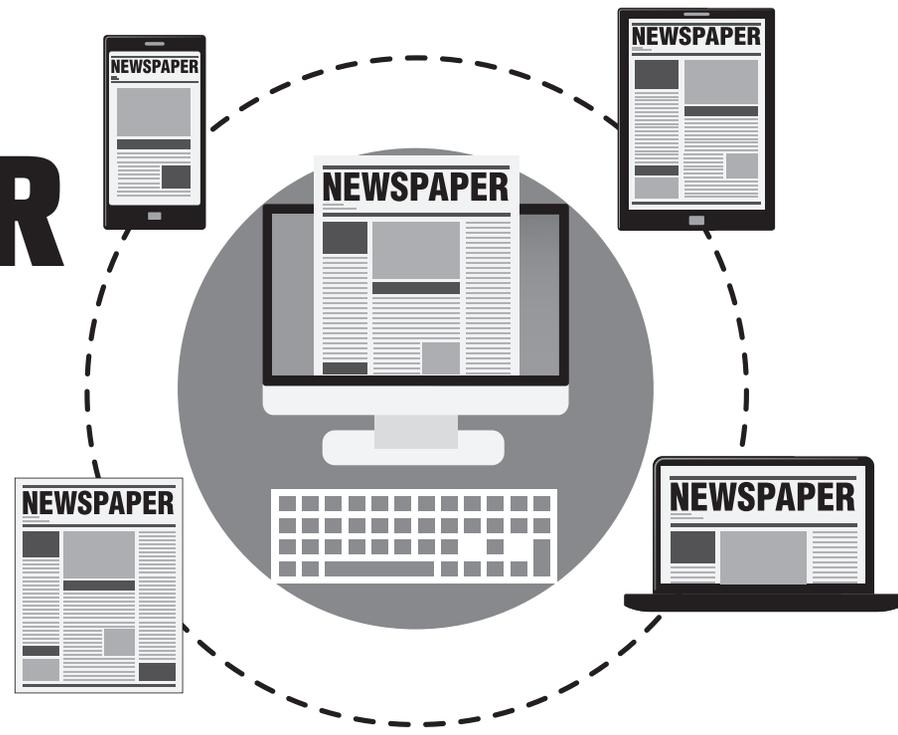
dealing with this problem and allows them to amend rules on an ongoing basis. They have that authority in the statute," he said. "So I think that problem was anticipated. And that's how the law intends to deal with that problem."

Meanwhile, the Protect Illinois Communities Act remains under legal challenge in federal court. On Nov. 3, a federal appeals court in Chicago decided on a 2-1 vote not to issue an injunction blocking enforcement of the law, saying the plaintiffs who challenged it had not shown that they are likely to prevail in a constitutional challenge.

See RULES, Page 23

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446905

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# Lawmakers decline to extend private school scholarship tax credit program

## Veto session adjourns without renewing Invest in Kids Act

By Peter Hancock  
CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS

Illinois lawmakers adjourned their fall veto session Nov. 9 without renewing a controversial program that provided indirect state support for students attending private and religious schools.

The Invest in Kids program will sunset as scheduled on Dec. 31, meaning donors to six state-approved private school scholarship funds will no longer be able to claim a 75 percent tax credit for their donations. The program has been capped at \$75 million annually since its implementation in 2018.

Advocates for the program say without the tax incen-

tives, the scholarship organizations won't be able to raise the money they have in recent years, and an estimated 9,600 students who currently receive those scholarships may have to find another way to pay for their education or transfer to their local public school.

Lawmakers passed the Invest in Kids Act in 2017 as part of a bipartisan package that also included an overhaul of the way Illinois funds public preK-12 education. The scholarship program was considered necessary in order to get then-Gov. Bruce Rauner, a Republican, to sign the public school funding overhaul.

Supporters of the program argued that it gave children from lower-income backgrounds the ability to attend schools that would otherwise be available only to wealthier families. But opponents, including teachers' unions and other advocates for pub-

lic education, argued that the tax credits siphoned money out of state coffers that could have been used to support public schools.

Last month, state Rep. Angelica Guerrero-Cuellar, D-Chicago, introduced House Bill 4194, which would have renewed a scaled-back version of the program. But that bill was never called for a vote.

One question that remained unanswered about the program is whether students who received private school scholarships performed any better academically than their peers who went to public schools.

The 2017 law required students receiving the scholarships to take the same standardized tests that public school students take each year, and it called on the Illinois State Board of Education to publish an analysis of that data.

But ISBE has not yet published that analysis. Officials

at the agency said they were unable to collect reliable data during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. An analysis using 2022 and 2023 test results is scheduled for release later this year or early in 2024.

