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WEDNESDAY, FEB. 7, 2024



STOCKTON MIDDLE SCHOOL FACEBOOK PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

Guest artist visits Stockton Middle School

The Art Department at Stockton Middle School welcomed Staff Sergeant Dylan Hill, United States Marine Corps, as a guest artist. Staff Sergeant Hill carves crayons into people, such as soldiers at attention. While he demonstrated the techniques he uses with small carving tools, the students practiced the techniques as well. They discussed how something like unexpected air bubbles in the crayons presented challenges to the overall sculpture. Sgt. Hill informed the students that it was a great

way to learn how to deal with unexpected challenges, think outside the box, and be creative.

Thank you, Sgt. Hill for visiting!

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Obituary

JAMES SCHMIDECAMP

James Schmidecamp, born June 24, 1937, to John and Alma Schmidecamp in Stephenson County, died at home Jan. 31, 2024. He married Janet Brandt on June 17, 1961. He and his wife farmed in the Shannon area until his retirement in 2009. In addition to farming, Jim served as a township auditor, was a member of the Carroll County Livestock Feeders Association, and was runner-up as Carroll County's Outstanding Young Farmer in 1972. He also served in the National Guard.

His hobbies in addition to farming were few. He enjoyed woodworking and home improvement projects made for his children and grandchildren. He also enjoyed music, family activities, attending his grandchildren's events, and supporting members of his church family at Zion Community Church in Pearl City. Jim delighted in travel to the western United States, with trips to Alaska and Hawaii being among his favorite journeys. He made sure that his family always took yearly vacations.

His talents included being



able to create new uses for repurposed items, long before recycling became popular. Always a farmer, his favorite

phrase was "it depends on the weather", which resulted in many family jokes through the years.

Survivors include his wife, Jan, his daughters, Lori (Dennis) Byrd and Lisa (James) Cassioppi, and their families, including three grandchildren, CJ, Ben, and Anna. He is also survived by a sister, Marilyn (Gary) Flickinger. He was preceded in death by a brother, Jackie.

A funeral service will be held on Friday, Feb. 9, 2024, at Zion Community Church of Pearl City at 11 a.m. with a visitation beginning at 10 a.m. Interment will take place at Chapel Hill Memorial Gardens in Freeport. In lieu of flowers a memorial fund has been established. Condolences may be shared at www.hermannfuneralhome.com.

Comptroller urges awareness of tax scams

CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS

State Comptroller Susana Mendoza is warning Illinoisans of email, phone and mail tax scams as the 2024 filing season begins.

One scam, for example, may contain a letter in a cardboard envelope with an IRS letterhead that contains the text "about your unclaimed refund." That letter may request personal information such as a photo of a driver's license or Social Security number. The contact information on the letter, however, does not belong to the IRS.

Telephone scammers often target recent immigrants and threaten arrest or deportation if the person doesn't send payment, often in the form of a gift card or wire transfer.

"Remember, neither the state nor the federal government will call taxpayers, threatening them and demanding payment via a wire transfer, or credit or debit card," Mendoza said in a statement.

Mendoza's office noted some Illinoisans have been targeted for false unemployment claims. The state sends 1099-G forms to people who have claimed unemployment.

If you receive such a form but did not collect such benefits, you can contact the Illinois Department of Employment Security to report fraud.

Email and text message scams use the IRS logo seeking personal or financial information. Anyone receiving such an email can report it to the IRS at phishing@irs.gov.

Individuals should also avoid tax preparers who are unwilling to sign the forms they have prepared.

Once tax returns are filed, Illinoisans can track their state tax refund at myrefund.illinoiscomptroller.gov.

\$55 million in grant funding will go to 111 local park projects

The state announced 111 parks and recreation projects throughout Illinois will receive a portion of \$55 million in state funding this year.

The Open Space Land Acquisition and Development grant program administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources is a cost-sharing program between state and local governments to help further outdoor recreation projects.

Gov. JB Pritzker's office

noted \$18.7 million of the funding will go toward projects in 32 economically or physically distressed communities. Those categories are calculated based on land value, poverty rates and whether the area has experienced a natural disaster or catastrophic event.

The awards included a \$600,000 grant for the Carbondale Park District in Jackson County, which will oversee a renovation of Crispus Attucks Park that includes the replacement of playground equipment that will make it disabled-accessible.

The city of Toulon in Stark County will receive \$600,000 to renovate a city park to include a splash pad, resurfacing a half-basketball court, and making a full basketball court a multi-use space. Playground equipment will also be made disabled-accessible.

Projects in 45 counties will receive funding from the OS-LAD program this year.

New State Police facility designs

The Illinois State Police released designs for a new headquarters and forensic laboratory in Joliet last week.

The structures are expected to cost a combined \$76.5 million, funded through the \$45 billion Rebuild Illinois capital infrastructure program that originally passed in 2019.

The two buildings are approximately 75,000 square feet combined on 12 acres of land adjacent to an existing ISP building and firing range in Will County.

The new forensics lab will replace the current Joliet facility that was built in 1964 and will include space for testing DNA, firearms, latent prints, controlled substances, footwear, tire tracks and toxicology, along with areas for processing crime scene evidence.

The new facility will house an ISP investigation zone and serve as headquarters for ISP's Troop 3, which serves from Will and Grundy counties to the state's northern border, excluding DuPage County. The building will contain several offices, training rooms, interview rooms, an evidence area, and a large garage for vehicle storage and inspection work, according to ISP.

The project is scheduled to go out for bids in the spring.

Church news

Salem United Church of Christ

Join for a service led by Pastor Christopher Ham at Salem United Church of Christ, 8491 West Salem Road, Lena, Illinois, this Sunday, Feb. 11, 2024, at 10 a.m. The Adult Sunday School will be hosted prior to service, starting at 9 a.m. on the lower level of the church. Children's Sunday School is held during church service, at 10 a.m.

The Wednesday Breakfast Bunch will be meeting Wednesday, Feb. 7, 2024, at Beltline Café, 325 West South Street, Freeport, IL.

Everyone is welcome to join.

If you would like to participate in a fun evening of crafting, please join us for Crafternoon from 4 to 7 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month. During this time there are snacks, a brief devotional thought, and plenty of time to work on crafts individually or together. This is hosted on the lower level of Salem United Church of Christ, and all are welcome to join.

For more information on any Salem related items, please contact 815-369-4511 or salemwingsofjoy@yahoo.com.

St. John's Lutheran Church

St. John's Lutheran Church, Pearl City, will celebrate the sixth Sunday of Epiphany on Sunday, Feb. 11 at 9 a.m. and Ash Wednesday service with the imposition of ashes will be on Wednesday, Feb. 14 at 7 p.m.

The Men's breakfast will be on Wednesday, February 7th at 7:30 a.m. at Garden View restaurant in Lena.

The February Grace Meal will be on Sunday, Feb. 18. People can pick up a meal between 11 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. Reservations are due in the church office by Thursday, Feb. 15. The menu for the February meal will be

chili, cornbread, and pudding. This meal is possible due to donations and a grant from the Foundation of Northwest Illinois.

The Healthy Wolves group will be packing backpacks on Thursday, Feb. 8 at 3:15 p.m. If interested in donating to this ministry, reach out to the church office for more information.

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. If you need to contact the pastor or church, you may call 815-443-2215 for information.

St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Elizabeth

When many churches are closing due to lack of young members joining, St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Elizabeth with Pastor Mike Nesbit has seen a steady growth in the years since COVID.

This growth is especially seen in the increased number of young families joining the church.

At the quarterly meeting held after church service on Jan. 28, six new voters were welcomed. Donations for 2023 year-end to the Elizabeth and Hanover Fire Departments, as well as the Elizabeth Ambulance (serving both communities) were announced. Planning for 2024 is well underway with fellowship and social events, educational opportunities, and community services. The picture directory is being updated and the 2024 budget was approved.

Services are held Sunday morning at 9 a.m. with live music and bands three Sundays of the month. Summer services are held outside on the grassy lawn by the pavilion, with live music each week (bring a lawn chair). Coffee is served every Sunday.

News briefs

Regional Spelling Bee

The Regional Office of Education #8 will be hosting the Regional Spelling Bee on February 13, 2024, at 7 p.m. at Highland Community College. If there is inclement weather, the Regional Spelling Bee will be held on Feb. 15, 2024, at the same time and location.

Female veterans brunch

The Lena American Legion Auxiliary will honor female veterans with a brunch on Saturday, April 20, 2024, at 9:30 a.m. This will be held at the Lena American Legion Home at 316 W. Main St., Lena. There will be no charge for this brunch. Please and join for fellowship and entertainment. Please call 815-369-4684 or email jamcps54@yahoo.com with any questions or to make reservations. Reservations are requested by April 10.

Savanna Community Blood Drive

The Savanna Community Blood Drive will be held on Friday, Feb. 9 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Savanna Fire Department Truck Bay, 101 Main Street, Savanna.

