

## *During Lent KC Fish is a Favorite*



### **Gone Fishin'**

*(The Pioneer / by Bill Napper)*

At the Highland Knights of Columbus Fish Fry folks lined up early Friday evening to get their favorite dish at the Highland Knights of Columbus. The menu included fried cod, baked cod, shrimp, chicken strips, hush puppies, coleslaw, bread, and a grilled-cheese option for younger diners. Volunteers kept the serving line moving as families, friends, and neighbors filled the hall for the weekly Lenten tradition.



### **Sharing The Message**

*(The Pioneer / by Bill Napper)*

Joe Hammond, left, Jerry Burkett and Jim Skaggs stand at the corner of U.S. 40 and State Route 143 in Highland on Saturday, holding signs reading "The only hope for America is Jesus" and "Pray 4 America." The trio travels throughout the area sharing their message. Passing drivers honked and waved in support.

## **United For Others: Grantfork's UFO Club Shares Homemade Desserts, Community Spirit**



### **UFO Mission**

*(The Pioneer / by Bill Napper)*

The UFO Club continues to demonstrate how small acts of kindness can build a stronger, more connected community.

*The Pioneer Newspaper*

**By Bill Napper**

HIGHLAND - The UFO Club — United For Others — continues to live out its mission of service across the Highland-Grantfork area, uniting women from Grantfork United Church of Christ, St. Gertrude Catholic Church, and other local groups. Their work blends fellowship, compassion, and hands-on support for families throughout the community.

Members of the UFO Club were at the Highland VFW, March 6, offering a table of homemade desserts to visitors. The sale served both as a fundraiser and as another opportunity for the group to connect with local residents. Their presence added a warm, personal touch to the evening, reflecting the club's long-standing commitment to community service.

The UFO Club's mission centers on being united for others, and their outreach includes items such as providing social, educational, and spiritual opportunities for women in the community, contributing to local needs, especially for families facing hardship, supporting families with terminally ill loved ones through comfort items and thoughtful gestures.

The group hosts fun, family-friendly events that bring neighbors together and strengthen community ties.

Whether offering a plate of homemade desserts or delivering support to a family in need, the UFO Club continues to demonstrate how small acts of kindness can build a stronger, more connected community.

# Americans Agree: It's Time to Settle the Clock Debate for Good

## My View

By Bill Napper

Send your  
Comments to:  
P.O. Box 144  
Highland, IL 62249  
or email your  
comments or  
guest editorial to:



thepioneerpaper@gmail.com

Send us your view!

Don't forget to set your clocks forward on Sunday, March 8 at 2 a.m.

Most folks set them on Saturday night before going to bed.

Twice each year, Americans perform a ritual that almost no one defends with enthusiasm.

We drag out a ladder and climb up the wall to push the time forward, or turn it back. It's dangerous; I wonder how many people end up in the hospital because they fell trying to adjust the time.

We reset our clocks, readjust our sleep, and grumble through the fog of a schedule our bodies didn't ask for.

The practice is older than most of the people still doing it, and yet Congress continues to let the debate drift from one season to the next without resolution. It's time—past time—for a national

decision.

Clock-changing is not a harmless tradition.

Studies consistently show a spike in traffic accidents, workplace injuries, and sleep-related health problems in the days following the switch.

Schools see groggy students. Employers see sluggish mornings. Families feel the disruption most of all. The inconvenience is universal, and the benefits are increasingly hard to identify.

The real debate

The country is not divided over whether to end the clock changes. Polls show broad agreement that the twice-a-year ritual should stop. The disagreement lies in what should replace it: permanent Standard Time or permanent Daylight Saving Time.

Standard Time aligns more closely with sunrise and human circadian rhythms. Daylight Saving Time offers brighter evenings that many families and businesses prefer. Both sides have reasonable arguments, and both deserve a fair hearing. But endless debate is not a policy. The nation as well as my friends and neighbors need a decision.

Congress has several options: adopt permanent Standard Time, adopt permanent Daylight Saving

Time, or consider a compromise such as a one-time 30-minute shift that ends the switching without forcing the country into either extreme. Any of these choices would be better than the status quo.

What matters most is that lawmakers stop treating this as a seasonal nuisance and start treating it as a solvable problem.

I believe the states are ready and the citizens are ready. Even our phones are ready. The only thing lagging behind is federal action.

Americans should not have to wait for another groggy Monday in March or another early sunset in November to be reminded that this issue remains unresolved.

The nation deserves a clear, per-

manent answer—one that reflects modern science, modern schedules, and modern expectations.

Congress must choose a time and stick with it. The country will adjust. What we cannot keep adjusting to is indecision.

It's driving us to distraction!

## Pioneer Goes Online to Better Serve Local Readers

By Bill Napper

### Staying Connected to the Community We Love

HIGHLAND - The Pioneer Newspaper's move to a free, online format isn't just a change in how we publish — it's a renewed commitment to strengthening the connections that make Madison County such a fantastic place to live.

*Our purpose is simple and heartfelt: to help more people stay connected to our community in the most positive and accessible way possible, said publisher Bill Napper. This way we can be free to everyone. And we update it as often as needed. If something happens today - it gets reported today. So set an alert for the Pioneer so that you will be alerted. Also set a shortcut on your desktop so you can make one click to read the paper.*

The Pioneer has not been sold, and it is not operated by any outside newspaper or media company.

It remains locally guided, locally produced, and deeply dedicated to the people and organizations that shape our county.

By removing cost barriers and offering daily updates, we're ensuring that every resident — no matter their schedule or circumstances — can stay engaged with the life of our community.

This newspaper has always belonged to the community, and now it's easier than ever for the community to be part of it.

The Pioneer is 100% free and available anytime at [www.thepioneernewspaper.com](http://www.thepioneernewspaper.com) or on Facebook at ThePioneerNewspaper — MADISON COUNTY.

We invite you to read, share, and stay connected as we celebrate our ability to reach more readers.

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Can Cause Seizures, Disfigurement, Loss of Hearing, Vision, Speech; No Known Cure

# Neurofibromatosis is little known, yet devastating disease



Sam Oswald

By Tom Emery

CARLINVILLE - When Peter Oswald learned in 1988 that his four-year-old son, Sam, had been diagnosed with neurofibromatosis (NF), he was stunned and confused.

"I'd never heard of the disease," said Oswald, a resident of Carlville, Ill., 60 miles northeast of St. Louis, "and it seemed that no one else had, either. I remember spending hours every evening in our local libraries, trying to learn as much about it as I could, because I wanted to know what we were dealing with."

Many others, then and now, have not heard of NF, which affects 1 in every 2,500 worldwide and is most often noticed in childhood or early adulthood. The disease appears equally across sexes, races, and ethnic groups.

Among the many, wide-ranging effects of NF are scoliosis, seizures, motor delays, vision or hearing loss, disfigurement, bone deformities, speech impediments, loss of balance, and lifelong physical pain.

Patients of NF routinely suffer from tumors on nerves across the body, and several separate, distinct versions of the disorder are currently classified. NF is classified as 50 percent hereditary and 50 percent a genetic mutation.

Despite its many horrific symp-

toms, this debilitating disease has a startling lack of awareness in the mainstream. Though less familiar to the general public, more patients suffer from NF than muscular dystrophy, Tay-Sachs disease, and Huntington's disease combined.

For those who struggle with NF, however, the disease is a part of their daily lives, and is a never-ending fight.

Since his diagnosis, Sam Oswald, now 41, has battled spinal fusion, two brain tumors, shunt revisions, bone grafting on both legs, knee surgery, dermal tumor removal, and eye surgery.

In July 2020, Sam underwent major surgery to remove a tumor in his chest, near his esophagus. That was followed by another operation in March 2021 to remove a tumor from his thigh, which was a recurrence with a bout of cancer from nine years before.

In that earlier bout, a fist-sized, highly aggressive tumor was located inside Sam's sciatic nerve, which is normally a quarter-inch wide. The nerve was removed after two surgeries, followed by very heavy, localized radiation and chemotherapy.

The procedures were done at Barnes-Jewish Hospital's Siteman Cancer Center in St. Louis, and benefitted from research on Sam's particular type of tumor by Washington University researchers.

"That was probably the riskiest surgery Sam has faced," said Peter Oswald. "It's a little scary when the first course of treatment to be considered was amputation." Sam remains on a schedule of periodic scans to assess any reoccurrence of cancer.

"NF is really hard, and I have to deal with it practically every day," said Sam Oswald. "But I've been really fortunate, too. I've had successful treatments for my NF symptoms over the years, and I have a really supportive family.

"I know that isn't the case for all NF patients, because I've met many who haven't had my level of support," continued Sam. "So I know how lucky I've been, even with all I have to deal with."

Though awareness and research are still lacking, much has changed since Sam was first diagnosed. His father gives credit to NF Midwest, Inc., an organization that provides research grants and support services in Illinois and five surrounding states, with leading the fight.

"Back then, the only way to find information was through a lot of research, on your own," said Peter Oswald. "But there have been great gains in NF research, public awareness, and support services. There's a lot more information and assistance today than there was thirty years ago."

"You also learn that you're not alone," continued Oswald, with evident emotion in his voice. "There are others who are having to deal with this, too. And there are more of them than you'd think."

Research has also led to many improvements in the approach to treating NF. Thanks to research breakthroughs, the gene for NF has been identified, so a diagnosis may be verified by genetic testing.

Oswald adds that Sam has benefitted from new treatments several times in his struggle with NF. "It reinforces the need for research to better understand this disease, and potential treatment options," he said. "It's a disorder with no cure."

For more information or to support the fight against the disease, visit NF Midwest at [www.nfmidwest.org](http://www.nfmidwest.org).

Thanks to his determination and the support of loved ones, Sam lives on his own in Carlville, and is able to get around with the help of a three-wheeled bicycle.

"NF can be a struggle, and often is," Sam said. "But I'm really grateful for what I'm able to do."

Tom Emery may be reached at 217-710-8392 or [ilcivilwar@yahoo.com](mailto:ilcivilwar@yahoo.com).

## Big Crowd Turns Out to Support Veterans at VFW Friday Fish Fry



### VFW Fish

The Pioneer Newspaper/ By Bill Napper

Guests line up for the Highland VFW's Friday-night fish fry, a packed-house tradition where volunteers keep the line moving and the plates full. Each meal served helps support the veterans who have stood watch for the nation, ensuring the post can continue its mission of service, camaraderie, and community strength.



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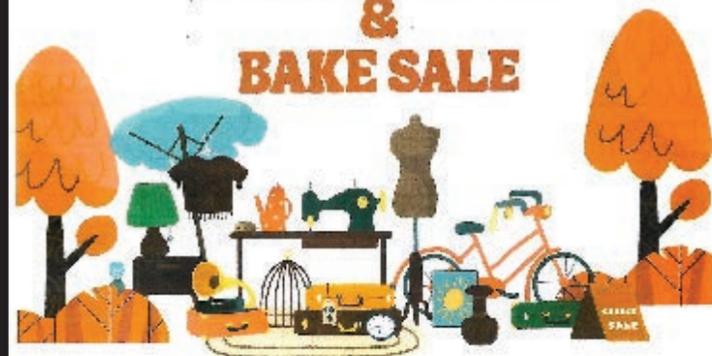
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# Strom and Bricker Sworn In as Highland Volunteer Firefighters



## Congratulations

Congratulations to Highland Middle School Cheer Coach Chelsey Kantner who was nominated for the 2026 ICCA Coach of the Year Award. The Coach of the Year Award will be announced at the Coaches Conference held at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel in Bloomington, Illinois on March 13-14.



## Taking the oath of office

Firefighters Tyler Strom and Sawyer Bricker take the oath of office Tuesday night after completing requirements to become members of the City of Highland's Volunteer Fire Department.

HIGHLAND - Two firefighters who have spent the past year training, studying, and serving alongside Highland's emergency crews were formally sworn in March 3 as members of the City of Highland Volunteer Fire Department.

Firefighters Tyler Strom and Sawyer Bricker completed requirement's of the department's rigorous training program earn-

ing their place among Highland's volunteer personnel.

During the evening ceremony, department leadership administered the oath of office.

The moment served as both a personal milestone for Strom and Bricker and a point of pride for the department, which emphasizes high standards of readiness, professionalism, and community service.

Meeting these requirements demonstrates their commitment to the department's mission and their readiness to serve the community in all emergency situations.

Their advancement supports the department's ongoing efforts to maintain a strong, well-trained team prepared to meet the needs of residents and businesses across the city.



# St. Paul Sixth Grade Held Spaghetti Dinner

HIGHLAND - St. Paul School's sixth-grade class hosted a carry-out spaghetti dinner on Sunday, March 8, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., with pickup at the St. Paul cafeteria at the corner of Ninth and Lemon Streets here.

The meal included spaghetti with meat sauce, Italian salad, breadsticks, and freshly baked desserts.

All proceeds are designated to the seventh- and eighth-grade class trip.

# Lane closures on Illinois 159 in St. Clair County begin March 9

BELLEVILLE – The Illinois Department of Transportation today announced that repairs on northbound and southbound Illinois 159 between Washington Street and the junction of Illinois 13/Illinois 158 in St. Clair County will require intermittent lane closures beginning Monday, March 9, weather permitting.

All lanes will remain open in both directions on weekdays from 6 to 9 a.m. and from 3 to 6 p.m.

The project is expected to be completed this summer.

For IDOT District 8 updates, follow us on the social media

platform X at @IDOTDistrict8 or view area construction details on

IDOT's traveler information map on GettingAroundIllinois.com.



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# Highland Health Care Center Launches “Highland Essentials” Program to Provide Groceries and Financial Support Services During Difficult Times

HIGHLAND—Highland Health Care Center has launched “Highland Essentials,” an innovative initiative to care for employees and their families experiencing financial challenges.

Through its established employee assistance fund, the skilled nursing facility is offering expanded resources to help people manage rising expenses. Highland Essentials was conceived, in part, to help families navigate uncertainty related to the federal government shutdown late last year, including proposed changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food support funding.

Through Highland Essentials, employees in need can access the following forms of assistance:

**Food Pantry Support:** On-site access to essential groceries and household items, also open to employees’ extended families; plus employees are welcome to add to the supplies that might aid their fellow staff members’ families.

**Get Paid Before Payday:** Staff can gain early access to earned wages in case of bills and other needs due between pay periods.

**Gas Cards:** Provided to employees who need them to get to work, in times of budget pressure

**Employee Assistance Fund:** Staff in immediate financial need can get economic help to tide them over during difficult times, via financial grants – which may range from \$500 to \$2,500 – to help meet expenses for unforeseen disaster or personal hardship.

“Our staff members are remarkable caregivers, and we realize they or their family members can benefit from care, too, especially when they have occasional financial pressures, like many people do,” said Debbie Langham, Highland Health Care’s CEO/Administrator. “Highland Essentials underscores our ongoing commitment to the well-being of our employees. Part of our mission is to treat every teammate like family, so to support that, we are ensuring assistance is

available in times of need.

“When uncertainty around the federal SNAP food program surfaced during the shutdown, our staff had some anxiety about family members’ access to food and basic essentials,” Langham added. “The launch of Highland Essentials is one of the innovative ways we reinforce Highland Health Care as not only an employer of choice but also a place where people feel secure and supported.”

*About Highland Health Care Center*

Highland Health Care Center is a 128-bed skilled nursing facility located in Highland, Ill., just 30 minutes east of St. Louis, Mo., in Madison County. The center is accepting both short-term and long-term skilled nursing care residents. Highland Health Care is also contracted with the St. Louis Veteran’s Association. Highland is hiring: [www.highland-hcc.com/careers](http://www.highland-hcc.com/careers). For more information, please contact Jennifer Cross at 618-830-1566 or visit our website at [www.highland-hcc.com](http://www.highland-hcc.com).



Highland Health Care Center has launched “Highland Essentials,” an innovative initiative to care for employees and their families experiencing financial challenges.