Throughout the veto session, dozens of supporters of the program converged on the Statehouse wearing blue t-shirts and waving signs that read, "Protect our scholarships."

House Republican leader Tony McCombie, of Savanna, told reporters Nov. 9 that she believes the program still has bipartisan support, and she said its backers will continue working to have it reinstated.

"It certainly will continue to be a priority of the caucus, and it certainly will be a priority of several of the Democrats in the House as well as, I believe, in the Senate," she said. "I don't think it's going to be something that they're going to want to just stop."

# Latest state school report card shows proficiency gains, persistent gaps on racial lines

## Reading, math scores up; graduation rate at 13-year high

By Peter Hancock  
CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS

Elementary and secondary students in Illinois showed consistent improvements in their reading and math scores while the state's high school graduation rate reached a 13-year high for the most recently concluded school year.

Those are some of the conclusions from the most recent annual statewide school report card, released last week by the Illinois State Board of Education. The report includes data from the 2022-23 academic year, including results of the standardized tests that students took in the spring.

Although statewide average proficiency rates remained below pre-pandemic levels, the results showed improvement over the previous year across all demographic categories.

"Educators and families should be proud of the remarkable progress we see on the 2023 Illinois report card while remaining focused on understanding and meeting the students' academic and social emotional needs at this phase of recovery," State Superintendent of Education Tony Sanders said during a media briefing on the report.

Robin Steans, president of the education advocacy group

Advance Illinois, agreed that the report was positive overall, but said it also contains some cautionary information, especially regarding racial achievement gaps and attendance rates.

"I think there is some legitimately encouraging news in the new state report card," she said in a separate interview. "I think there's also a lot of information that reminds us we've a lot of work to do still."

The annual report card offers a look at how well individual schools, districts and the state as a whole are performing across a wide range of indicators. In addition to student performance on standardized tests, the report also includes information about factors such as student demographics, graduation rates, college readiness, career and technical education, and school faculty.

Much of the public's attention, however, focuses on the standardized test scores, which are often seen as an indicator of how effectively schools are teaching the basics of reading, writing and math, and what kind of achievement gaps exist among different demographic groups.

### English and math

Overall, the biggest area of improvement over the last year was in English language arts, where the proficiency rate rose from 29.9 percent to 34.6 percent.

That's still below the 37.4 percent proficiency rate recorded in the 2018 to 2019 school

year—the last before the COVID-19 pandemic caused major interruptions the next few years. But last year's gain translates to roughly 39,000 more students than the year before who met or exceeded grade level standards in reading and writing.

And while it may seem problematic that only about one-third of all students are considered "proficient" in that subject, Sanders pointed out that Illinois has among the highest standards in the country for English language proficiency.

"So it's not possible to compare our proficiency rates to other states because it's like comparing apples to oranges," Sanders said.

Equally important, Sanders said, was the fact that there were year-over-year gains across all demographic groups, although significant gaps still exist between those groups.

For example, a significant gap still existed between Black and white students in English language arts proficiency. But on a percentage basis, black students saw the biggest gains in proficiency rates, rising from 12.1 percent to 16.1 percent—a 33-percent increase.

Still, the gap between white and black proficiency rates widened by more than a full percentage point, as did the gap between white and Hispanic students. White students had a proficiency rate of 44.9 percent compared to 22.2 percent of Hispanic students and

16.1 percent for black students.

Sanders also emphasized that the low proficiency rates among black students is more a reflection on the state's education system than on the students themselves.

"We educate black students disproportionately in underfunded 'Tier 1' school districts with more teacher vacancies, higher teacher and principal turnover, higher chronic absenteeism," he said, referring to Illinois' targeted system of education funding in which Tier 1 schools receive the least amount of money from their local property tax base.

See REPORT, Page 24

## Rules

(Continued from page 20)

Two of the plaintiffs in that case, the Illinois State Rifle Association and the National Association for Gun Rights, have said they plan to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, which has been reluctant in recent years to approve of firearms regulations.

But Cunningham said the legal challenges won't prevent the state from moving forward to implement the law, at least for now.

"We have a saying that every law is constitutional until a court tells you it's not," he said. "So the State Police has to go along with the rulemaking as contemplated by the law."

# REAL ESTATE NOTICES

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E-Mail: pleadings@il.cslegal.com Attorney File No. 14-22-09717 Attorney ARDC No. 00468002 Case Number: 2023 FC 2 TJSC#: 43-3282

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(Published in The Scoop Today Nov. 1, 8 & 15, 2023)

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# Report (Continued from page 23)

"So our black students in general have less access to supports, to the resources they need to learn at the rate to be on par with their peers," Sanders continued.