Appointments are preferred, but walk-ins are welcome. To make an appointment to donate, please call the Red Cross at 815-632-7384 or

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Around the Northern Hills

Heart Month

February is American Heart Month. It's a time dedicated to raising awareness about heart health and promoting a healthy lifestyle. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, so it's important to take care of our hearts. That being said, it's a great time to have your blood pressure checked. Did you know that the Jo Daviess County Health Department has a free blood pressure screening program? Walk-ins are welcome, but it is preferred that individuals call the office at 815-777-0263 ext. 531 to ensure a nurse is available.



By **ANNETTE EGGERS**
Jo Daviess
County Farm
Bureau

enrollment or be enrolled at an accredited college, university, community college or vocational/technical school.

3. Must be majoring in agriculture or an ag-related study.

4. Must exhibit potential for successful completion of study.

General scholarship applications must have successfully completed 12 college credits and be enrolled as a full-time student (up to two \$500 scholarships will be awarded). Highland Community College applicants do not have to have any college credits completed to apply for the scholarship (up to two \$500 scholarships will be awarded). A copy of the application can be found at www.jodaviecsscfb.com. Click on the foundation tab to find the link to the application.

Stay connected

We are always looking for ways to communicate with our members. Many people read my column in the paper, others follow us on Facebook or Instagram, but would you like to receive Jo Daviess County Farm Bureau news directly to your inbox? Share your email with us and we will make sure to add you to our periodic email newsletter. If you are interested, please share your email with me at jdcfbmgr@gmail.com.

Scholarships program

The Jo Daviess County Farm Bureau Foundation's scholarship program provides scholarships to students who are majoring in agriculture, agribusiness, vocational or an agriculture related course of study. The scholarships are awarded on the basis of exceptional scholastic ability.

All applicants must meet these eligibility guidelines:

1. Must be a Jo Daviess County Farm Bureau member, spouse of member or member's child.
2. Must be accepted for

Young Leaders Committee

The Young Leaders Committee will have their next meeting on Sunday, Feb. 25 at 6 p.m. here at the farm bureau office in Elizabeth. Anyone between the ages of 18 and 35 and has an interest in agriculture is welcome to attend.

Farm Fun Fact

Americans today consume 17.3 billion quarts of popped popcorn each year. The average American eats about 68 quarts!



SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

Little Blackhawks

Pictured are the Stockton Elementary Little Blackhawks of the week. These students have been recognized for doing great work and having excellent behavior. Congratulations for continuing to do great things at school.

• Briefs (Continued from page 2)

go to redcross.org. To streamline the donation and save up to 15 minutes, visit RedCrossBlood.org/RapidPass to complete a pre-donation reading and questionnaire on the day of the appointment.

Seasons of Life Ladies Conference

Cedarville Baptist Church will host Seasons of Life Ladies Conference on Friday, April 26 and Saturday, April 27. Enjoy dinner at 5 p.m. and Christa Mielke at 6 p.m. on Friday. On Saturday from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. attendees will hear from Christa Mielke and Cheryl Stitzinger. Lunch will be served at 12:30 p.m. followed by a presentation by Tom Meyer at 2 p.m.

Early registration is \$35

per adult and \$15 per youth. After March 16 the price is \$40 per adult \$20 per youth.

Saturday 2p.m. only costs \$10. Call or Email Pastor Pankonin at 507-276-1436 or jdpankonin@gmail.com with any questions.

Lanark Public Library event

The Friends of the Lanark Public Library invite the public on Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024 at 6:30 p.m. to be entertained by Ann Young, former Freeport Journal Standard columnist. Her program, "Good, Bad and Ugly of Travel" will be presented at 111 S. Broad St. No fee, no registration, just come, relax and enjoy the evening.

American Legion Auxiliary meeting

The February meeting of the American Legion Auxiliary will meet on Wednesday, Feb. 14, at the Lena American Legion Home at 6 p.m. Delegates will be selected to American Legion Auxiliary Illini Girls State and tray favors for the hospitalized veterans will be made. Dues will be collected. New members are always welcome. Kathy Pignato is in charge of the social hour. Junior members will meet on Feb. 10 at 10

a.m. at the American Legion Home. The meeting will consist of working on earning patches, a fun project, and a service project.

Blackhawk Unit of SCAHCE meeting

The Blackhawk Unit of the Stephenson County Association of Home and Community Education (SCAHCE) will meet Feb. 15 at 1 p.m. at the Pearl City Library. Judy Shippee will be giving the lesson on cheese. Program books for the year will be filled out.

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The entire Magee family would like to express our sincere gratitude & appreciation for all of your thoughtfulness & kindness extended to us during Teresa's illness & passing. It's truly a "blessing" to live in such a supportive & caring community. Thank you again for all the food, plants, flowers, cards & especially the prayers! It will all long be remembered.

Gene, Mish, Brian & Sam Magee

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OPINION



Weekly connection

The joy of sledding without all the work



By **SCOTT CERNEK**
Columnist

I have to say that over the past decade my wife and I have experienced the greatest blessing we could ever have hoped for. That blessing is the birth of our grandchildren. In those ten years, they have come pretty regularly at the rate of a little more than one per year and we have two more due in the next few days. There is no sweeter sound than to hear them call out "Hi Grandpa and Hi Grandma!". I know this sounds kind of cliché, but each one is so unique and so very special, and we couldn't love them more than

we do. Our grandkids are all within about an hour of our farm, so we get together very often. It seems like we get together with everybody about once a week mostly to celebrate birthdays. During the rest of the week, we have times when we might go to one of the families to help out. Those separate times are usually when we need to babysit so the moms can get someone to an appointment. Sometimes it's just so the parents can have a night out together doing some shopping or grabbing dinner. When the parents leave the fun begins. There's always books to read, games to play, apples to slice, grandma's cookies to bake and eat, eggs to gather or hay bales to climb out in the shed. I feel bad when I hear other grandparents talk about their grandkids living many states away and only being able to see them every so often. It helps me realize how fortunate we are to be so close to each other. I love the fact that our grown kids all love getting together. They usually have a lot of stories of their own childhood to reminisce about and that makes it fun too.

In January this year we were blessed to have a couple weeks of snow and cold so we could do some sledding. Now I know when we were kids, we used to search for a hill somewhere and sled down it as fast as we could. When we got to the bottom, we grabbed our sled and trudged all the way back up to the top of the hill to do it again. It might only take about ten seconds to get to the bottom and about ten minutes to get back up the hill. That didn't matter, we would spend hours sledding. When our kids were young, I bought an ATV and cut a two-foot-wide piece of thick rubber about six feet long. Then I strapped it to the back

In my opinion

Agriculture needs a stable workforce in 2024

By Brian Duncan
ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU
PRESIDENT

Finding and affording labor are among the top challenges Illinois farmers, suppliers and processors tell me they face in 2024. From locating qualified truck drivers to haul grain, to sourcing enough hands to pick vegetables or manage livestock, the shortage of links in the transportation and agricultural supply chains continues to undermine food access and

threaten the financial health of farms in Illinois and nationwide. I spotlighted last spring in a *FarmWeek* column the shortage of available local labor to fill valuable agricultural jobs. This shortfall has existed in rural communities for years, was amplified during the COVID pandemic and continues to grow. This reality has ultimately led more farmers to depend on immigrant workers, with producers turning to options

like the H-2A temporary agricultural program, the H-2B temporary non-agricultural worker program or the trade national visa program for skilled workers classified as nonimmigrants. Those who have navigated the H-2A program know just how cumbersome and expensive the program has become, chiefly due to its unsustainable and unpredictable wage increases and misguided rulemaking. Illinois farmers can expect more of the same this upcoming growing season, as the state's Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) is set to increase 6 percent from 2023. Nationwide, farmers planning to use H-2A workers in 2024 will have to raise wages in some states up to 15 percent, according to calculations by American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF).

Contributing to this increase are eight new rules advanced by the U.S. Department of Labor in 2023. One rule, finalized in March, impacts how a state's AEWR is calculated. Specifically, the rule disaggregates wage rates by job function and derives the new rates from non-farm data, which does not reflect market wages for ag employees. Ag employers will be required to pay the rates, regardless of their inaccuracies or what percentage of an employee's contract they devote to certain tasks. This new rulemaking alone is estimated to add double-digit increases in labor costs, according to AFBF. In fact, this is the sixth straight year of elevated wage growth for H-2A workers, with the rate of hourly wage growth outpacing all other private employees. H-2A employers will also face additional program costs stemming from required housing and transportation for workers.

For smaller farming operations, many of which are interested in hiring just one or two temporary workers, the complexity of the process and the cost of complying with new requirements will be especially detrimental. I have met with Midwest state Farm Bureau presidents and the AFBF Board of Directors to discuss all the difficulties farmers are facing with labor and with the H-2A program, specifically. One of the biggest challenges in trying to find solutions in this space is that legislative and regulatory remedies soon become entangled in the broader discussion of immigration reform. Congress in past years has tried and failed to advance many pieces of legislation around immigration. The Dignity Act of 2023 was the latest attempt. This type of broad legislation eventually becomes the home for divisive political issues like employer liability protection and private right of action, the annual number of visas allowed, visa holder touchback requirements and expedited immigration processes. These kinds of polarizing issues make passage of any legislation difficult.