## Senior Center March 2026

**Hours:** Monday-Friday 9am-5pm      187 Woodcrest Drive • Highland, IL • 618-654-6071

Senior Center is open to members with an active card that is required to enter the facility. Memberships sold at the Korte Rec Center.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2 Bunco 12-2:30pm	3 Euchre/ Pinochle 11:30-4pm	4	5	6 Euchre/ Pinochle 11:30-4pm	7
8	9 Bunco 12-2:30pm	10 Euchre/ Pinochle 11:30-4pm	11 Senior Club Day 10:30am-3:30pm	12	13 Euchre/ Pinochle 11:30-4pm	14
15	16 Bunco 12-2:30pm	17 CLOSED Voting Location	18	19 6pm Highland Art Council Antique Quilt Road Show	20 Euchre/ Pinochle 11:30-4pm	21
22	23 Bunco 12-2:30pm	24 Euchre/Pinochle 11:30-2 Bingo hosted by Cedarhurst 2-3	25 Bingo w/ Joyce Emig Insurance Agency	26	27 Euchre/ Pinochle 11:30-4pm	28
29	30 Bunco 12-2:30pm	31 Euchre/ Pinochle 11:30-4pm	<u>Young at Heart Bus Service</u> City Residents Call 618-654-6071 to schedule a FREE ride at least 24hrs in advance. 			

# Lady Bulldogs Close Season at Cahokia Regional; JV Bowlers Clinch Division B Title

HIGHLAND - The 7th grade Lady Bulldog volleyball team opened up the IESA Cahokia Regional on Monday, March 2nd against Triad. The Lady Bulldogs would win the first set 25-15 but the Lady Crusaders would come back to win the next two sets by scores of 25-10 and 25-15. The ladies end their season with a 8-15 overall record.

On Tuesday, March 3rd the Bulldog bowling teams traveled to West Park Bowl for a match with Columbia. The Lady Bulldog varsity and jv bowlers each won by scores of 5-0 to get the wins

while the boys teams were both swept 5-0. Ryan Spencer led the Bulldogs with a high game of 195. The Bulldog bowlers traveled back to West Park Bowl on Wednesday for a match against Waterloo. Both the varsity boys and girls teams lost 5-0 to Waterloo in their final regular season match. The varsity boys record stands at 4-5 overall while the varsity girls record stands at 7-2. The jv boys and girls both won 5-0 with the win the jv girls clinching the Division B title and will bowl for the conference championship on Monday, March 9th. The jv boys record finishes at 7-2 while the jv girls finish undefeated

with an 8-0 record. Carter Mettler bowled a high game of 210 for the day for the Bulldogs.

HMS Cheer Coach Chelsey Kantner was nominated for the 2026 ICCA Coach of the Year Award. The Coach of the Year Award will be announced at the Coaches Conference held at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel in Bloomington, Illinois on March 13-14. The Lady Bulldogs finished second at the ICCA and IESA State Championships this past season.

*Matt Herndon, RAA Highland Middle School Athletic Director/Physical Education*

# McKendree University Hosts 15 Local High Schools During 3-Day Model UN Nations Conference

by Tina Napper

LEBANON - McKendree University hosted its annual Model United Nations conference on campus from March 3-5. Fifteen local high schools and 325 student delegates attended and participated in the conference, representing countries from around the world passing resolutions to address global issues. The university has been hosting its Model UN conference for more than 50 years, making it the fourth-longest running high school Model UN conference in the nation.

Model UN provides students with an opportunity to learn how the UN operates and to practice their public speaking, debate, negotiation and team leadership skills. Participants take on roles as diplomats representing a country, investigating international issues, negotiating with allies and adversaries, and developing solutions to world problems.

Participating high schools include Althoff Catholic High School, Belleville East High School, Belleville West High School, Bunker Hill High School, Christian Brothers College High School, Edwardsville High School, Freeburg High School, Gibault Catholic High School, Highland High School, Lebanon High School, Mascoutah High School, O'Fallon Township High School, Okawville Jr./Sr. High School, Springfield High School, and Triad High School.

Students debated topics ranging from cybersecurity, violence against women, legal uses of military force, fostering climate resilience, safety at nuclear power plants, refugee camp conditions, global vaccination programs, universal healthcare, and reforming peacekeeping missions.

On the final day of the conference, the students addressed a simulated "crisis scenario" in which the U.S.-China rivalry spiraled out of control: both countries left the World Trade Organization and escalated a trade war, the U.S. invaded Greenland, and China invaded Taiwan.

The top three delegate awards went to Triad High School, representing Pakistan; Freeburg High School, representing Panama; and O'Fallon Township High School, representing Russia.

Students winning outstanding delegate awards were the following:

- General Assembly: Isabella Haynes, Triad High School
  - Disarmament: Eli Flor, O'Fallon Township High School
  - Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian: Josiah Biver, Freeburg High School
  - Legal: Morgan Barnett, Triad High School
  - Economic and Social: Braden Sexton, Triad High School
  - Science and Technology: Peyton Anderson, Triad High School
  - Human Rights Council: Liam Greene, Freeburg High School
  - World Health Organization: Zachary Rosborg, O'Fallon Township High School
  - Security Council: Tyler Rottmann, Highland High School
- Other awards include:
- Outstanding Resolution: Hunter Burton, Mascoutah High School
  - Outstanding Policy Statement: Aryamun Kalra, Belleville East High School
  - Outstanding Position Paper: Claire Totzke, O'Fallon Township High School

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Linda Andreas has modernized voting equipment, increasing accuracy and reliability, and strengthened vote by mail safeguards to prevent fraud

Linda Andreas has partnered with Coroner Nick Novacich to assist in the removal of deceased voters from the rolls!

Sources: 1. Illinois Business Journal (02/14/25) 2. River Bendler (03/16/2025) 3. Illinois Business Journal (04/29/2023) 4. Times Tribune (01/02/20)

Vote Linda Andreas for Madison County Clerk by March 17th!

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# GLOW GOLF FUNDRAISER

## MAY 8TH, HIGHLAND COUNTRY CLUB

# Immaculate Conception Held Annual Chicken Dinner

By Bill Napper  
The Pioneer Newspaper

PIERRON — Cars rolled in one after another as families made their way into the Immaculate Conception parking lot, creating a steady line for the annual chicken dinner.

Immaculate Conception Parish held its Chicken Dinner on Sunday, March 1, with meals served from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. All dinners are \$15.

The event was offered as a drive-thru; however, limited indoor seating was available for those who prefer to dine inside.

The annual dinner is a major fundraiser for the parish, and community support is appreciated.

Inside, the kitchen worked like a well-oiled machine. All ages of the parish worked together. The parish's youngsters delivered meals to folks waiting in their vehicles.

The meals had four pieces of chicken, potatoes, dressing, green beans and a homemade dessert.

This is a big fundraiser for the parish, and they appreciate the community support!



## Immaculate Conception chicken dinner

The annual Immaculate Conception chicken dinner was held Sunday until 5 p.m. The kitchen staff worked like a well-oiled machine. All ages of the parish worked together. The parish's youngsters delivered meals to folks waiting in their vehicles. *(Pioneer photo by Bill Napper)*



## Drive-Thru

*(Pioneer photo by Bill Napper)*

The line moved quickly as folks waited for their chicken to be delivered at the annual Immaculate Conception chicken dinner, Sunday.

## Express Care Valvoline Opens With New, Fresh, Modern Look

By Bill Napper  
[www.ThePioneerNewspaper.com](http://www.ThePioneerNewspaper.com)

HIGHLAND — Express Care Valvoline opened Friday, Feb. 28, and welcomed a steady stream of customers throughout the morning as the new shop began offering quick oil changes and basic car care.

Owner Tony Clark said he was happy with how the first day went.

"I was pleased. It's been great — if this is an indication of the first day, it looks like business has been wonderful," Clark said.

Clark stood near the entrance as drivers pulled in for service. Business adviser Pat Wieland joined him to greet customers and watch how the first day unfolded.

Clark said Highland residents have already made him feel welcome. He shared that several people greeted him the night before while he was eating at Railshake Brewery, which sits across the street from the new shop.

The shop and the surrounding area have been freshened up, giving the corner a clean, modern look as the business opens its doors to the community.

Clark also owns a Valvoline located in Troy and several facilities in Missouri. He said he is glad to bring his services to Highland as well.

Express Care of Valvoline offers quick, friendly preventive maintenance with no appointment needed. The shop is locally owned and aims to serve the Highland community.



## Express Care Opens

*Pioneer photo by Bill Napper*

Owner Tony Clark, left, and Business Advisor Pat Wieland stand at the near the entrance of Express Care Valvoline in Highland on Saturday as the business kicks off its first day at the Highland location.

## Lewis and Clark Events Calendar

### Recurring Event

Alton Area Tax Project: 5-7 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10 a.m.-noon, Saturdays, through April 14, lower level, Templin Nursing Building, Lewis and Clark Community College, 5800 Godfrey Rd., Godfrey. Appointments required. Visit [www.AltonAreaTaxProject.com/appointment](http://www.AltonAreaTaxProject.com/appointment) or call (314) 292-9579.

### Recurring Event

2026 Primary Election Early Voting: 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday, March 2-6; 8:30 a.m.-7 p.m., Monday-Friday, March 9-13 and Monday, March 16; 9 a.m.-noon, Saturday, March 7; 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturday, March 14; 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Sunday, March 8 and Sunday, March 15, Scott Bibb Center, 1004 E. 5th St., Alton. (618) 692-6290.

## ANNUAL FLASHLIGHT EASTER EGG HUNT!

Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:45 p.m.  
HIGHLAND HOPE UMC

Bring a flashlight, a basket or bag for eggs, and some friends! See you then! Rain or shine!

For ages pre-k through 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

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# Moose Lodge Donation Supports Lunch Bunch Program



HIGHLAND - Highland Moose Lodge members presented a donation this week to support the Lunch Bunch program, continuing the lodge's tradition of backing local food-assistance efforts.

The contribution will help the program provide meals for residents who rely on the service throughout the year.

The donation was delivered during a brief presentation with representatives from both organizations.

The Lunch Bunch program, administered through the Highland Area Community Foundation, offers no-cost lunches to community members and is supported by local volunteers and charitable partners.

The Moose Lodge has participated in several community initiatives in recent years, and members said supporting the Lunch Bunch aligns with their mission of helping neighbors in need.

## Moose Makes Donation to Lunch Bunch

*(The Pioneer photo/ By Bill Napper)*

This Moose donation was to the Lunch Bunch program, Feb 25.. Pictured from the left are Kenny Kapp, Moose member; Kevin Hemann, Highland Area Community Foundation executive director; and Dave Knebel, Moose member.

# Mater Dei FFA



## FFA – Ground Zero

*(The Pioneer/ Contributed photo)*

Thanks to FFA moderator Mr. Doug Lueking for providing members with the opportunity to attend the Illinois FFA Ground Zero Conference for freshmen and sophomores. Pictured at the conference are (left photo) FFA members (front, l-r) William McElhose, Briar Bickl, (back, l-r) Michael Lautenschlaeger, Justin Hilmes, Luke Pollmann; and (right photo) FFA members (l-r) Caitlyn Vonder Haar, Lyla Koch, and Brianna Hemker.

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# Highland Health Care Inviting Chili Cooks To Their Cook-off



**Good Chilli** The Pioneer/ HHC photo  
Carolyn Boczek Director of Activities- also had a chili and entry.



**You're Welcome** The Pioneer/ Bill Napper  
Nikki Flamm hands a bowl of chili to a resident at Highland Health Care during the cook off, Feb 26.

By Bill Napper

HIGHLAND — The Highland Health Care chili cook-off held Wednesday, February 26, brought a lively crowd, spirited competition, and a wide range of recipes as local folks and residents gathered between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. to taste, vote, and celebrate the art of great chili.

Entries this year included Trenton Senior Center, Mederi Caretenders, and Molina Health Care, each bringing its own style and signature approach to the pot. Tasters sampled every batch for a \$5 donation, earning the right to help select the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd-place winners announced at 2:15 p.m.

Community Leaders and Staff Join the Fun

Several representatives from partner organizations took part in the event, adding to the sense of community support and collaboration. Those attending included:

- Dan Levad, CEO
- Caysea Gray, Food Service
- Carolyn Boczek, Activity Director
- Jennifer Cross, Director of Business Development

Their presence underscored the event's goal of bringing together cooks, seniors, caregivers, and community members for a friendly, flavorful competition.

### A Showcase of Technique and Tradition

Judges and tasters noted the variety of approaches on display — from slow-simmered classics to bold, spicy blends.

The cook-off offered a chance for newcomers and seasoned chili makers alike to compare techniques, swap ideas, and enjoy a warm meal among friends.

### A Successful Day for Food and Fellowship

Organizers said the turnout exceeded expectations, with steady traffic throughout the four-hour tasting window.

Laughter, conversation, and the unmistakable aroma of simmering chili filled the room as attendees cast their votes and debated which pot deserved the top prize.

Highland Health Care also especially acknowledges Molina Healthcare and Mederi Caretenders for helping with the event!

The event closed with thanks to all participants, volunteers, and community partners who helped make the cook-off a flavorful success.



**Several Entries** The Pioneer/ HHC photo  
Several representatives from partner organizations took part in the chili cook off at Highland Health Care Feb. 26.



**Winners** The Pioneer/ HHC photo  
Chelsea Lynhyicum 3rd place winner, left, Caysea Grey- Grand Champion, and Jennifer Cross- 2nd place winner.

# Highland's Shawn Patton Named Cub Scout Leader of the Year

*The Pioneer Newspaper*

HIGHLAND - Shawn Patton, Cubmaster of Pack 8043, was named the Cahokia Mounds District's Cub Scout Leader of the Year. The pack is chartered by the Evangelical United Church of Christ in Highland.

Patton is entering his third year as Cubmaster and has earned a reputation for strengthening the pack's sense of unity and family. Leaders credit him with creating an environment where Scouts, parents and volunteers feel connected and supported.

"The pack has amazing den leaders, wonderful committee members and the best families who make our pack a family," one den leader said.

Patton and his wife, Angela, are active in the program with their two sons, Colton and Boone, who are both Cub Scouts. Angela serves as a den leader for the Lions and Tigers.

Patton's commitment to Scouting extends beyond weekly meetings. He has completed multiple leadership training camps, assists with Baloo Training for adult leaders and volunteers for the full week of Cub Scout Day Camp each June.

As Cubmaster, Patton works closely with the pack committee to plan events, maintain training requirements and ensure activities remain fun and engaging for the Scouts.

Pack 8043 leaders say they feel fortunate to have his leadership guiding the program.



## Scouting Family

*The Pioneer/ contributed photo*  
Cubmaster Shawn Patton stands with his wife, Angela, and their sons, Colton and Boone, all active members of Pack 8043. Angela serves as a den leader for the Lions and Tigers, supporting the boys as they advance through the Cub Scout program.

## Mater Dei Student of the Week: *Cameron Von Bokel*

Congratulations to Cameron Von Bokel, the Student of the Week for the week of March 2!

In her nomination, English teacher Mrs. Melissa Kunkle said, "I am happy to recognize Cameron Von Bokel as our Student of the Week! In my English I class, Cam is ready to learn and to ask questions for clarification on a consistent basis. I can always count on his willingness to participate and his being well prepared for class. I also look forward each day to his positive attitude and his smile. You just can't help but be in a good mood around Cam!"



Cameron is the son of Brian and Bonnie Von Bokel of Aviston and is a member of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church.



**IHSSBCA All-Sectional and "SB - IHSSBCA All-Sectional**  
Mater Dei school proudly announces that seniors Keegan Kohlbrecher and Owen Musenbrock were named to the 2026 Illinois High School Scholar Bowl Coaches Association (IHSSBCA) Class 2A All-Sectional Team! Per the IHSSBCA, this award recognizes the "... most skilled and enthusiastic players in each IHSA sectional division." This year marks the third year of recognition for Keegan (2026, 2025, 2024) and the second year of recognition for Owen (2026, 2025.)

## Mater Dei Continues Class 2030 Registration

Mater Dei Catholic High School administrators report that registration for the Class of 2030 is ongoing. Families may contact Mrs. Maria Zurliene at [mzurliene@materdeiknights.org](mailto:mzurliene@materdeiknights.org) or 618-526-7216 to schedule an individual appointment.

During registration, families may select courses and obtain applications for scholarships and memorial grants. While there is no deadline for registration, scholarship applications are due May 1, and memorial grant applications are accepted on a continual basis.