Math scores also improved in 2023, although the gains were less significant and the overall proficiency rate remained below pre-pandemic levels. White students scored proficiency rates of 35.6 percent, compared to 14.3 percent for Hispanic students and 8 percent for black students.

The statewide proficiency rate rose by just over one percentage point, to 26.9 percent, while all demographic groups gained on their scores from the year prior. As with English language arts, black students saw the biggest gain in proficiency rates, at 1.2 percentage points.

## College and career readiness

The report card also includes several indicators of how well students are progressing toward a successful completion of the preK-12 experience and how ready they will be to enter college or the workforce.

Among the most basic of

those metrics is the percentage of ninth graders who are on track to graduate. That means at the end of their ninth-grade year, they have earned at least five full-year course credits and have received no more than one semester of an "F" in a core subject such as English, math, science, or social studies.

In 2023, 87.4 percent of ninth-graders were on track to graduate, which is up from 86.6 percent in 2022, and the same 86.6 percent in 2019.

According to ISBE, students who finish their ninth-grade year on track are nearly four times as likely to graduate from high school as those who are not on track.

Perhaps the most significant indicator, however, was growth in the state's high school graduation rate.

In 2023, the four-year graduation rate stood at 87.6 percent, the highest level recorded in at least 13 years. Black and Hispanic students also saw gains in graduation rates over that period.

ISBE did note, however, that the graduation rate was artificially inflated at 88 percent during the pandemic year of

2020 when emergency actions were taken to reduce graduation requirements by one semester.

## Chronic absenteeism

One area of concern reflected in the report card was the rate of chronic absenteeism among students, defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year, regardless of whether it's an excused or unexcused absence.

Last year, 28.7 percent of students were classified as chronically absent. That was down from just below 30 percent the year before, but it was still well above the pre-pandemic level of 17.5 percent.

The rate was even higher for minority and low-income students—42.1 percent for black students; 34.5 for Hispanic students; and 38.2 percent for students classified as low-income.

"This should be very concerning," Steans, of Advance Illinois, said. "As I am around the state, this is not lost on anybody. And I think there's a lot of energy and effort going into it, and rightly so. But we're just not back where we want to be, by a lot."

Overall, Sanders attributed improvements in the 2023 report card to increased funding for public schools, the result of the Evidence-Based Funding formula that went into effect in 2018.

"State funding for education has increased by \$2.38 billion since the enactment of EBF, and we see the results in many of the metrics that you see today, but most especially in the four-year graduation rate for our students," he said.

Steans agreed, saying, "I think it is a reflection that funding is doing what it's meant to do."

She added that federal pandemic-related funds have also helped schools better educate students.

"I think both of those have been used by schools and districts to put in special supports for students, be they social and mental health supports, be it tutoring, after-school programming, be it bringing in more teachers or more reading specialist instructional coaches, things like that," she said. "I think both of those funding sources have really been helpful and made a difference."

# Local Girl Scouts set \$15,000 GivingTuesday target

Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois (GSNI) is setting a high goal for GivingTuesday fundraising this Nov. 28. The non-profit hopes to raise an unprecedented \$15,000 for its Travel Endowment Fund, increasing accessibility for local Girl Scouts from all over northern Illinois to experience life-changing travel opportunities.

Giving Tuesday was first created in 2012 as a simple idea: setting aside the Tuesday after Thanksgiving for a day that encourages people to do good. Since then, it has grown into a year-round global movement that inspires hundreds of millions of people to give, collaborate, and celebrate generosity. Last year, GSNI raised nearly \$12,000 through GivingTuesday with funds supporting financial assistance for Girl Scout memberships and uniforms, programming, and camping, along with STEM activities.

This year, the organiza-

tion is focusing donations on its Travel Endowment Fund. This fund began in 2016 with a generous \$10,000 donation from then-board member and Girl Scout alum, Cathy Veal, and her husband, Bill. They later matched funds raised by GSNI with an additional \$10,000 donation, totaling over a \$31,000 start-up fund.

Girl Scouts love to travel and explore the world—from field trips as Daisies to globe-trotting adventures as teens! Girl Scouts also embrace learning about different places and cultures. The Travel Endowment Fund enables GSNI to assist local Girl Scouts with all their current and future travel aspirations. Girl Scouts can apply for scholarships, as well as participate in a program to help them earn money for their travel. Learn more about how to support local Girl Scouts in their efforts and sign up for text alerts prior to GivingTuesday.



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