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Albrecht's last second shot secures victory in busy week for Wildcats

By Trenten Scheidegger
CORRESPONDENT

The River Ridge-Scales Mound Wildcats picked up their eighteenth and nineteenth victories of the 2023-2024 girls basketball season, last week. With three games scheduled in just five days, the Wildcats had a lot on their plate. They entered the week with an overall record of 17-6. They sat just behind Galena who they also faced off with in the NUIC-West standings. Needless to say, it was a big week for the Wildcats as they prepare for the upcoming postseason play.

Victory number 18 wouldn't come easily. On Monday, Jan. 29 the wildcats traveled to take on the East Dubuque Warriors. The Warriors were 10-10 ahead of their matchup, but one of those victories came in a pre-

vious matchup against RR-SM. The Wildcats dropped that game by a score of 49-43. This time, RR-SM came out on top of another exciting game.

The first quarter was a great example of what lied ahead. The Wildcats and Warriors went back and forth in the opener. Emily Wiederholt hit a big three-pointer giving her five in the quarter. Laiken Haas added a pair of baskets of her own. Thanks to some solid free throw shooting, East Dubuque would take a slim 10-9 lead into the second.

The second quarter was more of a physical matchup with both teams getting to the line. RR-SM hit six of their 10 free throws in the quarter. Meanwhile, East Dubuque went two and four on their end. That was enough for

the Wildcats to take the lead as they went into the breakup 21-18.

The game remained close until the final minutes. In fact, it came down to the final seconds as the game sat tied 43-43 with just 14 seconds left. Coming out of a timeout, RR-SM held possession of the ball. Albrecht caught a pass in the left corner and dribbled inside the left wing. In the face of two defenders, Albrecht put up a midrange jumper that bounced off the right rim, hit the glass, and eventually fell through the net with two seconds remaining.

The RR-SM defense got the stop for a 45-43 victory over East Dubuque. Wiederholt and Albrecht each led the team in scoring as they both finished with 12 points. Haas added eight points in

the victory.

Just two days later, the Wildcats faced one of the toughest challenges they will see all season in the Galena Pirates. Earlier this season, Galena came to Hanover and beat RR-SM by a score of 50-37. If the Wildcats wanted to return the favor, they would have to pull off an upset over the 23-1 Pirates in Galena.

The Pirates would prove that first matchup was no fluke. Galena quickly took an 11-6 advantage, and they sealed the game by outscoring the Wildcats 16-9 in the fourth. The Wildcats struggled offensively as Albrecht led the team with seven points. Abigail Frank was the next leading scorer with just six. Haas added five as the Wildcats fell by a score of 53-26.

RR-SM went on to close the week with another road game as they traveled to take on the Stockton Blackhaws. It was a much-needed bounce back game for the Wildcats. For the Blackhaws, the 2023-2024 season has been a streaky one. They have suffered losing streaks as long as four games and a winning streak of seven games. Just when it looked like the Blackhaws were making a turn at 11-9, they went just 2-5 over their next seven. The Blackhaws fell to 13-14 when they suffered defeat against the Wildcats on Feb. 2. RR-SM jumped out to an early lead as they went up 8-3. By the break, the Wildcats already held a 16-9 advantage as the Stockton offense struggled to get to the basket. The third quarter put things out of reach as

RR-SM outscored Stockton 18-10.

In the end, RR-SM picked up a 42-21 victory over Stockton. The Wildcats were led in scoring by Haas, who racked up 13 points, including two three-pointers. Wiederholt was next up with eight, and Albrecht had six in the victory. Kaci Patterson also added a three-pointer for RR-SM.

Stockton was led by Madie Mammoser and Dylann Broshous, who both finished with six points in the game. Katelyn Winters added five points in the loss. Mammoser had a nice day on the boards with 11 rebounds.

The Wildcats improved to 19-7 by the end of the week. They will wrap up the regular season on Feb. 8 when they play host to the Pecatonica Indians.

River Ridge boys split games with Stockton, Lena-Winslow

By Trenten Scheidegger
CORRESPONDENT

At the start of February, the River Ridge Wildcats held an overall record of 13-10. They were just coming off a tough stretch where they went 1-3 through four games against Scales Mound, Galena, West Carroll, and East Dubuque.

The Wildcats managed to open up the new month with a victory when they took on the Stockton Blackhaws. At the time, Stockton held an overall record of 7-14. One of those losses came in an earlier matchup against River Ridge, where the Blackhaws fell by a score of 48-14. Although the Blackhaws would put on a much better performance this time around, the Wildcats still captured the season sweep.

River Ridge jumped out to a controlling lead in the opening quarter. An Ethan Walters three-pointer provided a spark, while Joe Winter rattled off a trio of baskets. On the other end, Stockton had just two first quarter field goals from Carter Blair and Jacob Harbach.

By the end of one, the Wildcats were up 14-6.

The second quarter featured a bit of a three-point shooting contest. Tyson Heidenreich couldn't miss as he hit a trio of three-pointers for the Wildcats. Blair drained a pair of three-pointers on Stockton's end. Heidenreich and Blair went back and forth in an exciting quarter that saw River Ridge outscore Stockton 13-11.

At the break, River Ridge held a large lead as they were up 27-11. Stockton wasn't ready to just roll over, however. The Blackhaws came out ready to play defense in the second half, and they shut the Wildcats down in quarter three. The Wildcats had just two points in the quarter, which came from a Seth Nicholas field goal. Stockton managed to cut into the lead as Jon Randecker hit a pair of baskets and Blair added a basket of his own, including a successful and-one shot.

By the start of the fourth, River Ridge held a 29-24 advantage. Stockton quickly made it a two-point game. A Colby Tucker layup got the

Blackhaws started in the quarter. On their next possession, Tucker went for the same attack on the right side. This time, his layup missed off the backboard, but Randecker was there to hit the putback shot. Suddenly, the Blackhaws trailed just 30-28.

Stockton maintained their strategy of playing tight defense in the fourth quarter. The only difference was River Ridge started to get some calls as they got to the line. Ultimately, that's how River Ridge held on to win as the Wildcats took 15 free throws in the final quarter. They hit seven of those attempts, hitting at less than fifty percent.

Stockton still brought the game down to the wire. A physical shot by Blair, and a nice spin move in the post by Tucker had the Blackhaws within one with under 20 seconds to play. With Stockton fouling to extend the game, Walters came through in the clutch, going two for two at the line. They were the only two free throws Walters shot all game, but they were per-

haps the biggest shots of the game. After taking a three-point advantage, Sam Rife, who went scoreless throughout the game, hit the dagger. A free throw with nine seconds on the clock put the Wildcats up by two possessions, and they held on to win by a score of 40-36.

River Ridge was led by Nicholas, who finished with 10. Heidenreich added nine and Winter had seven. Stockton was led by Blair, who had 14. Both Tucker and Harbach finished with seven.

River Ridge went on to suffer a 66-50 loss to a physical Lena-Winslow team. It was a solid performance from Nicholas, who led the way with eleven. Winter was the only other Wildcat in double figures with ten.

River Ridge fell to 14-11 on the season with the loss to Le-Win. They will travel to take on the Scales Mound Hornets in the final game

of the regular season on Feb. 15. Stockton wraps up their regular season just two days earlier, when they host Scales Mound on Feb. 13.

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102 E. Baldwin St., P.O. Box 188,
Apple River, IL 61001

**Pastor Libby Rutherford (815) 990-1428
Church (815) 594-2223**

- **Sunday Worship – 9 a.m.**
- Bible Study - Every Monday 9 a.m.
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315 W. Maple St., Stockton, IL 61085
815-947-2414

E-Mail: calvarychurchofstockton@yahoo.com

- **Sunday Worship – 10:00 a.m.**
- **Sunday School – 8:45 a.m.**
- Communion and Potluck every 1st Sunday (except no potlucks during summer)
- Wednesday Night Bible Study - 6:30 p.m.
- Every other Sat. Youth Group - 6 - 8 p.m.
- You may find our facebook page and weekly messages by searching for "Calvary Church of Stockton on facebook.com"

You are welcome! Please visit us!