Families who are still exploring Mater Dei are also welcome to contact Mrs. Zurliene to arrange a family tour or a shadow day.

**Thank you for reading**  
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# Knights of Columbus Lenten Fish Dinners Underway

HIGHLAND – The Highland-Knights of Columbus opened their annual Lenten fish dinner season on Ash Wednesday, drawing families, friends, and neighbors who enjoy gathering each week for the popu-

lar community tradition.

Attendance continues to grow as word spreads throughout Madison County and nearby towns, turning the weekly meals into a lively social stop as well as a Lenten

observance.

The Knights offer both dine-in and carry-out meals featuring fried cod, baked cod, fried shrimp, and chicken strips.

Entrées are available in three

portion sizes—\$8, \$11, and \$14—and include two sides, along with hush puppies and bread.

A \$6 grilled cheese meal with two sides provides an affordable option for younger diners and

families.

Council members encourage residents to support the weekly dinners by treating their families to a meal at the KC Hall.



## KC Friday Fish

Guests wait in a fast-moving line at the Knights of Columbus Hall Friday-night fish fry in Highland, where the hot, delicious plates and broad menu drew another strong crowd. Refreshments are available in the lounge; ice tea is offered at no charge.

The Pioneer/ Photo by Bill Napper

# Highland Rotary Club Awards Grants to Local Schools

HIGHLAND - The Highland Rotary Club is once again thrilled to fill grants from Highland Middle School and Highland High School!

The Highland Rotary Club is once again proud to support students and educators in the Highland community, announcing a new round of grants for Highland Middle School and Highland High School.

The club approved funding for several classroom and program needs, continuing its long-standing commitment to service and youth development.

Rotary leaders said they are grateful for the opportunity to assist local teachers and staff



Bob Sylvester and Holly Ayer



Bob Sylvester and Carlym Graumenz



Bob Sylvester and Daniel Podwojski



HMS Asst. Principal Matt Baumgartner and Bob Sylvester

who work every day to enrich the lives of Highland's children.

The grants help strengthen academic programs, enhance learning environments, and provide resources that directly

benefit students.

The club expressed appreciation to the educators whose dedication inspires Rotary's ongoing support. "We appreciate

your service to our children," the announcement read, underscoring the partnership between the schools and the civic organization. The Highland Rotary Club

continues to invest in projects that reflect its mission of service above self, with education remaining one of its highest priorities.

# Carlinsville Gears Up For Route 66 Jubilee In June

*Central Illinois Town on Original Alignment of 66 Planning Huge Celebration in June with Vintage Cars and Games, Storytelling*

By Tom Emery

CARLINVILLE - This year marks the 100th anniversary of Route 66. One of the small towns along the route in Illinois is planning one of the largest celebrations.

The Route 66 Jubilee, which will feature old-fashioned cars, games, costumes, and storytelling, is scheduled for June 26 on the lawn of the Macoupin County courthouse in Carlinsville, 60 miles northeast of St. Louis. Planning for the event, one of the more significant small-town Route 66 events during the anniversary, has been going on for two years.

Even the date of the event – June 26, 2026 -- is significant. Spelled out numerically, the day is 6-26-26 – similar to the Carlinsville ZIP code of 62626.

“When highway and hometown align only once, we celebrate!” laughed Mary Tinder of Carlinsville, a member of the Jubilee Steering Committee that is organizing the event. “We expect this to be a really big deal, with something unique for everyone.”

The Jubilee will harken back to the days of Route 66, which rolled through Carlinsville (pop. 5,710) from 1926-30 during its original alignment, with old-time games like sack races and kick the can. Storytelling and historical presentations, including local authors, songwriters, and musicians, will add to the flavor of the event.

One of the top attractions of the Jubilee will be a display of classic Ford Model A automobiles, which were one of the few cars on Route 66 when it passed through Carlinsville. The Model A, which replaced the iconic Model T in Ford Motor Company production, was one of the top-selling cars in the United States during its production from 1927-31, though they are increasingly rare today.

A group of collectors from the Missouri Valley Region of the Model A Restorers Club (MRV-MARC) from the St. Louis area will be on hand with their cars at the Jubilee to show off their beautifully restored vehicles. Talks are being scheduled for the public to learn more about automotive and transportation history.

“That is really going to be something to see,” said Tinder. “We’re just thrilled that this group wanted to be here, and bring their classic cars.”

Presentations and conversations about the role of the car both on Route 66 and in American daily life, along with Route 66 travelers, moonshiners, gangsters, and flappers will educate and inspire people of all ages at the Jubilee. Many individuals, including local and county officials, will be in period costume during the day.

Another feature will be the “First Time Up” mini stage, where youngsters age 4-12 can take the microphone to sing a short song, read a few lines from a favorite book, or share their favorite poem. The stage reflects the conversations and participation that welcomes people of all ages to the Jubilee.

“We want to bring history alive for everyone through storytelling and music from the ‘Mother Road,’” remarked Tinder. “This event will be family-friendly with music, art, games, and, of course, food.”

The Route 66 Jubilee stems from ideas that Macoupin County Sheriff Shawn Kahl, along with Macoupin County Board members Harry Starr IV and Tony Wiggins, have envisioned for a vintage festival on the courthouse lawn.

“They’ve wanted to see this happen for several years,” said Andrea Duncan of Carlinsville, another member of the Steering Committee. “They saw how important, and how much fun, it could be.”

Similarly, Carlinsville Winning Communities, a local group dedicated to the advancement of the town, and the Carlinsville City Tourism Committee were challenged in 2023 by Great Rivers and Routes to become a part of the “Last 100 Miles” celebrations in Illinois along Route 66. Planning for the Jubilee has been underway in the two years since that invitation.

The Jubilee Steering Committee includes Tinder and Duncan, along with Bobbi Bates, the Economic Development and Zoning Coordinator for the city of Carlinsville, and Chad Strubbe, the general manager of Ace Hardware in Carlinsville and board member of the Carlinsville Community Chamber of Commerce.

The committee is continuing to plan with the community for the Jubilee, and welcomes all input and participation in the event.

Any civic groups who would like to be a part of the Jubilee activities may contact Tinder (217-825-9699) or Duncan (217-204-1446). Businesses, churches, and schools who want to be involved may contact Bates (217-854-4908) or Strubbe (217-891-1432).



**Highland Elementary School SRO**  
**Happy National SRO Day to Officer Clewis!**

*Thank you for all you do to keep us safe and for being a positive presence in our school. We appreciate you!*

**Thank you for reading the Pioneer**

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## KC 2026 Lenten Fish Dinner Menu



All Meals Include 2 Sides, Hush Puppies, & Bread		Price	
<b>Cod Fish Meals</b>			
1 Piece Cod Fish Dinner, Baked or Fried, w/ 2 Sides		\$8.00	
2 Piece Cod Fish Dinner, Baked or Fried, w/ 2 Sides		\$11.00	
3 Piece Cod Fish Dinner, Baked or Fried, w/ 2 Sides		\$14.00	
<b>Shrimp Meals</b>			
4 Piece Fried Shrimp Dinner w/ 2 Sides		\$8.00	
6 Piece Fried Shrimp Dinner w/ 2 Sides		\$11.00	
8 Piece Fried Shrimp Dinner w/ 2 Sides		\$14.00	
<b>Chicken Meals</b>			
2 Piece Fried Chicken Strip Dinner w/ 2 Sides		\$8.00	
4 Piece Fried Chicken Strip Dinner w/ 2 Sides		\$11.00	
6 Piece Fried Chicken Strip Dinner w/ 2 Sides		\$14.00	
<b>Grilled Cheese Meal</b>			
Grilled Cheese Sandwich w/ 2 Sides		\$6.00	
<b>Side Items – Choose 2 Sides Included With Meal</b>			
French Fries	Cole Slaw	Macaroni & Cheese	Apple Sauce
<b>Extra Items</b>			
Fish 1 Piece \$4.00	Shrimp 4 Pieces \$4.00	Chicken Strip 2 Pieces \$4.00	Side Items \$2.50
Desserts Available		Cash, Credit & Debit Cards Accepted	Begins Wed. 2/18 Then Fridays Thru 4/3
		Serving 4 PM – 7 PM	

**Knights of Columbus, Council 1580**  
12454 IL Route 143, Highland, IL 62249  
618-654-9049



**Congratulations to Highland High School Senior**

**Jordan Bircher on being selected for IBCA Special Mention All State!**



**Enjoy Fish, More at the Highland KC Hall every Friday during Lent!**

## Marking milestone in advanced prostate care

# 100th Aquablation procedure performed At HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital

O'FALLON — HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital is proud to announce the 100th Aquablation therapy procedure, marking a significant milestone in the advancement of minimally invasive urologic care in the region.

Introduced locally in 2023, Aquablation therapy is an advanced, robotic treatment for men suffering from benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), also known as an enlarged prostate. As the number one reason men visit their urologist, BPH affects approximately one in two men ages 51 to 60, with incidence increasing each decade of life if left untreated.

"Reaching our 100th Aquablation case represents an important milestone for our program and for the patients we serve," said Dr. James Rybak, urologist at St. Elizabeth's. "We're proud to offer this advanced, evidence-based therapy to our community through a partnership with a hospital that prioritizes innovation and excellent patient care. This achievement reflects the dedication of our entire team, especially our nursing staff, who are integral in delivering top-notch care to every patient."

BPH is a non-cancerous enlargement of the prostate gland that can lead to bothersome and sometimes serious lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS), including frequent urination, weak urinary stream, difficulty starting urination and incomplete bladder emptying.

Risk factors include age, family history, weight, inactivity and, in some cases, erectile dysfunction. Historically, surgical treatments for BPH have required men to balance

symptom relief with the risk of side effects. Some procedures provide strong symptom improvement but carry higher rates of irreversible complications such as incontinence or erectile dysfunction.

Dr. Rybak noted, "Aquablation therapy allows us to deliver precise, consistent treatment for benign prostatic hyperplasia while preserving quality of life. The treatment is incision-free, minimally invasive and typically takes less than an hour."

**What Is Aquablation Therapy?** Aquablation therapy is performed using the AquaBeam Robotic System, the first FDA-cleared surgical robot that utilizes automated tissue resection for the treatment of lower urinary tract symptoms due to BPH. Using detailed imaging, the surgeon creates a customized treatment map based on each patient's unique prostate anatomy. The system then delivers a precisely controlled, heat-free waterjet to remove the prostate tissue causing symptoms.

Men experiencing symptoms of an enlarged prostate are encouraged to speak with their primary care physician or urologist to determine whether Aquablation therapy may be appropriate for them.

"St. Elizabeth's Hospital remains committed to expanding access to innovative, evidence-based treatments like this and many others," said President and CEO Chris Klay. "Our goal is to ensure patients in our community do not have to travel far for advanced care and that we consistently pair advanced technologies with the expertise of our physicians and care teams."



### 100th Aquablation

Dr. James Rybak, urologist on the medical staff of HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital, pictured third from left, and his surgical support team celebrate the 100th Aquablation procedure performed at the hospital, marking milestone in advanced prostate care through this minimally invasive service.

The Pioneer/ contributed photo

### 38th Annual Bishop's Mass & Dinner Sunday, March 22

The Highland Knights of Columbus invites everyone to attend a Mass at St. Paul Church celebrated by Most Reverend



Bishop Thomas John Paprocki on Sunday, March 22, at 10:30 a.m.

KC Members have been mailed an invitation and donation request. Event information is also available in the literature rack at the main entrance to Trinity Hall.

Following the mass, a dinner and short program will begin at 12:00 PM at the Highland Knights of Columbus Hall for those who donate \$25 or more (per person).

This annual fundraiser provides direct financial support of our Seminarians, Newman Centers on College Campuses, and Local Pro-Life activities. Our goal is \$20,000.

For details please call 618-654-9049.

### Angie Grinter Elected to Membership into The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi

BATON ROUGE, LA - Angie Grinter of Collinsville, Illinois, was recently elected to membership into The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, the nation's oldest and most selective all-discipline collegiate honor society, at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Grinter is among approximately 20,000 students, faculty, professional staff and alumni to be initiated into Phi Kappa Phi each year. Membership is by invitation only and requires nomination and approval by a chapter. Only the top 10 percent of seniors and 7.5 percent of juniors are eligible for membership. Graduate students in the top 10 percent of the number of candidates for graduate degrees may also qualify, as do faculty, professional staff and alumni who have achieved scholarly distinction.

Phi Kappa Phi was founded in 1897 under the leadership of undergraduate student Marcus L. Urann who had a desire to create a different kind of honor society: one that recognized excellence in all academic disciplines. Today, the Society has chapters on more than 300 campuses in the United States and its territories. Its mission is to "cultivate a community that celebrates and advances the love of learning."

#### About Phi Kappa Phi

Founded in 1897, Phi Kappa Phi is the nation's oldest and most selective collegiate honor society for all academic disciplines. Phi Kappa Phi inducts approximately 20,000 students, faculty, professional staff and alumni annually. The Society has chapters on more than 300 select colleges and universities in the United States and its territories. Membership is by invitation only to the top 10 percent of seniors and graduate students and 7.5 percent of juniors. Faculty, professional staff and alumni who have achieved scholarly distinction also qualify. The Society's mission is to "cultivate a community that celebrates and advances the love of learning." For more information, visit [www.PhiKappaPhi.org](http://www.PhiKappaPhi.org).





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## Moose Makes Donation to Lunch Bunch

This Moose donation was to the Lunch Bunch program, Feb 25.. Pictured from the left are Kenny Kapp, Moose member; Kevin Hemann, Highland Area Community Foundation executive director; and Dave Knebel, Moose member.

*(Pioneer photo/ By Bill Napper)*



## VFW BINGO

Highland VFW Post 5694 hosts bingo every Thursday night at 7 p.m. The event draws players from across the area for an evening of fun, and friendly competition. Doors open early, giving players time to settle in, enjoy food from the kitchen, and catch up with friends before the games begin.

The Pioneer/ Bill Napper



## Former Bulldog Pitcher

Former Highland High School pitcher Kye Kruse is entering his junior year at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa. Kruse, a 6-foot-4, 200-pound right-hander, features a four-pitch mix that includes a fastball clocked at 96 mph. Grand View competes in the NAIA, and Kruse is expected to contribute to the Vikings' pitching staff this season. Fans can follow his progress on the team's athletics website.

*(Photo courtesy of Don Gunter)*



*Friedens UCC - Troy, IL*

## SPRING SAUSAGE DINNER

-DRIVE THRU ONLY-

## SUNDAY MARCH 15, 2026

## 11:30A-4:30P

Dinners are \$15/plate

Menu Includes: Grilled Pork Sausage, Mashed Potatoes & Gravy, Sauerkraut, Green Beans, and a Dessert

Questions: 618-867-6535 [friedensucc@friedensucc-troy.org](mailto:friedensucc@friedensucc-troy.org)

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207 E. Center St., Troy, IL 62294



# Happy National SRO DAY!



Officer Biggs

Thank you for all that you do for HMS! We appreciate you!

## Mackenzie Butler, of Bethalto, IL, is among the more than 660 students who graduated from the University of Mississippi in December 2025

UNIVERSITY, MS - Mackenzie Butler, of Bethalto, IL, is among the more than 660 students who graduated from the University of Mississippi in December 2025.

Butler, who majored in General Business, received a Bachelor of Business Administration from the School of Business Administration.

“Congratulations to our December 2025 graduates who are distinguished by their dedication to academic success,” UM Chancellor Glenn Boyce said. “They accomplished so much during their years at the university. I applaud them and can’t wait to see all the ways they will continue building their legacies that began here.”

December 2025 graduates are invited to walk across the stage at the University of Mississippi 2026 Commencement exercises, which will be held May 5-9. Morning Convocation will be held Saturday, May 9 at 9 a.m. in the Grove.