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH ELCA STOCKTON

600 N. Main St., Stockton

Pastor Chrissy Salser (815) 988-9450

E-Mail: clc600@mediacombb.net

Find us on Facebook at [ChristOnMainSt](https://www.facebook.com/ChristOnMainSt)

- **Worship times: Saturday, 5:30 p.m.**
Sunday, 10 a.m.
- **Sunday School: Sunday, 9 a.m.**

EBENEZER – SALEM UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

P.O. Box 102, Pearl City, IL 61062

Pastor Randy Nicholas

See Facebook or call 815-291-1965

- **Sunday Worship - Currently 8:30 a.m.**
- February services are at Salem UCC Church
Corner of Loran & Kent Roads

EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF LENA

720 N. Freedom Street, Lena, IL 61048
815-369-5591

Pastor Casey Dwyer, Pastor

- Adult bible study and Children's Sunday
School - 8:45 a.m.
- **Sunday Morning Worship Service and
Children's Church/Nursery – 10:00 a.m.**
- Awana Wednesdays at 6 p.m. (Sept. - April)
- Pastor's weekly sermons at
www.lenafreechurch.org

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

309 S. Main Street, Elizabeth, IL 61028

email: firstumcfoelizabeth@gmail.com

Pastor Donna Hoffman 608-293-0163

email: dchoffman8@gmail.com

- **Sunday Worship - 8:30 a.m.**
- Women's Faith Group -
1st Tuesday monthly - 9:30 a.m.

We are handicapped accessible

Find us on Facebook at

www.facebook.com/fumcelizabeth

GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH

118 East Mason Street, Lena, IL 61048

Vicar Thomas Mosbo (815) 369-5552

- **Sunday Worship – 9:30 a.m.**
- **Sunday School – 10:45 a.m. (Sept. - May)**
- Piece Corps Quilters –
Wednesdays at 8:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH OF WOODBINE

1904 S. Vel Tera Road, Elizabeth, IL 61028

Pastor Michael Burdett (815) 858-3843

- **Sunday Worship – 10:30 a.m. & 6:00 p.m.**
- **Sunday School – 9:30 a.m.**
- Prayer meeting – Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m.
- Sunday services broadcasted at 11:30 a.m. on
Radio WCCI 100.3 FM

HOLY CROSS CATHOLIC CHURCH

223 E. Front Avenue, Stockton, IL 61085

Father Mike Morrissey (815) 947-2545

- **Saturday Evening Mass – 4:30 p.m.**
- **Sunday Mass – 8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m.**
and 5:00 p.m.
- Reconciliation Saturday – 3:30 - 4:15 p.m.
- Parish Hall for Rent – Seats 200

LENA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

118 West Mason Street, Lena, IL 61048

Pastor Melwyn Alagodi (815) 369-5291

- **Sunday Worship – 9:00 a.m.**
- **Sunday School – 10:30 a.m.**
- **Daily Dial-A-Devotion 815-369-4411**

MARTINTOWN COMMUNITY CHURCH

W8996 Lena St., Martintown, WI 53522

(1 mile north of Winslow, IL)

Pastor Kevin Cernek • 608-558-0974

- **Sunday Worship – 8 & 10:30 a.m.**
*Worship inside or watch from the
parking lot on the jumbotron*
- **Sunday School for all ages – 9:30 a.m.**
- **Sunday Youth - 6 p.m.**
- **Tuesday Bible Study - 10:30 a.m.**
- **Thursday Prayer & Bible Study - 6 p.m.**

McCONNELL COMMUNITY CHURCH

211 Hulbert Rd. P.O. Box 97,

McConnell, IL 61050

815-868-2324

Email: mcconnellcmtychurch@yahoo.com

Pastor Jordan Cernek

- **Sunday Worship – 9:00 a.m.**
Fellowship hour after every service
- Find us on Facebook
[www.facebook.com/
mcconnellcommunitychurch.com](https://www.facebook.com/mcconnellcommunitychurch.com)
- * *We are handicapped accessible*

NEW VINE COMMUNITY CHURCH

621 W. Lena St., Lena, IL 61048

(Coach's Gymnasium)

Pastor Doug Carroll 815-541-4112

- **Sunday Worship – 9:00 a.m.**
with fellowship following
- **Communion first Sunday of each month**
- Bible Study Groups available
newvinelena.com
- Facebook: New Vine Community Church of
Lena, IL
- * *We are handicapped accessible*

PROVIDENCE PRIMITIVE BAPTIST CHURCH

15010 W. Howardsville Road

Lena, IL 61048

217-357-3723

Pastors Robert Webb & Rob Webb

- **Sunday Worship**
- each 3rd Sunday - 10:30 a.m.
- Potluck lunch following service

SALEM UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

8491 West Salem Road, Lena, IL 61048

(Turn on Salem Road at Eleroy Rest Stop)

Pastor Christopher Ham (815) 369-4511

- **Sunday Worship – 10:00 a.m.**
- **Adult Sunday School - 9 a.m.**
(before service)
- **Children's Sunday School - 10 a.m.**
(during service)

**We are handicapped accessible*

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Elizabeth, IL 61028

Pastor Dottie Morizzo

(815) 845-2272

Cell (815) 238-0670

www.schapvillezion.org

- **Sunday Worship Service – 10:00 a.m.**
- **Sunday School – 10:00 a.m.**
- Bible Study Classes Available

SHEPHERD OF THE HILLS LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Scales Mound, IL 61054

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Rev. James Mehlretter

Website: www.shepherdofhill.com

- **Sunday Worship – 8:00 a.m. & 10:00 a.m.**
- **Sunday School (Sept. – May) – 8:45 a.m.**
- Holy Communion is celebrated weekly.

ST. ANN CATHOLIC CHURCH

608 East Railroad, Warren, IL 61087

Father Andrew Hernandez (815) 745-2312

- **Sunday Mass – 8:00 a.m.**
- Reconciliation Sunday – 7:30 - 7:50 a.m.

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod

625 Country Lane Drive, Lena, IL 61048

Rev. Jason Shaw (815) 369-4035

- **Saturday Evening Worship – 5:30 p.m.**
- **Sunday Worship – 8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.**
- Blast Program at 9:00 a.m.
- High School & Adult Sunday School
at 9:15 a.m.

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

229 S. First St., Pearl City, IL 61062

www.stjohnspearlcity.org

815-443-2215

- **Sunday Morning Worship – 9:00 a.m.**
- Christian Education for all Ages - 10:15 a.m.
- Handicapped Accessible

ST. JOHN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

8315 S. Massbach Road, Elizabeth, IL 61028

Pastor David Russell

Church: 815-589-3367

- **Sunday Worship – 10:00 a.m.**
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ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH

105 West Webster, Apple River, IL 61001

Father Andrew Hernandez (815) 745-2312

- **Saturday Mass – 6:00 p.m.**
- Reconciliation Saturday – 5:30 – 5:50 p.m.

ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH

410 West Lena Street, Lena, IL 61048

Father Andrew Hernandez (815) 369-2810

- **Saturday Mass – 4:00 p.m.**
- **Sunday Mass – 10:00 a.m.**
- Reconciliation Saturday – 3:30 – 3:50 p.m.

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH - KENT

The Little Church with a Big Heart

1334 Sunnyside Road, Kent, IL 61044

1/2 mile north on Kent Road

- **Sunday Worship – 9:30 a.m.**
- **Holy Communion every Sunday**
- Women Meet at 9 a.m. on the 2nd Sunday
- Chair Lift to Sanctuary

WESLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Corner of Hudson & Benton St.,

Stockton, IL 61085

Pastor Melwyn Alagodi (815) 947-2541

- **Sunday Worship – 11 a.m.**
- Adult Bible Studies Available
- Communion Every 1st Sunday
- First Sunday potluck following church
services.

Find us on website StocktonWUMC.org
or Facebook-Stockton Wesley United
Methodist Church

* *Handicapped Accessible*

WINSLOW GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

197 Carver Street, Winslow, IL 61089

Pastor Robert Patin (815) 230-1862

- 608-669-5770**
- **Sunday Worship – 10:45 a.m.**
- **Sunday School – 9:45 a.m.**

ZION COMMUNITY CHURCH

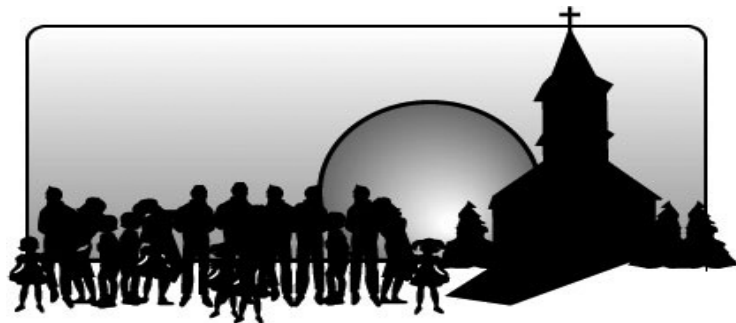
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Pearl City, IL 61062

Pastor Wayne Fischer • 815-266-6260

Pastor Chip Sohl • 815-541-1425

- **Sunday Worship Service – 9:00 a.m.**
- **Children's Church - during church service**
- **Prayer Shawl Knitting Tuesday at 6:30 p.m.**
- **Bible Study Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m.**



Come worship with us!



SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

River Ridge FFA wins at the section Poultry CDE

River Ridge FFA members recently participated in the in the Poultry Evaluation Career Development Event (CDE). During the event, participants select live meat-type chickens for broiler breeding, evaluate and place live egg-type hens, and rate the finished product by evaluating and grading carcasses and parts of chickens and turkeys. As a team, the River Ridge FFA placed first overall. Pictured is the Junior High team (left to right) of Wesley Haas, Bronx Gonzalez, Wyatt Ritchie, Wyatt Lehman, Russel Howard and Heydan Diehl who placed second overall.



SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

Graci Allen participates in the poultry meat cut identification portion of the Career Development Event.



SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

Sophomore Brook Bradbury grades poultry.

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SUBMITTED PHOTOS Rock Valley Publishing

Pictured is the River Ridge High School team of Natalie Keleher, Graci Alle, Ian Wachter, Lucas Holland, Arthur Horn, Brook Bradbury, Bindi Boop, Katie Cobine. front row- Lily Lucas, Allie Karberg, Faith Morhardt, Graci Vanderheyden, Izzy Haring, Avery Engle and Nick Cobine.



(Left) The top five competitors from the River Ridge FFA team include Lucas Holland, Ian Wachter, Nick Cobine, Avery Engle and Izzy Haring.

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Groezinger surpasses 1,000 career points

Grace Groezinger stands with Lena-Winslow's former all-time leading scorer, Jessica (Yeager) Blakely.

Lady Broncos defeat Pearl City, capture three-peat as NUIC Champions

By Trenten Scheidegger
CORRESPONDENT

The Orangeville Broncos improved their most recent win streak to 12 games when they picked up victories over Ashton Franklin-Center and Pearl City last week. Not only did they extend the streak, but the Broncos added to an even more illustrious run. They captured their third consecutive NUIC Conference championship as part of another electric girls basketball season.

The Broncos picked up their eleventh consecutive victory on Jan. 30 when they traveled to take on AFC. At 17-8, AFC has been no slouch this season. They continued to prove their ability to compete in their matchup against the Broncos.

The Broncos are well experienced in these big games. They also know how important it is to get off to a hot start, and that is just what they did against AFC. It was the duo of Whitney Sullivan and Laney Cahoon that led the way. Sullivan had six points in the opening quarter, including going two for two at the free throw line. Addie Wheeler added a basket as the Broncos combined for 13 in the opening quarter.

Orangeville's offense is dynamic with their three-headed monster of Cahoon, Sullivan, and Nadalee Doyle. They also

feature a number of other capable scorers that leave them with a deep scoring attack. Yet, it is their defense that stands out the most. They held AFC to just seven points in the opening quarter, which would prove to be crucial in the end.

The second quarter played out in similar fashion, with Orangeville outscoring AFC 16-8. It was Cahoon who led the way with seven points, including a three-pointer in the quarter. Kaylynn O'Haver added a three of her own as the Broncos took a 29-15 lead into halftime.

Even in the third quarter, the Broncos saw their lead expand. Sullivan and Doyle combined for 10 points in the quarter as Orangeville took a 40-23 advantage. AFC would have an incredible fourth quarter, however. With nothing to lose, they started letting it fly from deep. With a trio of late threes, AFC managed to close the gap. Orangeville's dominance through the first three quarters was just

enough in the end. The Broncos held on to win by a score of 48-42 in a game that became much closer than they would have liked. Cahoon led the team in scoring, while Sullivan finished with 12. Doyle added eight in the victory.

The very next day, the Broncos returned home to play host to the Pearl City Wolves. It was part of a busy week with their second of three games scheduled in just four days. With an opportunity to clinch the NUIC championship on the line, there was no shortage of energy for the Broncos.

In the first quarter alone, the Broncos jumped out to a 15-4 advantage. Four different Orangeville players scored in the quarter as Sullivan led the way with six. O'Haver hit an early three-pointer, and Cahoon added four points of her own. Danica Stager and Elizabeth Dinderman were the only Wolves to score in the opening quarter.

The second quarter was a

near copy and paste of the first. The Broncos outscored Pearl City 15-3 in another dominant quarter. Cahoon led the way with seven points in the quarter, and Doyle added a three of her own. Lily Blakely added three points in the quarter as well.

By the break, Orangeville had already jumped out to a 30-7 advantage. The second half was just about running the clock as the Broncos worked toward a 40-12 victory over the Wolves. Orangeville improved to 27-1 and claimed their third consecutive conference championship with the win.

O'Haver hit a couple of fourth quarter three-pointers, giving her nine points on the night. Cahoon led the way in scoring with 11, and Sullivan added six. Doyle finished with five, while Alaina Dinderman had four and Blakely had three. Downs led the Wolves with four, while Stager and Kuhlemeier each finished with three. Elizabeth added two in the loss.

Happy Retirement, Lee Ann!



Congratulations to Lee Ann Brinkmeier, Accountant, on her retirement from Citizens State Bank! We're thankful for her extraordinary 45-year career with our team, and the memories throughout. We wish you all the best in retirement, Lee Ann!

45 Years



450754

Stockton High School first semester honor roll

High Honor Roll (All A's)

Grade 12:

Dominick Bilich, Bennett Graves, Carson McPeck, Gracie Raab, Ashlyn Schubert, Leah Warner, Mavrick Winters

Grade 11:

Masyn Cahill, Jacob Harbach, Ava Hess, Madalyn Mammoser, Landon Warner

Grade 10:

Emma Aurand, Kiegan Jones, Jake Marek, Oliver McPeck, Sadie Vanderheyden, Hailey Weipert

Grade 9:

Arianna Arand, Alexis

Bennett, Payton Goswick

3.0 Semester Standard GPA & No D's

Grade 12:

Kristian Adleman, Lily Baker, Anthony Bilich, Abby Chumbler, Jared Dvorak, Addison Ernst, Robert Ernst, Izabella Ertmer, Braden Freese, Tanner Gile, Michael Haas, Alicia Howell, Karl Hubb, Gracie Keleher, Cyrus Kilburg, DeeDee Larson, Lincoln Legel, Wesley Logemann, Madalyn Marcure, Eve Moore, Nevaeh Peterson, Maecee Rice, Lydia Schuldt,

Colby Tucker, Gabrielle Ven-Huizen, William Westaby

Grade 11:

Kyla Arnold, Dylann Broshous, Emily Broshous, Jackson Coffey, Bryce Grube, Amber Haas, Elijah Haas, Kyle Haas, William Hart, Samuel Hille, Dillon McIntosh, Javier Montalvo, Kendra Robledo, Lillian Sikora, Ethan Steien, James Wickler, Katelyn Winters, Shea Witz, Kacy Wright

Grade 10:

Tegan Arnold, Adrian Baker, Arrison Bauer, Anna Blair, Hailey Broshous, Piper Brown, Kaylynn Brunner, Paige Chumbler, Reece Demeter, Mark Detwiler, Wesley Drane, Ian Eisfeller, Olivia Ernst, Aiden Kurek, Eli Larson, Noah Larson, Jeremiah Luke, Jack Mensendike, Hunter Mulholland, Gavin Offenheiser, Chelsea Olson, Rileigh Peterson, Cyler Pieper, Marjerie Pilapil, Jon Randecker, Robert Rillie, Gynelle Rowe, Arya Scott, Ari Zink, Blake Zink, Isabella Zuck

Grade 9:

Vanessa Baez-Ramirez, Arden Bauer, Carter Blair, Lucas Brenner, Dannyn Broshous, Jazmine Curtiss, Rilyn Dauphin, Logan Dreyer, Morgan Haas, Taylor Haas, Delaney Julius, Isabella Kilburg, Quinn Larson, Hailey Leitzen, Hanna Leitzen, Dionne McIntosh, Ireland Mensendike, Walker Olson, Madalynn Perry, Zoey Pfile, Caitlynn Robledo, Lola Rose, Kameron Rowe, Owen Stitch, Addison Thornton, Kaydra Wright

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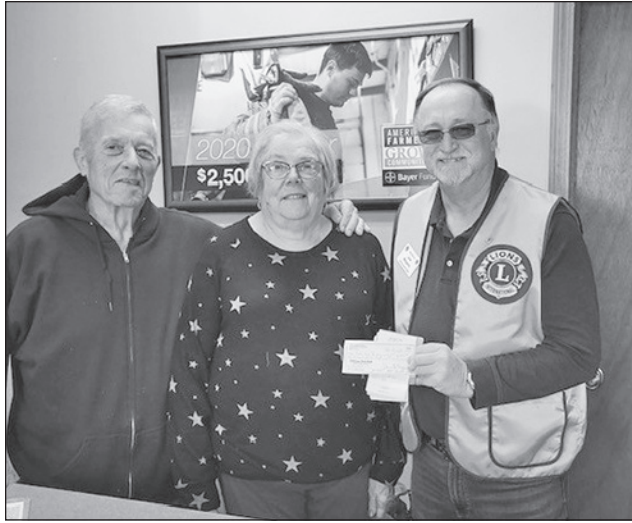
Lena Lions Peace Poster winner announced

Lion Richard Holmes introduces peace poster winner, Sophie Wirtz. Also pictured is Sophie's father, Bill Wirtz. The Lena Lions made a donation of \$200 to the Lena-Winslow Jr. High Art Department.