*For additional details and a complete 2026 Commencement schedule, visit the university’s Commencement website.*

*The University of Mississippi, affectionately known as Ole Miss, is the state’s flagship university. Included in the elite group of R1: Doctoral Universities - Highest Research Activity by the Carnegie Classification, it has a long history of producing leaders in public service, academics and business. Its 16 academic divisions include a major medical school, nationally recognized schools of accountancy, law and pharmacy, and an Honors College acclaimed for a blend of academic rigor, experiential learning and opportunities for community action. Recognized among the nation’s most beautiful, Ole Miss’ main campus is in Oxford, which is routinely acknowledged as one of the country’s best college towns.*

## UTampa Student, Tanner Garner, of Edwardsville, Earned Dean’s List Honors

TAMPA, FL (02/18/2026)-- Tanner Garner, of Edwardsville, earned dean’s list honors at the University of Tampa for the Fall 2025 semester. Garner is a Junior majoring in Psychology BA. Students must maintain a GPA of 3.75 or higher to be eligible for the dean’s list.

The University of Tampa is a private, comprehensive university located on 110 acres on the riverfront in downtown Tampa. Known for academic excellence, personal attention and real-world experience in its undergraduate and graduate programs, the University has about 200 programs of study and serves more than 11,500 students from 50 states and most of the world’s countries.

## Randi Ulrich earns Dean’s List Honors At Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College

SAINT MARY OF THE WOODS, IN - Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College is pleased to announce that Randi Ulrich of Granite City has achieved Dean’s List Honors for the fall 2025 semester.

Congratulations on earning this academic achievement.

# Becker’s Names HSHS One of the Top Places to Work in Healthcare

SPRINGFIELD — Becker’s Healthcare recently released its

list of 165 top places to work in healthcare, honoring hospitals, health systems and healthcare companies that are setting the standard for what it means to be an exceptional workplace in 2026.

This year, Hospital Sisters Health System (HSHS), headquartered in Springfield, Illinois with care locations in Wisconsin and Illinois, was honored to be among the esteemed organizations recognized for investing deeply in its people. HSHS does this by offering robust benefits, meaningful opportunities for professional and personal development, inclusive environments where employees feel valued doing mission-driven work, and providing resources that support true work-life balance. Beyond their walls, HSHS and others recognized also make a powerful difference in their com-

## Mater Dei Student of the Week: Sam Hansen

Congratulations to Sam Hansen, our Student of the Week for the week of February 23!

In his nomination, math teacher Mr. Daniel Litteken stated, “In recognition of Sam’s outstanding effort and positive attitude in my class, I am happy to select him as Student of the Week! Every day, Sam consistently works hard, comes prepared with his assignments completed, and is never afraid to ask thought-



ful questions when he needs clarification. His willingness to participate in discussions not only helps him understand but also supports his classmates’ learning. He demonstrates responsibility, perseverance, and a genuine commitment to improving his algebra skills.

Just as important, Sam always comes to class with a smile on his face and puts all

of us in a good mood with his positive outlook. I am proud of the growth he has shown this year and cannot wait to see all he accomplishes in the future. Congratulations Sam!”

Sam is the son of Brian Hansen and Mary Fitzgerald of Aviston and is a member of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church.

## Highland Woman’s Club’s Trivia Night to Fund Vocational Student Awards

As the Highland Woman’s Club prepares for its Third Annual Trivia Night on March 21, members’ hopes are high that success will reward the beneficiaries of the event. One of those beneficiaries is the Highland Woman’s Club’s HHS Vocational Award. The club’s commitment to Highland Schools now includes this unique award specially tailored for the vocational and tech ed student.

“We wanted this award to fulfill more needs than the typical scholarship does,” commented Scholarship Committee member Terry Menz. “Many HHS students head directly for the workforce and have specific needs to start their careers,” Menz added. After consulting with HHS School Counselors, the club broadened the uses for the award funds. “Awards will vary in amount – from \$250 to \$1000 – to cover specified needs detailed on the application,” explained Education Committee Chair Linda Lueders. The Vocational Award is designed to cover union dues, lab fees, tools, medical equipment, computer needs, and cosmetology supplies. Uniforms and specialized footwear and gear are also covered in this award.

HHS Vocational and Tech Ed teachers have information on the award, and school counselors can provide the application to interested students. In a few months, the HHS Class of 2026 will graduate and the Highland Woman’s Club hopes that this award will assist students as they transition from high school to the world of work. “For over 100 years, the Highland Woman’s Club has prioritized our schools in our fundraising efforts. We ask the Highland community to assist us by participating in our Trivia Night,” concluded Lueders.

The event, held on Saturday, March 21st, will take place at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Highland with doors opening at 6:00 p.m. and play beginning at 7:00p.m. Along with the Vocational Award, proceeds will also assist Meals on Wheels and the schools’ Angel Fund. Trivia Night participation is \$160 for an 8-person table. Call Cyndi at 618- 401-9542 to reserve a table now.

## Jonas Akeman among Mississippi State University’s recent graduates

MISSISSIPPI STATE, MS - Jonas Akeman, of Edwardsville, IL is among nearly 1,400 students graduating from Mississippi State University in fall 2025.

Akeman received the Bachelor of Science from MSU’s College of Forest Resources.

MSU President Mark E. Keenum congratulated graduates as the December ceremony’s keynote speaker, emphasizing the world-class education they received and the core MSU values it reflects—integrity, hard work and respect for others.



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munities through service initiatives and a strong commitment to social responsibility.

This is not the first time HSHS has been named to this prestigious list. Hospital Sisters Health System has been on this list for the past three years, 2024 through 2026.

“We are honored to be recognized among other well-respected institutions nationwide for our workplace atmosphere,” said Diamond Boatwright, HSHS President and CEO. “Our Ministry is strong because of our colleagues and physicians, and we work hard to ensure opportunities for them to expand their horizons both professionally and personally. HSHS provides a place for people to grow in their career while remaining committed to their health and wellbeing.”

The organizations featured on this list distinguish themselves as

premier employers by supporting their teams in meaningful, holistic ways. From comprehensive wellness initiatives and professional growth opportunities to community engagement and cultures rooted in connection and balance, these workplaces are redefining what it means to thrive in healthcare.

HSHS employs more than 10,000 colleagues who provide care in 14 acute-care, children’s, rehabilitation, and critical-access hospitals, and home health and hospice programs in Central and Southern Illinois and Eastern Wisconsin.

Thomas Ahr, HSHS Senior Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer, said, “We are grateful that Becker’s has recognized the efforts we have undertaken to provide safe and healthy work environments where

colleagues can build successful careers. From clinical career ladders to leadership programs to expanded educational opportunities with tuition assistance, we help them on their career journey, while demonstrating that Joy is a Value at HSHS.”

Learn more about HSHS’s career opportunities, culture and benefits at careers.hshs.org.

The full list features individual profiles of all hospitals, health systems and healthcare companies.

Note: Becker’s Healthcare developed this list based on nominations and editorial research. Organizations do not pay and cannot pay for inclusion on this list. This list is not exhaustive, nor is it an endorsement of the hospitals, health systems or companies mentioned. Organizations are presented in alphabetical order

# Mater Dei Announces Students of the Quarter

The Mater Dei community is pleased to announce the Students of the Quarter for the second quarter of the 2025-2026 academic year. These students were selected by the administration and faculty from the list of students who earned high honor roll or honor roll recognition. Please join us in congratulating them and their families!

Senior Reagan Woomer, son of Nathan and Jordan Myers of Odin. Throughout his academic career, Reagan has enrolled in nearly all honors courses for English and math, including English Composition 101 and English Composition 102 as a senior. For his academic achievements, he has earned honor roll recognition for eleven quarters. He also earned two College Board awards—the Rural and Small Town Recognition Award and the School Recognition Award. Outside the classroom, Reagan is a four-year member of the basketball team (current captain), Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) (current treasurer), Pep Club, and the track team; a three-year member of National Honor Society; and a two-year member of the golf team and Marketing Club. In track, he holds the record for the 400m dash and is a member of the record-holding 4x400m relay. In his community, Reagan volunteers as a youth basketball coach. Finally, he is a member of St. Mary Catholic Church (Carlyle). Following graduation, Reagan plans to pursue a degree in sports medicine but has not yet selected an educational institution.

Senior Peyton Muscarello, daughter of Dominic and Lynn Muscarello of Breese. Throughout her academic career, Peyton has enrolled in multiple honors courses for English, math, and science, including English Composition 101 and English Composition 102 as a senior. For her academic achievements, she has earned honor roll recognition for fourteen quarters and an academic letter her junior year. Outside the classroom, Peyton is a four-year member of Concert Band, Liturgical Planning Team, Marching Band (current section leader), Pep Band, Pep Club, Sisters in Christ, Student Ambassadors, Student Council (current treasurer), and Teens for Life (current secretary), and a three-year member of National Honor Society. For three years, she has received the Christian Service Award. She has also received awards for Liturgical Planning Team (two years) and Student Council. Finally, Peyton is a member of St. Dominic Catholic Church, where she serves as a Breese Youth Ministry member (current secretary), confirmation retreat leader, and extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. Following graduation, she plans to attend Illinois State University to pursue a degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders.

Junior Hayden Melone, son of Peter and Courtney Melone of Trenton. Since his freshman year, Hayden has enrolled in all honors courses for English, math, and science. As a junior, his courses include Algebra II Honors, Chemistry Honors, and English III Honors. For his academic achievements, he has earned honor roll recognition for ten quarters, an academic letter his sophomore year, and an award for World History. Outside the classroom, Hayden is a three-year member of the baseball team and the soccer team and a two-year member of National Honor Society. Finally, Hayden is a member of St. Mary Catholic Church (Trenton).

Junior Lila Huelsmann, daughter of Kurt and Julia Huelsmann of Aviston. Since her freshman year, Lila has enrolled in all honors courses for English, math, and science. As a junior, her courses include Algebra II & Trigonometry Honors, Chemistry Honors, and English III Honors. For her academic achievements, she has earned honor roll recognition for ten quarters, an academic letter her sophomore year, and awards for Algebra I Honors, Geometry Honors, Spanish II, and Theology I. She also earned the College Board Rural & Small-Town Recognition Award. Outside the classroom, Lila is a three-year member of the volleyball team, a two-year member of National Honor Society, and a first-year member of FBLA and Student Ambassadors. In the community, she serves as an assistant coach and volunteers as a leader at camps and clinics for Blue Steel Volleyball Club. Finally, Lila is a member of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, where she serves as a church picnic volunteer.

Sophomore Bodie Brockmeier, son of Brandon and Amanda Brockmeier of Bartelso. In both his freshman and sophomore year, Bodie enrolled in honors courses for English. This year, his courses include English II Honors. For his academic achievements, he has earned honor roll recognition for four quarters. Outside the classroom, Bodie is a two-year member of the football team and the soccer team. Finally, Bodie is a member of St. Cecilia Catholic Church.

Sophomore Alexis Eversgerd, daughter of Kevin and Meghan Eversgerd of Aviston. In both her freshman and sophomore year, Alexis enrolled in honors courses for English and math. This year, her courses include Biology Honors, English II Honors, and Geometry Honors. For her academic achievements, she has earned honor roll recognition for six quarters and an award for Health. Outside the classroom, Alexis is a two-year member of the cheerleading team, Student Ambassadors, and the track team; and a first-year member of the



## MATER DEI SOTQ Q2

(The Pioneer Newspaper/ Courtesy photo)

Mater Dei is pleased to announce the Students of the Quarter for the second quarter: (front, l-r) freshmen Emma Heiligenstein and Dane Kohlbrecher, sophomores Alexis Eversgerd and Bodie Brockmeier; (back, l-r) juniors Lila Huelsmann and Hayden Melone, and seniors Peyton Muscarello and Reagan Woomer. The Students of the Quarter are selected by the faculty from the list of students who have earned high honor roll or honor roll recognition. Congratulations to these students and their families!

cross country team, Marketing Club, and Student Council. She has also served as a class officer for two years (current president). Finally, Alexis is a member of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church.

Freshman Dane Kohlbrecher, son of Kevin and Angie Kohlbrecher of Aviston. In his first year at Mater Dei, Dane's courses include Algebra I Honors and Physical Science Honors. Outside the classroom, he is a member of

Concert Band, the cross country team, Marching Band, Pep Band, Scholar Bowl, Student Council, Teens for Life, and the track team. Finally, Dane is a member of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, where he serves as an altar server and Catholic Youth Ministry (CYM) member.

Freshman Emma Heiligenstein, daughter of Steve and Susan Heiligenstein of Centralia. In her first year at Mater Dei, Emma enrolled

in college-preparatory courses. Outside the classroom, she is a member of Art Club, Chorus, Concert Band, the fall play crew, Liturgical Music Group, Marching Band, Pep Band, the spring musical crew, and the yearbook staff. In her community, she volunteers for Meals on Wheels. Finally, Emma is a member of St. Mary Catholic Church (Carlyle), where she serves as a Vacation Bible School volunteer.



## Mass – Fr. Jim Deiters”

On February 5, the feast day of teenage martyr St. Agatha, Fr. Jim Deiters reminded everyone to demonstrate “small ‘m’ martyrdom – standing up and doing what is right for what is right” and to pray for the courage to live their faith. “We offer our sincere gratitude to Fr. Jim, a member of our Class of 1983 and pastor of St. Clare of Assisi Catholic Church in O’Fallon, and to the many priests and deacons who attend our weekly Masses and teach our students to learn, live, and love their faith!”

## Liberty Bank Announces Jared Siebert as Market President

ALTON - Liberty Bank, A United Community Bank, is pleased to announce the promotion of Jared Siebert to Market President. Jared has been with Liberty Bank for five years, most recently serving as Vice President of Commercial Lending.



In his new role, Jared leads and supports the Liberty Bank team while overseeing market strategy and growth. His emphasis is on strengthening client relationships and expanding Liberty Bank's presence as a trusted provider of personal, business, and wealth management services throughout the Riverbend area.

"My focus as Market President is to support our team and continue to deliver the high level of service our clients expect and deserve," stated Siebert. "Liberty Bank has a strong reputation throughout our Riverbend area, and I am excited to build on this momentum for our employees, our customers, and our communities. I appreciate the guidance of Liberty Bank's advisory board of directors, including several of the Bank's founders, whose leadership and community commitment are invaluable. I am also grateful for the strength and support of United Community Bank's leadership as we work together to serve our communities

and grow strategically."

Jared brings 20 years of banking industry experience to his role. He began his banking career in 2006 while attending Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE), working part-time while completing his undergraduate studies. Over the course of his career, he has held positions including personal banker, retail mortgage lender, branch manager, commercial credit analyst, commercial credit department manager, and commercial lending officer. He spent 13 years with TheBANK of Edwardsville before gaining additional industry experience and joined Liberty Bank in 2021.

"Jared is a proven leader who understands the value of community banking and relationship-based service," said David J. Drennan, President of United Community Bank. "His experience, dedication, and deep ties to the region make him well suited to lead Liberty Bank as part of United Community Bank."

Siebert earned both a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and a Master of Business Administration from SIUE. He is also a graduate of the Community Bankers Association of Illinois Community Bankers School.

Active in the community, Jared serves on the board of the Edwardsville Rotary Club and is a past board member of the Edwardsville CEO Program. He and his wife, Amy, live in Edwardsville with their three children and together they enjoy sports, traveling, fishing, and spending time outdoors

with family and friends.

About Liberty Bank

Liberty Bank, based in Alton, Illinois, was established in 1994 by local business leaders. Expanding to Godfrey in 1997 and Bethalto in 2006, it has since grown to include a total of four locations serving Madison County. Liberty Bank is a United Community Bank. For more information, visit [bankliberty.com](http://bankliberty.com).

About United Community Bank

United Community Bank is an employee-owned bank group based in Chatham, Illinois. Its origins go back to 1907 with the founding of Farmer's State Bank in Greenfield, IL. In 1973, a local group led by Robert Narmont invested in Farmer's State Bank with the goal of delivering the ultimate in customer service while continuing to welcome other banks into the United Community Bank family. Today, United Community Bank has grown to a more than \$4 billion dollar institution with over one hundred banks and ATMs in 37 communities in central, west central, and southwest central Illinois, northeast Missouri, and southwest Florida. Together, United Community Banks includes United Community Bank, Marine Bank & Trust, Brown County State Bank, Farmers State Bank of Camp Point, Liberty Bank, and Midland Community Bank in Illinois, Mercantile Bank in Illinois and Missouri, and United Commonwealth Bank in Naples, Florida. To learn more about us and to visit all our banks online, visit [ucbbanks.com](http://ucbbanks.com).



FFA Vice President Angeleen Wesselmann, left, and Reporter Lyla Koch attended the 2026 Governmental Affairs Leadership Conference (GALC) hosted by Illinois Farm Bureau on February 17. From four sessions, they gained valuable insight and knowledge from the speakers: Chris Sununu, former Governor of New Hampshire; Emanuel "Chris" Welch, Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives; Don Harmon, President of the Illinois Senate; Anne Vogel, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 5 Administrator; Danny Munch, Economist, American Farm Bureau Federation; and Krista Swanson, Chief Economist, National Corn Growers Association.

## Mater Dei the Class of 2030 Registration

According to Mater Dei the Class of 2030 Registration Continues: Thursday, February 26, 6 p.m.

"We are excited to continue to register members of our Class of 2030 at our alternate registration on Thursday, February 26, at 6 p.m.!

At registration, which requires approximately 20 minutes, parents and students will meet with a teacher to discuss course recommendations and to select courses. Families may also obtain applications for scholarships and memorial grants."

A family who is unable to attend may contact Mrs. Maria Zurliene to schedule an individual appointment ([mzurliene@materdeiknights.org](mailto:mzurliene@materdeiknights.org) or 618-526-7216).

While we do not possess a registration deadline, the deadline for scholarship applications is May 1.

Applications for memorial grants are accepted on a continual basis. Families who are still exploring the Mater Dei difference may contact Mrs. Maria Zurliene to schedule a family tour or a shadow day ([mzurliene@materdeiknights.org](mailto:mzurliene@materdeiknights.org) or 618-526-7216).

Baseball Camp: Sunday, March 1, 12:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Our Baseball Knights look forward to hosting grade school students (grades 3 – 8) at their baseball camp on

Sunday, March 1, from 12 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.! The cost is \$40 for an individual camper or \$60 for two or more

campers from the same family. Detailed information is available on our website:

[www.materdeiknights.org/camp-baseball](http://www.materdeiknights.org/camp-baseball).

Winter Concert: Sunday, March 1, 6:00 p.m.

Enjoy performances by our concert band, wind and percussion chamber ensembles, and soloists at our winter concert on Sunday,

March 1, at 6:00 p.m., in the main gym.

### Nominations Sought for Christian Discipleship and Christian Service Awards

Ms. Colleen McDermott invites community members to submit nominations for the Christian Discipleship

Award, which is presented to one senior; and the Christian Service Awards, which are presented to one freshman, one sophomore, and one junior.

Created by the Mission Effectiveness Committee of the Mater Dei School Advisory Council, these awards recognize students for service to school, church, and community.

For a nomination form, contact Ms. Colleen McDermott ([cmcdermott@materdeiknights.org](mailto:cmcdermott@materdeiknights.org)), or visit [www.materdeiknights.org/faith/service](http://www.materdeiknights.org/faith/service) ("Service Awards" tab). Nominations will be accepted until March 31.

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State Farm Florida Insurance Company, Winter Haven, FL

## The New Illinois Liquor Control & Compliance Portal has Launched

The Illinois Liquor Control Commission is pleased to introduce its new Licensing & Compliance Portal, a modern, unified system designed to streamline application, renewal, and compliance management for licensees statewide.

As we begin implementation, licensees may notice temporary adjustments to workflows and processing timelines during the first 90 days. This transition period is a planned and important part of launching a new system of this scale. Throughout this phase, the ILCC will closely monitor performance, incorporate user feedback, and make targeted refinements to ensure the portal functions efficiently and effectively.

The new platform provides a more intuitive, user-friendly experience, clearer visibility into licensing requirements, and enhanced communication with ILCC staff. By consolidating multiple divisions into a single, purpose-built system designed specifically for the Illinois Liquor Control Commission, the ILCC is reducing administrative burden while promoting greater consistency, transparency, and accountability across licensing and compliance operations.

“This launch marks a significant milestone in the ILCC’s ongoing modernization efforts,” said Executive Director Lisa Gardner. “It reflects our continued commitment to responsible regulation, public safety, and improved accessibility for businesses across Illinois. We appreciate the patience and partnership of our licensees as we move through this transition together.”

Training resources, guidance materials, and technical support information are available at [ilcc.illinois.gov](http://ilcc.illinois.gov). The ILCC encourages licensees to provide feedback as they begin using the portal. Stakeholder input remains essential to helping us improve the system and better serve the industry.

## Andreas calls for Voter ID

### Clerks writes letter to senators, demanding they vote for SAVE Act and support ‘common-sense tools’ for election integrity

EDWARDSVILLE — In an effort to ensure fair elections and strengthen election integrity, Madison County Clerk is calling on the U.S. Senators who represent Illinois to support the SAVE Act.

The Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, also known as the SAVE Act, would require proof of citizenship to register to vote as well as presentation of an ID to cast a ballot.

Andreas has written letters to U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin and U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, urging them to support the measure. In the letters, Andreas said the SAVE Act includes “common-sense tools” for election integrity.

“This is not a partisan political issue—it is basic election security and sound administration,” Andreas stated in her letters. “Every day, my office works to maintain accurate voter rolls, verify eligibility, issue ballots, and train election judges. When identification standards are inconsistent or limited, verification becomes harder, records are more difficult to reconcile, and preventable errors are more likely. Clear ID rules and better verification tools reduce uncertainty up front instead of forcing corrections later.”

Andreas said polls consistently show that Americans overwhelm-



Madison County Clerk Linda A. Andreas

ingly support an ID requirement for voting.

A Pew Research Center poll found that 83 percent of Americans, regardless of political affiliation, support requiring all voters to show government-issued photo identification.

“Voter ID is not a barrier—it is a safeguard,” Andreas stated in her letters. “We require identification for routine transactions like banking and travel. Casting a ballot—one of the most important civic acts—should meet at least that same standard.”

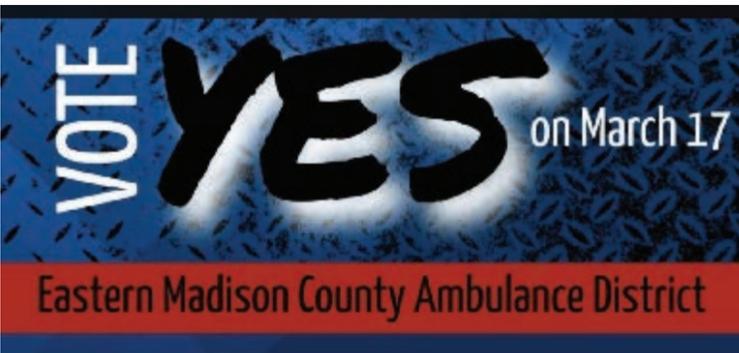
Election integrity has been a central focus for Andreas.

For example, in November, Andreas announced an initiative to

ensure that deceased residents are promptly and accurately removed from the county’s voter registration rolls.

The initiative was launched in collaboration with Coroner Nick Novacich, whose office upgraded its computer software and now can provide accurate and timely death records to the Clerk’s Office.

“There are multiple facets to election integrity, but it all starts with ensuring that the votes are cast by people who are, in fact, eligible to vote,” Andreas said. “Providing an identification card is a simple and effective way to safeguard our election security. I strongly support the SAVE Act and urge legislators to support it.”



### What is an “Emergency Services District”?

- An Emergency Services District (ESD) is a district formed by a community or communities to manage emergency services (ambulance) within the community. An ESD is a separate, certified taxing body.
- The name of the new district will be the “Eastern Madison County Ambulance Emergency Services District.”
- The model for the ESD has been successfully operating since December of 2004.

### Why is the merger needed?

- Rising costs
- The expense of medical equipment, ambulances, fuel, and maintenance is increasing rapidly.
- Staffing challenges
- There is a critical need for more qualified paramedics and EMTs to provide 24/7 coverage.
- Efficiency
- A merger aims to reduce administrative costs and improve the ability to offer fair compensation to attract qualified personnel.

### Impact of the Proposition

- Enhanced ability to attract and retain skilled personnel.
- Existing EMTs and paramedics from the current districts will continue to be employed by the new ESD.
- Responding ambulances will continue to be based at the Hamel and Highland-Pierron stations.
- Continued commitment to high-quality, reliable emergency medical services across all served communities.

### Funding and Governance

- Funding Shift
- Currently, services are funded by separate taxes in each of the districts.
- New Taxing Structure
- Once formed, the ESD will become the sole taxing district for these services and will take the place of previous separate levies.
- Levy Amount
- The expected initial levy amount will be 0.20%.



Alhambra / Grantfork / Hamel / Highland-Pierron / Marine / St. Jacob / St. Rose



### Mater Dei Boys Basketball

Beckett Tucker, left, Will Schulte, Dane Peppenhorst, Austin Koerkenmeier, and Connor Kienlen, all members of the Mater Dei Class of 2034, were among the sixty Junior Knights introduced at the Knights Basketball game on February 3. This year’s 169 Junior Knights represent the classes of 2034 to 2043

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TUES SENIOR FEB 10

227 Joe Missey

536 Joe Missey

WED MEN FEB 11

300 Chad Bartoszkiewicz

757 Chad Bartoszkiewicz

WOMENS THURS FEB 12

211 Shelly Peck

546 Shelly Peck

TUES SENIOR FEB 17

177 Melissa Taylor

503 Melissa Taylor

211 Moe Kocher

544 Bill Gass

WED MENS FEB 18

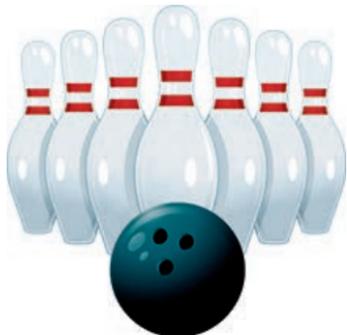
267 Josh Missey

671 Tim Rutz

THURS WOMENS FEB 19

210 Carol Porter

563 Lisa Zobrist



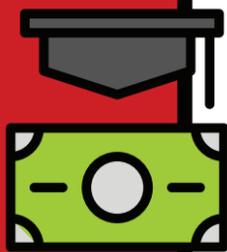
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## Concordia Nebraska announces Direct Admission Program for LCMS high school graduates

SEWARD, NE - Concordia University, Nebraska and the Concordia University System (CUS) recently announced a new Direct Admission Program for students who are graduating from a Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (LCMS) high school. The program is effective immediately and available for current class of 2026 seniors considering fall 2026 enrollment.

"It is moments like these when I am so grateful for the partnership in the Gospel that exists among other schools in the Concordia University System," said Concordia Nebraska President and Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Director of Academic Ventures Dr. Bernard Bull. "This is an inspiring example of how we can come together to accomplish something that can be a great blessing to students across the country."

In addition to Concordia Nebraska, other participating universities include Concordia University Chicago, Concordia University St. Paul and Concordia University Wisconsin.

"To all our LCMS high school students, I would like to say, CUS universities are your universities. Direct Admit is a great way for you to continue your studies at a university committed to the Lutheran confession of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," said Concordia University System President Rev. Dr. Jamison Hardy. "If you are considering college, consider attending a Concordia University System school. Direct Admit makes your move to college easier than ever."

Inquiries and questions related to the direct admit program may be directed to Concordia Nebraska Associate Vice President of Undergraduate Admissions Aaron Roberts at aaron.roberts@cune.edu. Further information on Concordia Nebraska admission timelines, campus visits and financial aid is available at cune.edu.

*About Concordia University, Nebraska*  
 Concordia University, Nebraska, founded in 1894, is a fully accredited, coeducational university of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod located in Seward, Nebraska, which currently serves more than 1,700 students. Concordia offers more than 100 undergraduate, graduate and professional programs in an excellent academic and Christ-centered community that equips men and women for lives of learning, service and leadership in the church and world. For more information, visit cune.edu.

## OSF St. Anthony's Health Center Expands Heart Health Screenings with CT Cardiac Calcium Test

ALTON - OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony's Health Center is now offering a CT cardiac calcium scoring test. This non-invasive test, conducted through OSF Saint Anthony's Imaging Services helps doctors gain a clearer picture of a patient's overall heart health.

Patients with one or more risk factors are encouraged to undergo this test every three to five years if the initial score is zero or very low. Risk factors include diabetes, high blood pressure (hypertension), obesity, unhealthy cholesterol levels, a family history of heart disease, lack of physical activity, and tobacco use or exposure to tobacco smoke.

"February is Heart Month, making it a great time to remind our loved ones about the risks of heart disease, the nation's leading cause of death," said Fred Sanscoucie, radiology director at OSF Saint Anthony's. "This simple screening can be an important addition to a patient's overall health plan, as it may help prevent a heart attack or provide doctors with a roadmap for preventing heart disease."

Scheduling the test is easy with two options: with a physician's order or by contacting Scheduling directly at (618)-474-4606. The scan takes approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The cost of the exam is \$117 and is typically not covered by insurance. All scans are reviewed by an OSF radiologist. For additional information, call (618)-474-4606 or visit osfsaintanthonys.org.

About OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony's Health Center: A 49-bed Rural Health designated acute care hospital in Alton, Illinois, OSF Saint Anthony's serves the residents of Madison, Jersey and Macoupin counties. It is home to OSF Moeller Cancer Center, which provides the latest diagnostic tools and treatment for patients in a relaxing environment. OSF Saint Anthony's also provides 24-hour access to a physician-staffed emergency department, in addition to cardiovascular, neurology, pulmonology, surgical, rehabilitation services and more. OSF Saint Anthony's is fully accredited by the Joint Commission for Healthcare Facilities, American College of Surgeons' Commission on Cancer, American College of Radiology, American Heart Association, IDPH and TJC Primary Stroke Center. OSF Saint Anthony's is part of OSF HealthCare - an

integrated health system with 17 hospitals in Illinois and Michigan and robust Innovation and Digital Health divisions that provide access to specialty care and remote monitoring, helping people receive the care they need close to home. OSF HealthCare is operated by The Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Francis.

*OSF HealthCare is an integrated health system founded by The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis and headquartered in Peoria, Illinois. The system includes 18 inpatient facilities encompassing 16 licensed hospitals, two of which operate dual*

*campuses in separate communities. Among these hospitals, 10 are acute care facilities, five are critical access hospitals and one is a continuing care facility. OSF has 2,141 licensed beds throughout Illinois and Michigan and employs more than 27,000 Mission Partners across 170+ locations. These include OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois, the third largest pediatric hospital in the state, and OSF OnCall, its digital health operating entity that offers hospital-at-home care. In addition, OSF operates two colleges of nursing; OSF Home Care Services, an extensive network of*

*home health and hospice services; Pointcore, Inc., which is composed of health care-related businesses; and OSF HealthCare Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the organization. Advances in health care transformation take place through OSF Innovation as well as OSF Ventures, which provides investment capital for promising health care innovation startups.*

*OSF HealthCare has been recognized by Fortune as one of the most innovative companies in the country and by Forbes as one of America's Best Employers for Healthcare Professionals. Learn more at osfhealthcare.org.*

# HCWC Hosting Breakfast With The Easter Bunny on March 28

HIGHLAND - The Highland Civic Woman's Club will host its annual "Breakfast with the Easter Bunny and Chris Cakes" on Saturday, March 28, from 8 to 11:30 a.m. at the Evangelical United Church of Christ, 2520 Poplar Street in Highland.

The family-friendly event

features an all-you-can-eat pancake breakfast prepared by Chris Cakes, along with basket raffles, children's crafts, live bunnies, and photo opportunities with the Easter Bunny.

Tickets are \$14 in advance or \$15 at the door. Children under age one are admitted free.

Tickets may be purchased online or at The Chocolate Affair. Sponsorship opportunities remain available, and organizers encourage local businesses to call 618-882-8317 for details.

Proceeds support the Highland Civic Woman's Club and its community service projects.

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## University of Mississippi Announces Fall 2025 Dean's Honor Roll

UNIVERSITY, MS -- The University of Mississippi announced students named to the Fall 2025 Honor Roll lists, including Dean's Honor Roll.