• Sledding (Continued from page 4)

of the ATV and dragged our kids around and around the park across the street from where we lived. Later we moved to a one-acre lot, and I would spend hours and hours pulling them and their friends around and around the house. It was so much fun, I decided to keep the tradition going. The last couple of weeks

I had a chance to pull all the grandkids around our farm on the same sled using the same ATV that I used when our kids were little. It's fun to take them around a curve and watch the sled come sliding around and almost pass up the ATV. They laugh and laugh until they're too cold to keep going then we go in and warm



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Lena Lions donate to local food pantry

Lion Jim Meyers presents a check and gift cards in the amount of \$2,000 to Larry and Judy Buchenau, head of the Lena Food Pantry.

up with some of grandma's cookies and head back out for more fun. I didn't realize when our kids were little that someday we would have quadruple the fun with all these little ones.

I know I've shared this scripture before, but it's so good. Psalm 127:4-5 Like arrows in the hand of a

warrior, so are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. He will not be put to shame when he confronts the enemies at the gate. Even though the sledding was a little short this winter, I'm already looking forward to playing baseball with these little ones. Until next week, God bless!



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Happy Birthday to you!

Lena Lions celebrate the January birthdays at the Lena Living Center.

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Village of Lena happenings

The news station 13 WREX conducted several interviews around town last week to feature Lena in the Destination Downtown with Derek Bayne. Tune in to Channel 13 on Thursday, Feb. 15 to see the segment.

Spring is right around the corner and every year the Lena Community Park District puts on the Bunny Hop. This daddy-daughter dance will be held Friday, March 15 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Lena Community Center. Tickets go on sale Feb. 23 and can be purchased from DeVoe Floral.

The Dayton Street project is under way and more changes will be made

around town. So far trees have been removed, poles have been relocated and a house has been taken down. The intersection of Dayton Street and E. Lena Street will be widened to accommodate truck traffic for local businesses. This project is located within the TIF district and will be paid for out of TIF funds.

The Village Board meets at Village Hall on the second and fourth Monday of each month at 6 p.m. Everyone is welcome to attend to see what is happening within the Village of Lena. If interested in discussing a specific topic, call Village Hall at 815-369-4016 to be put on the agenda for Public Participation.

Workforce

In light of this, AFBF board members decided farm needs were urgent enough to prioritize two immediate legislative solutions: a freeze of wages at 2023 levels for three years and a rollback of the DOL's AEWB methodology that was enacted in March.

AFBF President Zippy Duvall sent a letter in December, calling on congressional leaders to look for any opportunity to enact these legislative priorities. Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) has followed up with our congressional delegation expressing both the urgency of the problem and the critical need for solutions.

Illinois farmers are committed to paying a fair wage, but they cannot pay well beyond the means of their farm incomes, which are

(Continued from page 4)

forecast to fall this year.

Along with completing the vital work of the 2023 farm bill, IFB is also committed to working with elected officials from both parties in 2024 to find meaningful ways to modernize guestworker programs and stabilize our workforce.

Solutions to worker shortages in the U.S. agricultural supply chain are needed to not only ensure farms remain economically sustainable, but more importantly maintain food security, and, ultimately, our national security.

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.



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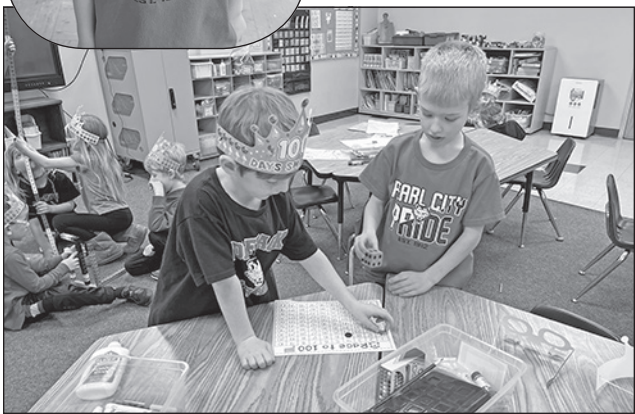
Pearl City students hard at work

Pearl City Elementary held their annual Spelling Bee on Friday, Feb. 2. The event featured 16 spellers from first through fourth grade. After more than ten rounds, it ended with the reigning champ defending his title. Congratulations to Oliver Plager and all of the participants on a job well done! Pictured are Pearl City Elementary Spelling Bee contestants (first row) Michele Herron, Michaela Regalado, Isabella Lopez, Fallyn Pauley, Jaxon Allen, Liam Edlund, Aiden Heck, Emma Edlund, (second row) Lillian Yeoman, Claire Slater, Gwen Endress, Kambry Kruse, Oliver Plager, Beckett Pauley, Tate Tessoroff, Samantha Sanchez.



Celebrating 100 days of school

SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing
Bohdi Thompson (left) shows his smile as he enjoys the 100th day of the school year.



SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing
Hudson Pickard and Jackson Kempel work on their 100th day of school activities in Mrs. Bunkers Kindergarten Class at Pearl City Elementary.



SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing
Pearl City students Bryn Plager and Natalie Dinderman are all smiles on their 100th day of kindergarten.



SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing
Pearl City seventh graders Sophia Boyer, Aubrey Allen, and Lucy Voss study anatomy and body structure of earthworms by performing a dissection.



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Javier Cancel celebrates the 100th day of school in Mr. Allen's kindergarten class.

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McCombie and House Republicans back estate tax legislation

Today, the Illinois Farm Bureau unveiled new legislation aimed at improving the Illinois Estate Tax. House Minority Leader Tony McCombie (Savanna) has spearheaded efforts throughout her tenure to address this problematic "death" tax, one that has disproportionately hurt family farms but also small businesses and manufacturing in Illinois. McCombie and members of her leadership team stand in support of the recently unveiled bipartisan proposal.

For the past seven years, Leader McCombie has worked in the Illinois House of Representatives to address the estate tax—alongside several House Republican members who have pursued ways in which small businesses, farmers, and family businesses could see relief from the punitive nature of the state's archaic tax system which "re-taxes" assets upon death of the owner.

This past Spring, McCombie provided subject matter testimony in the House Revenue Committee in support of legislation she sponsored to reduce the estate tax and protect family farms. McCombie was joined in the Capitol last March by members of the Farm Bureau and the National Federation of Independent Business who were supportive of her bill and provided key testimony in favor of the measure, which would prevent any double taxation of inherited farms and small businesses.

While McCombie's more comprehensive legislation on this issue has not moved forward, the need for tax relief still ranks as a top priority for House Republicans this legislative session. "I have advocated for a fix to the estate tax for a long time, and I take this newly introduced bill as a bipartisan step forward, with the understanding that we must go much further to change Illinois' reputation as a bad place to do business," said Leader McCombie.

In a press conference today in Bloomington, at the home office of the Illinois Farm Bureau, House Republican leaders stood with bipartisan lawmakers supporting the new measure. House Bill 4600, named the Family Farms Preservation Act, is designed to protect the heritage of family farmers by updating the Illinois Estate Tax code.

Deputy House Republican Leader Norine Hammond (R-Macomb) recognized the progress this bill makes to protect family farms in the state, but also noted the need for greater bipartisanship to continue doing more.

"Illinois' estate tax hurts our

farm families. House Republicans have consistently fought to increase the exclusion amount to account for rising farmland values. House Bill 4600 is a bipartisan agreement that will help family farmers pass their farmland on to the next generation, protecting our family farms from being sold off to large corporate or foreign interests. I'm proud to stand with the Illinois Farm Bureau and my colleagues in support of this critically needed change to our tax laws," said Hammond.

According to State Representative Charlie Meier (R-Okawville), "The estate tax has devastated family farms for decades as these farms are often sold to pay the inheritance tax."

Rep. Meier is not only a farmer but serves as the Republican Spokesperson on the House Agriculture & Conservation Committee. "Improving estate tax exemptions for farmers will help save family farms when the farm is passed down to each generation," continued Meier. "Family farms treat their farmland like family as it helps provide for their family and produces the crops that help feed the world. Our country has the lowest food costs in the world, thanks to family farms."

State Representative Jason R. Bunting (R-Emington) also echoed his support for the measure. "For far too long, Illinois' estate tax system has threatened family farms – like mine and my neighbors – with the prospect of having to sell the farm if there is a death in the family," said Bunting. "Families going through a difficult time should not have to make the tough decision about whether or not to sell the farm. This legislation moves us toward a better system which will help keep farms in the family hands which have worked for generations."

Stephenson and Carroll County Farm Bureau news

By Victoria Hansen

San Francisco 49ers or Kansas City Chiefs? Kansas City Chiefs and San Francisco 49ers. This is a question on many people's minds as we move into the weekend of the "Big Game". No matter which team you are rooting for, it's hard to deny the important role that farmers and agriculture play in this weekend's festivities.

Let us imagine a game without agriculture. That would mean no tickets as tickets are printed on paper from trees and often use soy ink from soybeans. Some paper is even made of cornstarch. There would be no hot dogs as pork, beef and buns are not possible without agriculture. There would be no popcorn or peanuts since these favorite sport snacks are also grown by farmers. Beer comes from crops like barley, wheat, rye, and hops so you wouldn't find beer either. Lastly, there would be no footballs as footballs are covered in cowhide. I don't know about you, but I am certainly thankful for the farmers and ranchers who contribute so much to football and sporting events in general.

Pollinator presentation

On Saturday, March 9 at 1 p.m. the Stephenson County Association for Home and Community Education will host a presentation on Pollinators. This event will take place at the Farm Bureau Building, 210 West Spring Street, Freeport, IL 61032.

Canadian Rockies, Lethbridge and the Calgary Stampede

Join the Stephenson County Farm Bureau and Tri-State Travel on our Canadian Rockies, Lethbridge, and Calgary Stampede tour July 3-9, 2024. Experience Lethbridge, the financial, transportation, and industrial center of Southern Alberta, explore the agricultural heart of Lethbridge in "Feedlot Alley" and visit with local crop farmers, visit Fort Macleod, a replica of the fort established by the Northwest Mounted Police, tour Bar U Ranch, the largest ranch in all of Canada, explore the heart of the Rockies along the famous Icefield Parkway and ride the Ice Explorer for a closer look at the glaciers and wildlife, walk along

the shores of Lake Louise and explore the local shops and cafes, watch the World-Famous Calgary Stampede in a series of championship heats of Chuck Wagon racing, experience life as it was for the first prairie settlers in Heritage Park, and watch the world's top rodeo riders compete for cash prizes and the title of World Champion. Visit www.stephensoncfb.org under "trips" for more information and registration forms. Final payments due April 1, 2024.

Prep, Freeze, Cook back by popular demand

The Stephenson County Farm Bureau and Agriculture in The Classroom program wants to help make your life easier with our Prep, Freeze, Cook fundraiser. Proceeds of this fundraiser help support the Agriculture in The Classroom program in Stephenson County.

Agriculture in The Classroom teaches students about where their food comes from and the importance of agriculture. So far this year students have learned about apples, pumpkins, turkeys, cranberries, and pigs. This program is free to all classrooms in our county. Prep, Freeze, Cook makes family mealtime easy, by providing 10 prepared and frozen meals for five person or two person quantities.

Each individual who orders will receive one of the following meals: Three Cheese Lasagna, Gravy Pork Roast, Root Beer Pulled Pork, Chicken and Broccoli Mac n Cheese, Bacon Caesar Chicken Casserole, Ham Breakfast Burritos, Honey BBQ Chicken, Cheddar Bacon BBQ Burgers, Taco Casserole, and Chicken Pot Pie Soup.

Five person meals are \$175 and the two person meals are \$90. We are accepting orders now through Feb. 28 at 4:30 p.m. Orders will be ready for curbside pickup on Wednesday, March 13 from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the Stephenson County Farm Bureau. Orders can be placed over the phone at 815-232-3186, in person at 210 West Spring Street, Freeport, IL, or by printing and mailing the order form off our website: www.stephensoncfb.org

under "news" tab.

If you would like to support the Agriculture in The Classroom program but aren't interested in meals, donations can be made to the Stephenson County Farm Bureau Foundation by mailing or dropping off donations to 210 West Spring Street, Freeport, IL. If you have questions, please contact our office at 815-232-3186 or by emailing office@stephensoncfb.org.

Statement from the Illinois Farm Bureau on state legislators' effort to protect family farms

Members of the Illinois General Assembly announced today the Family Farm Preservation Act, a bipartisan effort to protect farm families and their land by updating the Illinois Estate Tax code. The measure is being spearheaded by Sen. Dave Koehler, D-Peoria, and Rep. Sharon Chung, D-Bloomington. Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) President Brian Duncan commented on the legislation, which aims to ensure families may continue passing down their farms to the next generation.

"Passing on the family farm is not just about continuing the business, it's about preserving family heritage and a way of life," said IFB President Brian Duncan. "Yet the current Illinois estate tax often forces families to break up the farm by selling land, livestock or even equipment every time the business passes on to the next generation. A death of a loved one should not be a death sentence for the family farm. IFB thanks Sen. Dave Koehler and Rep. Sharon Chung for introducing the Family Farm Preservation Act and applauds the bipartisan effort of our state legislators to ensure Illinois' family farms can continue providing food, fuel and fiber without fear of losing the business when a family member dies."

In addition to Kohler and Chung, six other General Assembly members helped announce introduction of the bill, underscoring the bipartisanship effort: Sen. Patrick Joyce, D-Essex, Sen. Sue Rezin, R-Morris, Sen. Tom Bennett, R-Gibson City, Rep. Charlie Meier, R-Okawville, Rep. Norine Hammond, R-Macomb, and Jason Bunting, R-Emington.



Guidelines for writing, submitting a letter to the editor

Rock Valley Publishing encourages readers to reach out to the community by writing a letter to the editor.

Letters are limited to 500 words. Authors must include their first and last name, the city or village in which they reside, and a phone number and email address where they can be reached in case of questions.

Send letters to: scoopshopper@rvpublishing.com

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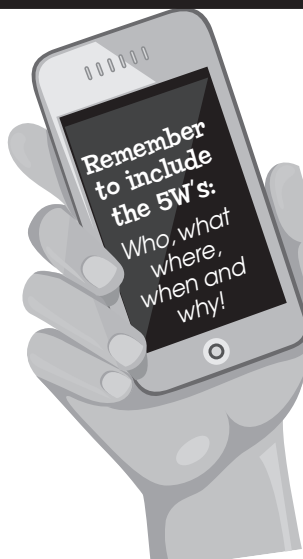
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Organization to receive federal funding to help launch regional water sustainability industry

Innovation hub hopes to produce 500 jobs within 2 years

By Dilpreet Raju
CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS
A Chicago organization focused on drinking water sustainability will receive a \$15 million federal grant over the next two years for a project aimed at jumpstarting a regional clean water industry.

The U.S. National Science Foundation awarded the grant to Current Innovation NFP, a nonprofit "innovation hub" whose mission is to "solve pressing water challenges caused by climate change and pollution." It will receive one of 10 inaugural NSF Engine awards aimed at using science and technology to drive region-

al economies.

Current's Great Lakes Water Innovation Engine, also called Great Lakes ReNEW, includes more than 50 regional partner organizations from Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin.

Between the partner organizations, which range from non-profits to educational institutions and for-profit companies, the project aims to train 500 people for jobs related to water technology within the first two years.

While the initial grant covers two years, it could grow to an eventual \$160 million investment over a 10-year period so long as the project progresses towards its goals.

At an announcement Jan. 30, Gov. JB Pritzker called the federal funding a "win for our economy and for our environment" as climate pressures continue to mount.

"Fresh water is drying up.

Nations across the globe are grappling with unprecedented water shortages, and over time, it will become the world's most precious resource," he said.

Great Lakes ReNEW will develop methods for selectively separating wastewater molecules to retrieve different minerals used in the production of electric parts.

"Our advantage in the Great Lakes region is that we are home to one-fifth of the planet's fresh water," Pritzker said.

Current, which will lead the regional project, aims to launch and invest in dozens of water tech companies while using a testbed for those companies to develop technologies that aim to attract water-intensive manufacturers.

The end goal is a circular economy centered on refining wastewater, removing chemicals such as PFAS—sometimes called "forever chemicals"—while retaining minerals like

cobalt, lithium and nickel. These minerals are necessary when producing rechargeable batteries, most of which are currently produced overseas, making them valuable to domestic tech companies.

Toni Preckwinkle, Cook County Board president, said the investment will benefit communities affected by environmental racism.

"We simply will not survive if we don't invest in clean water," she said.

The Great Lakes hold about 90 percent of all fresh water in the United States and the National Science Foundation estimates 40 million people rely on the lakes for clean drinking water.

Alaina Harkness, executive director of Current and principal investigator of the project,

said water scarcity is something to tackle as early as possible.

"Today, we waste too much of our water and the valuable materials it carries—materials that we need to power the electrification of our society," she said.

Harkness said the environment and economy have always been inextricably linked.

"No economy or society is sustainable beyond the ecosystems and natural resources we all rely on," she said. "We don't have time to waste, we do have two years and \$15 million to show meaningful, measurable progress on new science to extract valuable minerals from our wastewater."

Harkness said the project will "help address both our environmental and economic challenges, generating solutions to plan-

etary concerns while creating good jobs and opportunities for people to build wealth and stability."

Within the two-year period, it also plans to engage 1,000 youth across the region in STEM-related programs.

Crafting sensor networks that can detect real-time information on chemical levels in water will be another short-term aim, said Junhong Chen, co-principal investigator and lead water strategist at Argonne National Laboratory based in Chicago's western suburb of Lemont.