Daniel Munie, of Collinsville, IL, in the B.B.A. in Management program, is on the Dean's Honor Roll, which is reserved for stu-

dents who earn a semester GPA of 3.50-3.74.

Julia Stobie, of Edwardsville, IL, in the B.B.A. in Marketing program, is on the Dean's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.50-3.74.

Makenzie McFarlin, of Glen Carbon, IL, in the B.A. in Biological Science program, is on the Dean's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.50-3.74.

Caleb Butler, of Bethalto, IL, in the B.A. in Psychology program, is on the Dean's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.50-3.74.

Landon Mahat, of Maryville, IL, in the B.A. in Sport Management program, is on the Dean's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.50-3.74.

Macee Shemwell, of Edwardsville, IL, in the B.A. in Psychology

program, is on the Dean's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.50-3.74.

John Miller, of Edwardsville, IL, in the B.A. in Biochemistry program, is on the Dean's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.50-3.74.

To be eligible for honor roll designation, a student must have completed at least 12 graded hours

for the semester and may not be on academic probation during the semester.

The University of Mississippi, affectionately known as Ole Miss, is the state's flagship university. Included in the elite group of R1: Doctoral Universities - Highest Research Activity by the Carnegie Classification, it has a long history of producing leaders in public service, academics and business.

## Karen Boulanger Joins K&L as Director of Operations

HIGHLAND - Karen Boulanger is the new Director of Operations at Korte & Luitjohan Contractors (K&L). Following a lengthy career at Ameren, Boulanger has joined her family's business.

She is the daughter of the late Cyril "Pete" Korte, founder of K&L.

Boulanger grew up around the company, which made her familiar with some aspects.

"For many years, I observed K&L from the sidelines. Immediate and extended family, as well as many dedicated employees continued what Dad started and have grown the company into an organization that I am excited to be a part of."

She brings extensive experience in performance management, safety, and human resources to K&L.

Initially brought in to implement Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS) at the company, her role now includes overseeing human resources, safety, and quality assurance/quality control. Boulanger has infused a fresh perspective to the 68-year-old construction firm.

Gregg Korte, K&L President, is very pleased Karen agreed to join Korte & Luitjohan following her retirement from Ameren.

"Having watched what she accomplished throughout her career there, I had a strong sense of the value she would bring to our organization," Korte explained.

He described Karen as "a true visionary, a strong leader, an effective diplomat, and a proven driver of results." He feels K&L is "unquestionably a better place with her on our team."

Korte talked about the timing of his sister's joining the company. "Given that we are roughly ten years apart in age, the timing works well for everyone involved. As Celeste Korte, Ken Toennies, and I begin planning our own retirements, Karen's increasing presence and involvement with the rest of our leadership team provides both continuity and confidence for the future."

Founded in 1958, Korte & Luitjohan Contractors, Inc. is a design-build, construction management, general contractor company based in Highland, Illinois.

## VA moves to improve dental care access

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has released a request for proposals for a new dental care administrator to operate the department's next generation network of community care dental providers.

The goal is to contract with a vendor that will support the department in building and maintaining a robust national network of licensed dental providers and practitioners. The network will include general and specialty dental care, preventive dental services, and pharmacy support.

Through this new contract, VA aims to improve and standardize dental care delivery, ensuring Veterans receive the preventive and restorative dental services they need to maintain their health.

VA's community care program enables Veterans to access health care from non-VA medical providers at the department's expense. Community care has been an integral part of caring for Veterans since the World War II era. In 2018, President Trump enshrined this right for Veterans by signing the bipartisan MISSION Act. Today, about 40% of all VA care is provided through community care.

Of the nearly nine million Veterans enrolled in VA health care, approximately 26% are eligible for dental care. In fiscal year 2025 alone, 888,051 Veterans received dental care through VA, with more than 3.5 million dental procedures delivered through community care.



## Band – Alumni Night

The Mater Dei Pep Band Alumni Night was a family affair for the Litekens – Brad '05, Melissa '04, and their son Ethan '29! The staff and students thank all the alumni who brought both their music skills and their energy back to the stage during the Knights Basketball game on February 3!

## Marine Firefighters' Auxiliary Sets March 29 Easter Egg Hunt at Fireman's Park

Marine families will gather later this month for a community Easter tradition as the Marine Firefighters' Auxiliary hosts its annual Easter Egg Hunt on Sunday, March 29, 2026, at 1 p.m. at Marine Fireman's Park.

The free event is open to children ages 0 to 8, with egg-hunt areas divided by age group to keep the search fair and fun for all participants. Families are encouraged to arrive a few minutes early to allow children time to line up before the whistle starts the hunt.

A rain date has been set for Saturday, April 4, 2026, at the same time and location.

The Auxiliary expressed appreciation to local businesses and organizations for their donations,

which help supply eggs, prizes, and support for the event each year. Organizers say the com-

munity's generosity continues to make the hunt one of Marine's most popular spring gatherings.

The Easter Egg Hunt is open to all area families,

and volunteers will be on hand to assist children and ensure a safe, enjoyable afternoon at the park.



# OBITUARIES, FAMILY, TRIBUTES

## HIGHLAND

### Larry E. "Grumpy" Michael

Larry E. "Grumpy" Michael, 89, of Highland, IL, passed away on Thursday, February 26, 2026, at home, surrounded by family.



He was born on February 1, 1937, in Napoleon, OH, to Guy and Adeline (nee Floehr) Michael. On March 8, 1958, he married Frances Tift in Angola, IN.

Larry moved to Highland with his wife, Frances, in December of 1974, from Reading, MI. He served in the United States Army and was a member of the Reading American Legion and the St. Jacob American Legion. Larry was an over the road trucker and all-around handyman. He liked to take things apart and rebuild them, fix cars, go salmon fishing at Lake Huron and in Oscoda, MI, and in his younger years, he raced stock cars. Years ago, he owned a race car that won many races at Butler Motor Speedway in Quincy, MI. Larry was a big-hearted softie who loved to agitate and poke fun at his grandkids and great grandkids. He will be dearly missed.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Guy and Adeline Michael; father and mother-in-law, Roswell and Hazel Tift; grandson, Ryan Junker; sister, Hope Card; stepbrother, Marlyn Moon; brothers and sisters-in-law, Evelyn Michael, Roger Card, Roger Kaufmann, Dean Tift, Edward Smith, Hilda Smith, and Joyce Tift.

Larry is survived by his wife of 68 years, Frances Michael, Highland, IL; children, Danny (Sara) Michael, Reading, MI, Carol (Mark) Junker, Highland, IL, and Diana (James) Williams, Albers, IL; grandchildren, Michael (Megan) Junker, Jared (Amy) Gilomen, and Amanda (Mike) Tobin; great grandchildren, Mikaela, Mabrie, Madden, Merrick, Myles, and Maisie Junker, Mason Junker-Schrumpf, Fletcher Tobin, Avery, Kylee, and Carly Gilomen; siblings, Ladd Michael, Faith Kaufmann, and Lillian (Ken) Lee; sister-in-law, Judy Moon; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Memorial donations may be made to Keystone Cemetery in St. Jacob, IL.

Memorial Visitation: Sunday, March 1, 2026, from 4:00 to 7:00 pm, at Meridith Funeral Home, Highland, IL

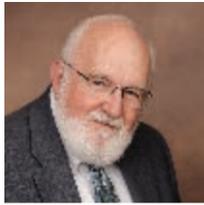
A memorial graveside service will be held in Michigan at a later date.

Meridith Funeral Home, Highland, IL

## MAEYSTOWN, IL

### Rev. Kenneth A. Knobloch

Rev. Kenneth A. Knobloch, 90, of Maestown, IL, died March 3, 2026, in Sparta, IL. Born August 5th, 1935,



Ken grew up in Maestown, IL, and then attended Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, majoring in sociology. His deep conviction of God's love and grace for all led him to pursue ministry in the United Church of Christ, and he was ordained in 1964.

It was around this time that he met Jean Dauderman through his sister Marian Knobloch. They married on September 26, 1964, and their family grew as children Leah, Deb and Jon arrived.

Ken lived gracefully, that is, reflecting the grace of God with his gentle nature and omnipresent smile. Conveying the love of God was the motivation underlying all of his ministry. He served congregations at Friedens United Church of Christ in Irvington, IL, and St. Peter UCC in Red Bud, IL, where his family lived for many years. He also gave his time and talents to numerous committees within the Illinois South Conference. In addition to being a minister, he taught himself to play both piano and organ, ultimately serving as the organist for the Illinois South Conference's annual meetings. He also loved singing—he sang with the Belleville Philharmonic Choir and was often invited to sing The Lord's Prayer at weddings.

Ken's creativity emerged in his many avocations. He believed that if there was something he wanted to do, he could learn how to do it. He painted, worked with wood, and even designed his family's home in Maestown. His green thumb led him to become a Master Gardener, and he especially enjoyed

growing and propagating orchids and poinsettias. In the kitchen he is remembered for his homemade egg rolls and the traditional German meals he prepared for family and friends.

In addition to his many pursuits, Ken was a member of the Maestown Historical Preservation Society.

Ken will be remembered not only for the many roles he embraced—minister, musician, gardener, woodworker, chef—but also for the way he lived: with intention, kindness, and a deep appreciation of God's presence in the many beauties of life.

He is survived by his wife, Jean, his children Leah (Tim) Ziegler, Deb (Dieter) Gum and Jon (Amanda) Knobloch, grandchildren Taylor (Caleb) Hembree, Trent Knobloch, Tyler and John Ziegler and, great grandson Elijah James Hembree, and a wide circle of friends, colleagues, and community members who will miss him dearly.

He is preceded in death by his parents Albert C. and Virginia M.C. (nee Leber) Knobloch; and sister Marian V. Knobloch.

As an expression of sympathy, the family prefers memorial contributions to:

DuBois Center, St. Paul UCC - Waterloo, St. John UCC - Maestown, Maple Creek Hospice - Sparta, or Family's choice

Visitation:  
3 PM to 8 PM Friday, March 13, 2026 at Quernheim Funeral Home in Waterloo, IL

9 AM to 10 AM Saturday, March 14, 2026 at St. Paul United Church of Christ in Waterloo, IL

Funeral Service:  
10 AM Saturday, March 14, 2026 at St. Paul United Church of Christ in Waterloo, IL

Rev. Kyle Timmons and Pastor Patrick Poole officiating

Interment will follow at St. John Cemetery in Maestown, IL.

## BETHALTO

### Gerald E. Bourland

Gerald E. Bourland, 87, of Bethalto, passed away on Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at his home surrounded by his family.



He was born in Cottage Hills, on October 7, 1938, the son of Silas and Verble (Bilderback) Bourland. Gerald married Joan E. Bria on June 24, 1960, at Bethalto United Methodist Church. She survives.

Gerald was an accountant at Laclede Steel for 44 years until his retirement.

He then served as a consultant at Alton Steel for several years.

He was a member at Zion Lutheran Church in Bethalto where he was on the building committee and very active on the school board as well as the Missions board.

He was also a member and past president of Bethalto Rotary Club, a member of the Bethalto Village Board of Trustees for 47 years, and the Steel Credit Association.

He enjoyed mowing the grass and caring for his yard, golfing and golf trips, and washing his cars.

During the winters, Gerald and Joan were Snow Birds and traveled to Florida for 15 years. He was always mild mannered and even tempered.

Most of all, he loved spending time with his friends and family.

Along with his wife, Joan, he is survived by his children, Jerilyn (Larry) Hawkins of Bethalto and Todd (Amy) Bourland of Elizabethton, TN; 6 grandchildren,

Tyler (Kelsey) Hawkins, Nathan (Sara) Hawkins, Elizabeth (Timothy) Howald, Rachel (Justin) Sapp, Emmeline Bourland, and Easter Anna Bourland; and 8 great-grandchildren, Kaden, Jackson, Vada, Ellie, Miriam, Jace, Nolan, and Gideon.

He was preceded in death by his parents; and 4 siblings, Evelyn Schoppet, Robert Bourland, Dorothy Myer, and Donald Bourland.

Visitation will be held on Saturday, March 7, 2026, from 9:30 am until time of service at 11 am, at Zion Lutheran Church in Bethalto. Pastor Kale Hanson and Pastor Brandon Metcalf will officiate. Burial will follow at Rose Lawn Memory Gardens.

Memorials are suggested to Zion Lutheran School.

Online condolences and guestbook may be found at [www.eliaskallalandschaaf.com](http://www.eliaskallalandschaaf.com).

## Mid-State Tractor Club To Meet March 11

The Mid-State Antique Tractor Collectors Club will meet at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, March 11 at Maverick Steaks and Spirits restaurant in Litchfield. Attendees are asked to arrive early to enjoy dinner prior to the 7 p.m. meeting.

A program of interest will be presented following the meeting. The collectors' club invites anyone interested in antique tractors or old farm-related items to attend the monthly meetings. There are always interesting discussions about the old tractors and equipment that collectors collect.

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month through April 2026. The club takes the summer months off for tractor shows and will begin meeting again in November 2027. All are welcome.

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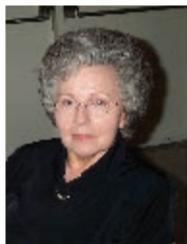
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**HIGHLAND**

**Delores M. Rinderer**

Delores M. Rinderer, 91, of Highland, IL, passed away on Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at Aviston Countryside Manor in Aviston, IL.

She was born on January 18, 1935, in Highland, IL, to Adolph and Gertrude (nee Schwarz) Daiber.



Delores was born and raised in Highland, IL, and worked on the family farm her whole life. She would always make sandwiches or bake pies for the ones working out in the fields or help get the pickup truck wherever it needed to be. Delores was a member of St. Paul Catholic Church in Highland, the Farm Bureau, and did a lot for HIS Kids Cancer Support. She enjoyed reading the local news and dancing when she could. Delores was very kind and caring, always willing to help anyone with anything. She will be dearly missed by all who knew her.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Adolph and Gertrude Daiber; brother, Orville Daiber; sister-in-law, Delores Daiber; and brother-in-law, Earl Weis.

Delores is survived by her daughter, Yevon (Elmer) Eilers, Highland, IL; sister, Marie Weis; nieces and nephews, Wayne (Connie) Weis, Rozanne (Brad) Steinkoenig, Joan Weis, Gary (Becky) Weis, Connie (Cary) Brown, Sharon (Dan) Dickman, Dennis (Lori) Daiber, and Judy (Kevin) Brendel; multiple great nieces and great nephews.

Memorial donations can be made to the St. Paul Education Foundation or to HIS Kids.

Visitation: Monday, March 9, 2026, from 4:00 to 8:00 pm, at Meridith Funeral Home, Highland, IL, and Tuesday, March 10, 2026, from 9:00 to 10:15 am, at St. Paul Catholic Church, Highland, IL

Mass of Christian Burial: Tuesday, March 10, 2026, 10:30 am, at St. Paul Catholic Church, Highland, IL

Clergy: Fr. Pat Jakel

Interment: St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery, Highland, IL

Meridith Funeral Home, Highland, IL

**BREESE**

**Donald F. "Donny" Ripperda**

OBIT: Donald F. "Donny" Ripperda, age 69, of Breese, and formerly of Aviston, passed



away peacefully at his home on Sunday, February 22, 2026 surrounded by family. He was born November 10, 1956, in Breese, a son of the late Joseph and Virginia (nee Wolters) Ripperda.

Donny is survived by his siblings, Charles (Tina) Ripperda, Theresa Richter, Kenneth (Karen) Ripperda, Karen (Jim) Astroth, Beverly Ripperda, Lisa (Scott) Schuette, and Pamela Powell; and numerous nieces, nephews, great-nieces, and great-nephews.

Donny was preceded in death by his parents; brother and sister twins in infancy, Mary and Gary Ripperda; and brother-in-law, Mike Richter.

Donny graduated from Westclin High School in 1975. He formerly worked at Hardee's in Breese for many years, where he served as a custodian and assisted with unloading delivery trucks. He was a faithful member of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Aviston.

Donny found joy in life's simple pleasures. He could often be seen riding his bicycle around town and especially looked forward to his annual trip with his family to the St. Louis Zoo and the Centralia Balloon Festival. He also enjoyed playing bingo, taking occasional trips to Branson, and had extraordinary math skills.