"The breakthroughs will play a pivotal role in securing our domestic supply chain, supporting electrification and advancing our clean energy future," Chen said. "While it might sound like science fiction, I assure you it is not."

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IN*CI*DENTAL*LY

Oral health care before, during and after pregnancy

As National Children's Dental Health Month begins, it is a suitable time to stress that women who are pregnant or planning to be pregnant should be aware that their oral health has a direct impact on their developing fetus. Rising hormone levels and physiological changes that occur during pregnancy can lead to dental problems such as gingivitis, (swollen, red gums) of oral teeth in the absence of oral disease, tooth erosion, tooth decay, and periodontal disease (which is associated with premature birth and low birth weight). They may also develop pregnancy tumors of the gums (pyogenic granuloma). These are not cancerous, may bleed, and are the result of increased progesterone levels and inflammation.

Approximately two-thirds of pregnant women experience morning sickness and/or acid reflux, which



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

can lead to elevated levels of acid in the mouth. Pregnant women often develop food cravings, especially for foods with a high sugar content, which further increases acidity in the mouth. These acids can erode the protective enamel layer of your teeth and lead to cavities. Therefore, it is best for both you and your unborn child that you schedule a dental appointment before you become pregnant.

Diagnosing and treating oral health issues and having your teeth cleaned will help assure that you begin your pregnancy in the best oral health, which will

promote both your and your child's overall health. This also allows your dentist to evaluate your oral health routine and make sure that you have the knowledge and guidance to effectively deal with pregnancy related dental issues.

Maintaining oral health throughout your pregnancy is necessary and dental checkups are safe. However, make sure that your obstetrician has contact information for your dentist. Each pregnancy is unique, and you may have medical conditions that will need to be conveyed to your dentist. When scheduling a dental appointment, let your dentist know you are pregnant. Provide a complete health history, with a list of all over-the-counter medications, vitamins, supplements, and prescription medications that you are currently taking, as well as contact information

for your obstetrician. Your dentist will want to inform your obstetrician if you have significant periodontal disease, as this presents a potential risk for premature birth and low birth weight.

While routine preventative and emergency dental care can be provided at any point in your pregnancy, non-emergency dental procedures are best conducted during the second trimester and should not be scheduled during the last six weeks of pregnancy. Elective dental procedures should not be carried out until after your child is born.

If you experience a dental emergency, know that diagnostic x-rays will not harm your fetus and your dentist will provide a protective apron with a thyroid collar. Treatment for a dental infection must not be delayed. Acute dental pain is considered a harmful stressor in pregnancy, as it can elevate

oxytocin and cortisol levels. Taking antibiotics that are deemed safe for use during pregnancy and effective pain management will decrease stress for both mom and baby.

Pregnancy can add a whole new meaning to the word exhaustion. Do not allow this to interfere with your oral care routine. When you care for yourself, you are also caring for your unborn child. When you do not remove the bacteria in your mouth, it can enter the bloodstream and travel to the uterus. It is imperative that you floss and brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. If you have morning sickness, do not brush your teeth immediately after you vomit. Instead, rinse with fluoridated tap water. Using a small, soft toothbrush and brushing later in the morning, after the worst of the nausea has passed,

often helps. Drink plenty of tap water, as its fluoride strengthens your teeth and provides defense against tooth decay. Rinse with tap water between meals, as frequent snacking also leads to the increased production of the bacteria, Streptococcus mutans, which produces higher levels of acid that weaken enamel. Your dentist may also prescribe a fluoride rinse. Your babies' teeth are forming by the end of your first trimester, so make sure to eat a nutritious diet high in calcium, protein and vitamins A, C, D and B12, and low in sugar, throughout your entire pregnancy. When taking vitamin supplements, such as folic acid, do not choose the chewy or gummy types that stick on your teeth.

After delivery, if you have not experienced any dental complications, you can return

See HEALTH CARE, Page 16

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ISP patrol enforcement activity increased, traffic fatalities and shootings decreased in 2023

Interstate shootings down more than 30% in 2023

In 2023, the Illinois State Police's (ISP) modernization of the Divisions of Patrol, the creation of Special Operation Groups focused on criminal interdiction, and the continued implementation of a data-focused command structure led to a decrease in interstate shootings and fatal crashes. These same enforcement strategies also yielded more arrests, as well as increases in gun and vehicle recoveries.

"ISP saw a growing problem in Illinois, used data and first-hand expertise to efficiently address problems, and achieved results – the absolute model of what state government can and should do for its citizens," said Governor JB Pritzker. "The decrease in fatal expressway shootings and crashes is an im-

portant step on the road to a safer Illinois, and I thank ISP for their innovation and dedication to advancing this work."

"As an agency, we've become more nimble and focused on data, making decisions based on where the greatest threats to public safety emerge, rather than following the same old pattern or habits," said ISP Director Brendan F. Kelly. "Over the past several years, we have really demanded more of ourselves, making the tough decisions, executing, and empowering the most effective law enforcement tool there is – the well-trained, professional, crime-fighting trooper. Challenges remain, but we are headed in a good direction."

2023-2022 Patrol Enforcement data:

- **Interstate/expressway shootings:** In 2023, ISP saw a 32% decrease in reported interstate/expressway shootings from 2022.
- **Fatal Crashes:** In 2023, ISP responded to 7% fewer fa-

tal crashes on interstates than in 2022.

- **Arrests:** In 2023, ISP saw a 3% increase in patrol arrests from 2022 (6,543 arrests in 2023).

- **Guns Recovered:** In 2023, ISP patrol reported a 12% increase in guns recovered from 2022.

- **Vehicles Recovered:** In 2023, ISP patrol saw a 7% increase in vehicles recovered from 2022.

Additionally, ISP patrol seized more than \$4.5 million in illicit criminal currency and more than 10,000 pounds of illegal drugs in 2023.

On Jan. 1, 2023, ISP evolved from 21 patrol Districts across the state to 11 patrol Troops. Moving to Troops enabled more officers to be available to respond to calls for service 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. This modernized patrol structure reflects the best practices of peer states, increased command accountability, allowed for shifts that

support officer wellness, and helped ISP put officers where they are needed most in order to reduce interstate shootings and crashes, and seize illegal drugs and guns.

ISP also established Special Operations Groups (SOGs) in 2023. Officers assigned to SOGs are focused on reducing violent crime, intercepting those trafficking in illegal guns and drugs before they reach Illinois communities, and reducing crashes on Illinois highways. The SOGs consist of Statewide Anti-Violence Enforcement (SAVE) units, Highway Interdiction Teams (HIT), and Fatal 4 Teams.

Implementing regional Unified Command structures has allowed ISP Divisions to operate in concert to strategically combat crime on multiple, specialized fronts, including work performed by investigative agents and forensic services, which led to additional arrests.

ISP continues to increase its use of technology, which direct-

ly impacts our ability to target and track criminal activity. Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs) capture a visual of vehicle license plates and anytime a wanted or suspected vehicle is detected by an ALPR, an alert is issued and law enforcement are better able to locate and track the vehicle. In 2021, ISP installed approximately 100 ALPRs along I-94. By the end of 2022, 289 ALPRs were installed in the Chicago area. In 2023, ISP installed 139 additional ALPRs; 78 cameras in St. Clair County, four in Champaign County, four in Morgan County, and 53 cameras in Cook County. In 2024, ISP plans installations in Macon, Madison, Peoria, Bureau, Lake, and Winnebago counties, with additional cameras potentially in Boone, DeKalb, DuPage, Grundy, Henry, Kane, Kendall, LaSalle, McHenry, Rock Island, Sangamon, and

Will counties, and Lake Shore Drive in Chicago.

ISP's Air Operations unit remains an instrumental part in safely increasing arrests. Air Operations help make pursuits safer by allowing units on the ground to terminate high-speed pursuits while Air Operations continues tracking the fleeing vehicles from the air. This allows units on the ground to pre-position themselves to stop the vehicle. During 2023, ISP Air Operations missions in Chicago directly resulted in 169 arrests, including seven homicide, 29 carjacking, and 11 armed robbery arrests, as well as 133 vehicles and 70 weapons recovered.

ISP's crime fighting strategies will continue to evolve as crime evolves and we are committed to reducing shootings and fatalities, and getting illegal guns and drugs off the streets.

Health care

(Continued from page 14)

to your regularly scheduled dental visits. However, if you have experienced dental complications, try to schedule an appointment

a few weeks following delivery. Maintaining optimal oral health throughout your lifetime is critical to both you and your

child's overall health. Moms with poor oral health can also pass damaging bacteria to their children through kissing, sharing eating

utensils (such as testing the food to see if it is too warm) and (never do this) putting a pacifier in your mouth to "clean" it.

Florida murder suspect arrested

On Jan. 30, 2024, the United States Marshals Service arrested 24-year-old Yoel Paredes of Freeport at a residence in Freeport on charges related to a 2022 homicide that occurred in the State of Florida. Paredes was transferred to the Stephenson County Jail where

he is awaiting extraction to the State of Florida.

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.

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