Funeral Mass of Christian Burial will be Saturday, February 28, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Aviston with Fr. Von Deeke presiding. Interment will follow at St. Francis Cemetery.

Visitation will be Saturday, February 28, 2026, from 8:30 - 10:45 a.m. at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Aviston.

In lieu of flowers, plants, and other gifts, memorials may be made to Community Link or St. Francis Cemetery and will be received at the visitation or by mail at Moss Funeral Home, 535 N 5th St. Breese, IL 62230, who is serving the family.

Expressions of sympathy can be sent to the family at [www.mossfuneralhome.com](http://www.mossfuneralhome.com)

**HIGHLAND**

**Janice M. Straeter**

Janice M. Straeter, 74, of Highland, IL, passed away on Thursday, February 19, 2026, at home, surrounded by family.



She was born on June 22, 1951, in Breese, IL, to Edmund and Dolores (nee Beckmann) Wellen. On May 7, 1971, she married Virgil Straeter in Aviston, IL.

Janice graduated from Mater Dei High School in 1969, then got her certificate from Sanford Business College. She worked in the Federal Building in St. Louis until the fall of 1973. She then worked for Virgil's business in administration and as a cashier for the auction business. Janice was a member of St. Paul Catholic Church in Highland and followed her faith meticulously, praying the rosary often. She enjoyed cooking and baking, being known for her cherry pie, cream puffs, and helping her late mother, Delores, make strawberry jelly. A sweet, loving, family oriented woman, Janice will be dearly missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing her.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Edmund and Dolores Wellen; brothers-in-law, Jim Straeter, Joseph Urzi, and Frank Straeter; and nephew, Michael Wellen.

Janice is survived by her husband of almost 55 years, Virgil Straeter; children, Renee Marie (Mark) Steinmann and Eli Virgil (Janell) Straeter; grandchildren, Michaela Steinmann, Jacob Steinmann, and Rhett Straeter; brother, Jim (Diane) Wellen; brothers and sisters-in-law, Margaret (Mike) Detmer, Eileen (Gary) Kerr, Melinda Straeter, Diane Urzi, Vicki Glauber, and Loreine (Ross) Campbell; numerous nieces, nephews, extended family members, and friends.

Memorial donations may be made to St. Paul Catholic School or HIS Kids, Inc.

Memorial Visitation: Saturday, February 28, 2026, from 8:30 to 10:15 am, at St. Paul Catholic Church, Highland, IL

Mass of Christian Burial: Saturday, February 28, 2026, 10:30 am, at St. Paul Catholic Church, Highland, IL. Meridith Funeral Home, Highland, IL

**O'FALLON, ILL**

**Karen Loyet Kuhl**

God's secret shopper reviews are in: Karen Kuhl's life merits a 5-star rating.



Karen Loyet Kuhl, 73, of O'Fallon, Ill., passed away Friday, Feb. 27, 2026 in BJC Hospice at Memorial Hospital in Shiloh, Ill., after a long struggle with pulmonary fibrosis.

If you know Karen, you love Karen. And only you know how she checked all of your personal boxes as a loving mother, grandmother, friend, co-worker or just someone lucky enough to meet her and experience her kindness along her journey.

Karen was born on November 4, 1952, in East St. Louis, Ill., the daughter of the late Julia (née Abert) and Kenneth Leonard Loyet. Karen was preceded in death by her sister Lynn Loyet.

Karen is survived by her husband Patrick Kuhl of O'Fallon, Ill.; her brother Steve (Connie) Loyet of Venice, Florida; her sons Nathan (Tomomi Sawada) of Ballwin, Mo.; and Adam (Katie) Kuhl of Oakville, Mo.; and three grandchildren Jacob Kenneth Kuhl, Samuel Blake Kuhl and Joseph Patrick Kuhl.

Karen graduated from Triad High School in 1970, and from St. John's School of Nursing in Springfield in 1973 as a Registered Nurse. Karen married Patrick Kuhl on July 6, 1973, at St. Paul Catholic Church in Highland, Ill. She worked as an RN at hospitals in Corpus Christi and Austin, Texas, for 11 years. Karen put her career on hold to raise her family and moved to O'Fallon, Illinois in 1984. Karen later worked for years as a nurse for Heartland Hospice.

After responding to a newspaper ad for a secret shopper to rate a local fast-food restaurant, Karen took on more and more challenging assignments to turn secret shopping into a career. Karen eventually trav-

eled around the United States and internationally, writing critiques and reviews of hotels, restaurants and casinos.

Most of all, Karen cherished her family. Her sons and their families considered her their hero. Karen loved their visits, especially their coming to her house every Sunday for meals, which she cooked with love. Karen loved to see and interact with her grandchildren. Karen was a great cook and frequently made meals for neighbors and friends. She liked to play games and entertain friends, and became fast friends with everyone she met. As a nurse, Karen was compassionate and caring. Co-workers and many patients became friends for life. Karen loved to travel, which she did often for her career as a secret shopper. Some of her best times were taking Caribbean cruises with her family and her brother and sister-in-law. She traveled abroad several times with her dear friend, Melanie Steen.

Karen will be deeply missed by her family and remembered with love and gratitude. Memorials may be made to the Children's Shriners Hospital of St. Louis or to the charity of the donors' choosing.

Visitation will be held at Wolfersberger Funeral Home, 102 West Washington Street O'Fallon, Ill., on Wednesday, March 4, 2026 from 4 - 7pm.

The Nurses Honor Guard of St. Louis will honor Karen at 10:45 am and a Memorial Mass will begin at 11 am, Thursday, March 5, 2026 at St. Clare Catholic Church, 1411 Cross Street, O'Fallon, Ill, with Rev. James Deiters presiding and Rev. Bill McGhee concelebrating. Family will receive friends 1 hour prior to mass at church. Following Mass, Karen will be laid to rest at St. John the Baptist Catholic Cemetery in Blackjack, Illinois. A remembrance lunch will follow at church.

Online condolences may be shared at [www.wfh-ofallon.com](http://www.wfh-ofallon.com). Wolfersberger Funeral Home is entrusted with arrangements.



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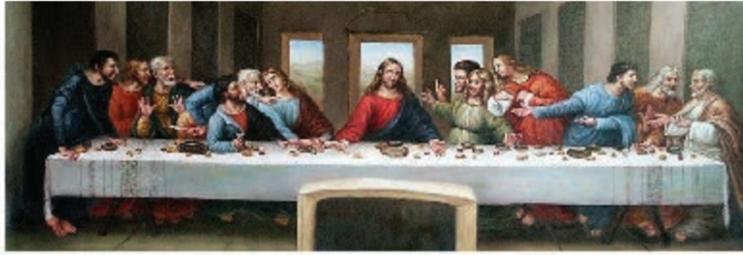


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**When: 7:30p.m. Palm Sunday, March 29 (potluck supper at 6:30 p.m.)**

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**HI TOP SCORES**

TUES SENIOR FEB 22  
 203 Melissa Taylor  
 493 Melissa Taylor  
 217 Moe Kocher  
 593 Moe Kocher

WED MEN FEB 23  
 269 Lane Messerli  
 731 Dan Simmons

WOMENS THURS FEB 24  
 233 Shelly Peck  
 673 Shelly Peck

**Highland Students on President's List at Mississippi State**

MISSISSIPPI STATE, MS - Students on the President's List at Mississippi State achieved a 3.80 or better GPA, based on a 4.0 scale, while completing at least 12 semester hours of coursework with no incomplete grades or grades lower than a C.  
 The following local students attained this honor:  
 Olivia Goodman, of Bethalto, IL  
 Karpenter Farmer, of Edwardsville, IL  
 Carter Holthaus, of Highland, IL  
 Taylor Stewart, of Highland, IL

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*For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11*



Bulldog boys bowling team at the Bartelso Tournament with Coach Schruppf.

## Bulldog Bowlers Sweep Alton, Win Bartelso Tournament, and Close Home Slate Strong

HIGHLAND - The Bulldog bowling teams traveled to Alton for a match against the Redbirds at Bowl Haven on Monday, February 24. The varsity and jv girls plus the jv boys team all got 5-0 wins for the day. Weston Maine bowled a 215 for the boys team for the high game for the day.

On Tuesday the Bulldog boys bowling team traveled to Bartelso for a tournament and came away with some hardware. The Bulldogs captured the team title and Emmett Ripperda led the way for the Bulldogs by placing first with a 577 series, Carter Mettler finished 3rd with a 565 series and Hayden Gvillo finished in 6th place with a 507 series.

The Bulldog bowlers hosted

Collinsville on Thursday, February 26 in their last home match and the 8th grade bowlers were recognized. The Bulldog varsity and jv boys each won three out of five. The wins raise the record for the varsity to 4-3 and the jv boys to 6-1. High games for the day were from Carter Mettler who rolled a 215 while Hayden Gvillo rolled a 205. The Lady Bulldog varsity and jv teams both won 5-0. The varsity girls raise their record to 6-1 while the jv girls raise their record to 6-0 on the season.

The Lady Bulldog volleyball teams traveled to Hillsboro for a non-conference matchup on Wednesday, February 25.

The 7th grade lost a tough three set match to the Lady Dragons while the 8th grade lost in two

sets by identical scores of 26-24. On Thursday the ladies traveled to Smithton for another non-conference contest. The 7th grade lost in two sets while the 8th grade won in a hard fought three set match.

The 7th grade record stands at 8-14 going into the IESA Cahokia Regional where they will play Triad in a quarter final contest on Monday, March 2.

The 8th grade raised their season record to 11-11 on the season and they will play in the IESA Triad Regional starting on Tuesday, March 10th against host Triad.

*By Matt Herndon, RAA  
Highland Middle School  
Athletic Director/  
Physical Education 6th-8th*



Shoal Creek Whitetails Unlimited is proud to have made a financial contribution in support of Madison County CAREE for Ag in the Classroom initiatives across local schools in Madison County.

## Immanuel UCC Serving Carry-Out Chicken Dinner on March 22

HAMEL - Immanuel United Church of Christ in Hamel will hold its Annual Chicken Dinner on Sunday, March 22, with carry-out meals served from 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the church campus on Staunton Road.



The menu includes fried chicken, mashed potatoes with gravy, green beans, slaw, applesauce, and dessert. Meals are priced at \$14.

The event also features a quilt raffle with prizes that include a handmade quilt, a television, and a \$50 gift card. A themed-basket raffle will be held as well, with tickets available for \$1 each or six for \$5.

Immanuel UCC is located 1½ miles south of Hamel. Additional information is available at the church office or on its website.

## Dr. Anastasia Dufner Brings Rural-Focused Care to HSHS Medical Group in Highland

HIGHLAND – HSHS Medical Group welcomes Anastasia Dufner, MD, a board-certified family medicine physician, to HSHS Medical Group Family and Internal Medicine at 12860 Troxler Ave., Suite 320, Highland.



Dr. Dufner provides full-spectrum primary care for patients of all ages and is committed to helping patients feel heard, informed and supported in their care decisions. Raised in a rural community, she values accessible, relationship-based care and the role family medicine plays in supporting small communities. Her approach emphasizes continuity of care across life stages, including preventive care, women's health and pediatrics, as well as inpatient and outpatient medicine.

Dr. Dufner offers a range of in-office services and procedures to support timely, convenient care. She completed the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine Family Medicine Residency Program in Springfield, Ill., and earned her medical degree from Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. She also holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Blackburn College in Carlinville, Ill., where she graduated summa cum laude.

To schedule an appointment with Dr. Dufner, visit hshs.org or call 618-651-2810. New HSHS Medical Group patients may call the HSHS Medical Group Patient Advocate at 844-520-8897 to help set up their first appointment.

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# Illinois Bill Proposes New Fees for Store Bags

The Pioneer Newspaper - By Bill Napper

Illinois lawmakers are looking at a new rule called House Bill 5112.

It was introduced on February 5, 2026, by State Representative Laura Faver Dias. The bill focuses on cutting down how many bags people use when they shop.



Starting January 1, 2027, shoppers would pay 10 cents for every carryout bag they use at a store. The fee would go up 5 cents each year until it reaches 25 cents per bag. If the state is not meeting its goals for reducing bag use, the fee could keep rising.

Stores would keep part of the money, and the rest would go to the state and local governments. The money would help pay for programs that protect the environment.

The bill also says that plastic bags could not be used for delivery orders starting in 2027. The state would have to report each year on how well the program is working.

Some bags would be exempt, including bags used for groceries bought with SNAP or other food-assistance programs.

If stores break the rules, they could face fines. Money from those fines would go into a state fund that helps manage waste.

The bill would take effect right away if it becomes law.

# Korte Recreation Center marked its 25th Anniversary full day of activities and prizes

HIGHLAND - A full day of activities, prizes, and community fun marked the 25th Anniversary for the Korte Rec Center on Friday, February 6.

The celebration featured fitness and wellness programs for all ages, along with two presentations from HSHS at 9 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

Both members and non-members joined in the festivities, taking part in special events such as Family Swim and the popular duck races, where participants cheered on their brightly colored ducks as they floated toward the finish line.

Guest visitors stopped by throughout the day, and attendance prizes and giveaways added to the excitement.

A food truck was on-site. Admission was free for KRC members, while non-members participated by paying the daily rate or by purchasing a special \$25 Family Day Pass.

Recreation center staff thanks the community and guests for helping them celebrate 25 years of providing recreation and fun.

For more information, the KRC team is available on line, via social media or at 618-651-1386.



## Dress Up

The KRC's 25th Anniversary celebration on Friday, Feb. 6 was filled with activities and the staff helped everyone get in the mood by dressing in costumes.

Photo by Bill Napper

## Glen Carbon Gardens Featured in 2-Day County Tour

Glen Carbon - Six private gardens in Glen Carbon will be open to the public June 12-13 for the Madison County Garden Tour, a fundraiser benefiting the Madison County Extension Education Foundation. The event is organized by University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners.

The tour runs Friday, June 12, from 4 to 8 p.m., and Saturday, June 13, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Visitors may explore the gardens at their own pace.

Tickets are \$15, with children 10 and under admitted free. The tour will also include a raffle featuring unique container gardens.

More information is available at (618) 344-4230 or online at <https://givebutter.com/MCEEF2026GardenTour>.

## Plant Bingo Returns April 11 in Edwardsville

EDWARDSVILLE - The Madison County Extension Education Foundation will host its annual Plant Bingo on Saturday, April 11, at the Farm Bureau Auditorium, 900 Hillsboro Avenue in Edwardsville. Doors open at 1 p.m., with games beginning at 1:30 p.m.

The event offers an afternoon of

lighthearted competition and the chance to win a variety of plants. A suggested donation of \$20 will be accepted at the door or online. Proceeds support University of Illinois Extension programs, including 4-H, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, and Nutrition Education.

More information is available at (618) 344-4230 or <https://givebutter.com/MCEEF2026Bingo>.

## Trivia Night Set for Feb. 28 in Edwardsville

EDWARDSVILLE - The Madison County Extension Education Foundation will host a com-

munity Trivia Night on Saturday, February 28, at the Farm Bureau Auditorium, 900 Hillsboro Avenue in Edwardsville. Doors will open at 5:30 p.m., with trivia beginning at 6 p.m.

Entry is \$20 per person or \$160 for a table of eight. The evening will feature eight rounds of trivia, a 50/50 raffle, and additional games. Water and soda will be available for purchase.

Proceeds support University of Illinois Extension programs, including 4-H, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, and Nutrition Education.

For more information, call 618-344-4230 or visit [www.givebutter.com/MCEEF2026Trivia](http://www.givebutter.com/MCEEF2026Trivia) (givebutter.com in Bing).



## Health Information

HSHS St. Joseph Hospital was well represented at the KRC's 25th Anniversary celebration on Friday, Feb. 6 with Stephanie Grant, left, Patricia Noe, and Tina Frank providing blood pressure checks, cardiac information, and health guidance for visitors from their booth on the second floor.

Photo by Bill Napper

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## 80's Rock 'N' Roll Bingo Set to Bring Neon Nostalgia to Highland

Highland residents are gearing up for a night of retro fun as HBCB hosts its 80's Rock 'N' Roll Bingo event on Saturday, March 7, at 2005 Lindenthal Avenue. The evening runs from 7 to 10 p.m., with doors opening at 6 p.m., giving guests plenty of time to settle in, grab a drink, and soak up the electric 1980s atmosphere.

The fundraiser blends classic bingo with the music and style of the decade, inviting participants to dress the part. Organizers encourage neon spandex, leg warmers, leather jackets, headbands, and the biggest Aquanet-styled hair attendees can muster. Prizes will be awarded for the best costume and table décor, adding a competitive twist to the festivities.

Guests may bring their own snacks, but outside beverages are not permitted. Drinks will be available for purchase throughout the night. Tickets can be secured online through the event's Zeffy link, and organizers recommend early registration due to strong community interest.

For questions or additional details, attendees can reach the event team at rocknrollbingo.hbc@gmail.com.

The night promises music, memories, and plenty of laughs—an upbeat community gathering that celebrates both the spirit of the 80s and Highland's tradition of lively local events.

## Madison County Historical Society Speaker Series Returns

The first MCHS Speaker Series of 2026 will be held on Sunday, February 8 at 2 p.m. at the Main Street Community Center in Edwardsville, Illinois. Wilbert Glasper will provide a program entitled "Are We on the Right Bus?" which will describe what it was like for Glasper and his brother, Allen, as they went through desegregation in the 1950s.

Even though his family did not move from their Madison, Illinois, home, the young Glasper boys were sent to three different schools in three years. Fortunately, they had each other, but it was a stressful time. They went from a school that was Black students only to a classroom where they were the only Black students.

Glasper is a life-long resident of Madison, Illinois. He is active in his community, serving on numerous boards including the Madison County Historical Society Board. Prior to his retirement in 2009, he was an electrician at Anheuser Busch. Glasper is also an award-winning musician who began playing saxophone at a young age.

The Speaker Series also offers a small used book sale before and after the program. These book sales focus on history and literature titles and are a fundraiser for MCHS.

MCHS Speaker Series programs are free and open to the public. The Main Street Community Center is located at 1003 N. Main St. in Edwardsville.

## Clinton County Retired Teachers to meet March 5

The next meeting of the Clinton County Retired Teachers Association is March 5, 2026 at the Trenton House Restaurant in Trenton, IL. The program speaker is Heather Calcara from the Illinois Attorney General's Outreach Services Department. She will be speaking about identity theft, common scams and tips to avoid such situations, as well as your consumer rights if you do find yourself a victim of some type of scam. The meeting starts at 11:30am. All retired teachers and guests are invited. Please call or text Rosemary Huelsmann by March 1, 2026 at 618-973-7875 if you plan to attend.

### 38th Annual Bishop's Mass & Dinner Sunday, March 22nd, 2026



Most Reverend Bishop  
Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

The Highland Knights of Columbus invite you to attend a Mass at St. Paul Church celebrated by Most Reverend Bishop Thomas John Paprocki on Sunday, March 22nd, 2026 at 10:30 AM. KC Members have been mailed an Invitation. Event registration information is also available in the literature rack at the main entrance to Trinity Hall.

Following the mass, a dinner and short program will begin at 12:00 PM at the Highland Knights of Columbus Hall for those who donate \$25.00 or more (per person). There is no donation required for members of the St. Paul OCIA class and their families.

This annual fundraiser provides direct financial support of our Seminarians, Newman Centers on College Campuses, and Local Pro-Life activities.

Knights of Columbus, Council 1580  
12454 IL Route 143, Highland, IL 62249  
618 654 9049



## North Main Street Water Main, Streetscape Improvements Continue

EDWARDSVILLE - A major improvement project to modernize and upgrade the infrastructure along a portion of North Main Street is continuing in downtown Edwardsville. The project will include the replacement of a more than 120-year-old water main, the addition of pedestrian-friendly safety and accessibility upgrades, enhanced streetscape features, road resurfacing and an overhaul of sewer lines.

**PROJECT STATUS:** Water main replacement is underway south of Hillsboro Avenue along North Main Street.

**PROJECT UPDATES:** Updates, contact information and more can be found about this improvement project on the City's website: [www.cityofedwardsville.com/cityprojects](http://www.cityofedwardsville.com/cityprojects)

**PROJECT SCOPE:** The North Main Street Water Main & Streetscape Project will entail at least \$4.87 million in improvements along approximately a quarter mile of North Main Street from just south of Vandalia Street to slightly north of Hillsboro Avenue. Later in the project, the water main will be upgraded in the 100 block of West Vandalia Street, just to the west of North Main Street.

**BUSINESSES OPEN:** The businesses within and near the construction zone are open and accessible. While parking is not possible along the North Main Street work zone, there is public parking and business access from the parking lot behind the businesses (between North Main and North Kansas streets).

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**Bring your own snacks, but no outside drinks allowed. Drinks will be available for purchase. Prizes for best costume and table decor!**

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[ROCKNROLLBINGO.HBCB@GMAIL.COM](mailto:ROCKNROLLBINGO.HBCB@GMAIL.COM)

Alton Mayor David Goins to Give Keynote

**LC to Host MLK 2026 Celebration: ‘From Vision to Success’**

GODFREY – Lewis and Clark Community College will host “I Have a Dream,” From Vision to Success, A Celebration of Martin Luther King Jr., at 12:30 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 4, in The Commons. The free, public event will honor the life, legacy, and vision of Dr.

Martin Luther King Jr., featuring a keynote address from Alton Mayor David Goins, along with a student keynote from Nicc Edwards, an LC student and 6-year veteran of the United States Marine Corps.

Goins, a proud Alton native, Alton High School graduate and former member of the Alton Police Department, was elected in 2021 as Alton’s first African American mayor.

Edwards was the founding president of the college’s chapter of the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) from August 2023 to August 2025. He currently works as a Promotions and Entertainment Supervisor at Horseshoe STL in the Marketing department, his field of study.

Attendees will also hear excerpts from Dr. King’s speeches, read by Lewis and Clark students, highlighting the continued relevance of his words and ideals.

Live entertainment will be provided by guest musicians Jared Hennings and Ralph Monroe. Heavy appetizers will be provided by Nicky G’s, allowing guests to enjoy food and fellowship during the event.

**Samantha Hangsleben has been named to Western New England University’s President’s List for the Fall 2025 semester.**

SPRINGFIELD, MA - Western New England University (WNE) is proud to announce that Samantha Hangsleben of Glen Carbon, IL has been named to the President’s List for the Fall 2025 semester. Hangsleben is one of nearly 600 students to achieve this mark of academic excellence. Students are named to the President’s List for achieving a semester grade point average of 3.80 or higher.

A WNE education provides career-span agility through a curriculum grounded in professional/experiential studies, enhanced by the liberal arts, and enriched by mentored research that equips graduates to adapt and succeed in the workplace of the future.

Western New England University (WNE) is a private, nationally ranked, comprehensive institution with a focus on preparing work-ready and world-ready graduates. Founded in 1919 in Springfield, Massachusetts as a division of Northeastern College, WNE’s 215-acre suburban campus serves more than 3,700 students, including over 2,500 full-time undergraduates. More than 47,000 alumni have earned degrees through its 90+ undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs at Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business, Engineering, and Pharmacy and Health Sciences, and School of Law. Students come from 39 U.S. states and territories and 23 countries. Of 45,104 living alumni, 30% remain within the region, residing in the four Western Massachusetts counties and northern Connecticut.

WNE is classified among nationally ranked universities in US News and World Report, and among the Top 100 Undergraduate Engineering programs, and in the Doctoral/Professional Universities category in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.

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[www.leapsoflove.org](http://www.leapsoflove.org)

# First Measles Case of 2026 Identified in Metro East Area

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is reporting this year’s first confirmed case of measles in the state in an adult residing in the Metro East area. The individual recently returned from travel out of state.

IDPH is working with local, state and federal health officials to investigate all potential locations where others may have been exposed to the individual while that person was infectious. One community location in Illinois has been identified so far: Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Collinsville. People attending church on February 8 between 8 a.m. and 12:15 p.m. were potentially exposed to measles.

The church has notified congregants of this exposure and provided guidance on how to protect themselves and their loved ones. For exposure locations where people can be individually identified, the local health department is notifying them directly. Additional potential exposure locations have been identified in other states.

Most people are vaccinated against measles routinely in childhood and are not at high risk of contracting the disease; two doses of the measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine are 97% effective in preventing measles. Most at risk are people who have not been vaccinated, including infants – initial measles vaccine is recommended at 12-15 months – or people who can’t get vaccinated because of other health concerns.

Anyone exposed and not fully vaccinated against measles should monitor themselves for a period of 21 days from the suspected date of

exposure. Individuals should stay alert for any signs and symptoms of measles such as rash, high fever, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes, and notify their local health department if they become symptomatic. If you are showing symptoms of measles and need medical attention, call ahead to your healthcare provider so appropriate precautions can be taken to prevent any further spread of the illness.

“This first reported case of measles in Illinois in 2026 is a reminder to our Illinois residents that this disease can be prevented with up-to-date vaccination,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “With almost a thousand cases in the US so far this year, the IDPH team has been preparing, working closely with local public health and health care partners on strategies to reduce spread and minimize outbreaks. IDPH is urging clinicians to consider a measles diagnosis in patients with consistent symptoms and alert their local health department immediately if they suspect a case.

“The key to preventing measles is the highly effective measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine. Two doses of measles vaccine are 97% effective in preventing measles,” said Dr. Vohra. “I recommend that our Illinois residents make sure that they and their family members are up to date on the MMR vaccine and all other age-appropriate immunizations.”

After exposure, measles symptoms can take from seven to 21 days to develop. Individuals who experience measles symptoms should contact a health care provider by phone or email BEFORE going

to a medical office or emergency department. It is important to share specifically that you have a concern that you may have measles so that appropriate precautions can be taken to prevent further spread of the illness.

IDPH advises people traveling internationally or to a U.S. state with a measles outbreak to confirm their vaccination in advance. Unvaccinated or under-vaccinated individuals should ideally receive their vaccine at least two weeks prior to

travel to an area with a high risk of measles. To find a nearby vaccination location, people can utilize the IDPH vaccine locator tool.

Health care providers are reminded to immediately contact their local health department to report any suspected cases of measles; the health department can assist providers with arranging for testing and additional steps as needed.

While this is the first confirmed case of measles in Illinois this year,

measles has been on the rise around the country, surging in 2025 to the highest level in decades. Measles had been considered largely eradicated from the U.S. since the year 2000, but that elimination status is now in jeopardy because of the nationwide surge in cases. Illinois saw a total of 14 cases statewide in 2025.

More information on the disease can be found on the IDPH website at Measles.

## Madison County Associate Judge Vernonica Armouti received Advocate Award For Excellence in Legal Advocacy

EDWARDSVILLE – Associate Judge Veronica Armouti received the Advocate Award for Excellence in legal advocacy at the inaugural Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis (BAMSL) Illinois Region Legal Leaders Awards held on January 8 th in O’Fallon, Illinois.

Beyond the courtroom, Judge Armouti is deeply engaged in the community. She supports local and pro bono organizations, serves on boards to share her legal expertise, and mentors students pursuing careers in law. Armouti was the first Illinois judge to complete the Harvard Law School Judicial Executive Leadership Program and was part of the National Judicial College delegation to the Judicial Renaissance II

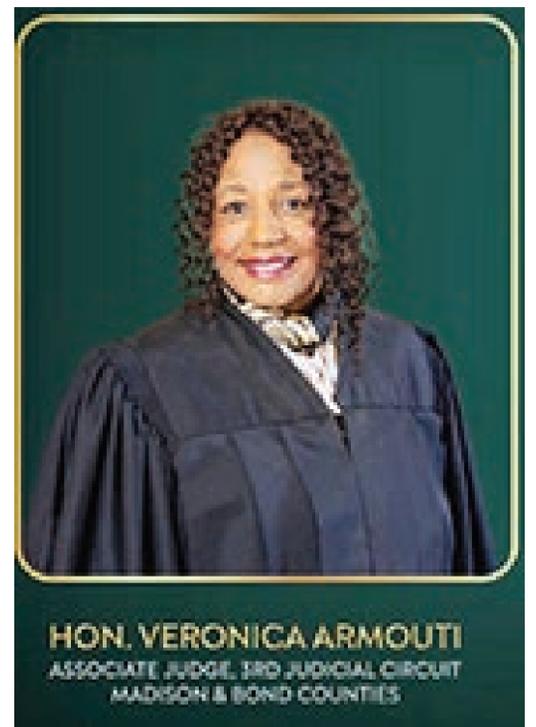
Conference hosted by the Judicial Research and Training Institute of the Supreme Court

of the Republic of South Korea. Armouti also teaches “Disabilities in the Courthouse,” a required continuing legal education course for judges at the statewide Education Conference and at the New Judge Orientation.

Judge Armouti was raised in downstate Illinois and credits her upbringing and early mentorship with shaping her lifelong commitment to public service.

After living abroad and in the Chicago suburbs, she returned to Southern Illinois to raise her family and build her legal career.

Serving the community that helped develop her, she says, was both a natural and deeply meaningful choice.



## 2025 continued a multi-year growth trend for OSF Saint Anthony’s and OSF Medical Group

ALTON – While national projections indicate a 9% increase for inpatient days (i.e. length of stay) for the next 10 years, along with a long-term trend of a 5% decline in inpatient admission volumes for hospitals, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony’s Health Center and OSF Medical Group continue to see patient volumes increase in outpatient services and office visits respectively - and not just from 2024 to 2025, but also since 2022.

“The year-over-year increases in our outpatient services are a clear indication that what we’re experiencing at OSF Saint Anthony’s is consistent with the rest of the health care industry around the country,” says Lisa Schepers, DNP, MBA, RN, NE-BC, interim president, OSF Saint Anthony’s. “National inpatient hospital utilization is projected to slightly rise over the next decade, driven by an aging population, with inpatient days expected to grow. However, in the long-term, industry research continues to show per capita admissions declining as care shifts to outpatient settings. We’ve

planned for this very scenario and are meeting the health care needs of our patients here in the Riverbend region.”

Greatest among the outpatient services volume increases that OSF Saint Anthony’s has realized is in outpatient surgeries. For example:

In 2025, outpatient surgery procedures rose 9% from 2024

Even greater is the 24.56% volume growth since 2022

“These increases encompass more than just appendectomies, gall bladder procedures, colonoscopies and other general surgery encounters,” says Schepers. “Our increased surgery volumes also include urology, podiatry, interventional pain management, ENT (ear, nose & throat), and orthopedics.”

Not far off from the growth pace for outpatient surgeries is the expanded utilization of outpatient services. Overall, 2025 brought increased volumes equaling 6.08%. Respective individual outpatient service growth ranged between 2%-7% for:

Imaging (X-ray, CT/MRI/PET, mammography, ultrasound)

OSF Rehabilitation (physical, speech and occupational therapies) Psychological Services Laboratory

The most significant growth in 2025 for OSF Saint Anthony’s outpatient services was in the hospital’s Wound Care Center of Excellence where patient volume increased by 79% - nearly double from 2024.

It is estimated that chronic wounds affect 6.7 million people in the U.S. and that number is rising, fueled by an aging population and increasing rates of conditions such as diabetes, obesity and the late effects of radiation therapy. If left untreated chronic wounds can lead to diminished quality of life and possibly amputation of the affected limb.

Likely candidates for treatment at the Wound Care Center of Excellence at OSF Saint Anthony’s are those suffering from (but not limited to):

- Arterial ulcers
- Burns
- Diabetic ulcers
- Neuropathic ulcers
- Pressure ulcers

- Radiation wounds
- Surgical wounds
- Traumatic wounds
- Vasculitis
- Venous ulcers
- Other chronic, non-healing wounds

A primary source for the growth in 2025 can be traced back to OSF Medical Group offices in Alton (primary and specialty care) and Godfrey (pediatrics, primary care, and OSF PromptCare in Godfrey).

Total provider office visits increased by 12.35% from 2022-2025, which amounts to an average 4.116% year-over-year increase annually during that time.

“Just in 2025, we added six (6) new providers to our medical staff roster,” says Isha McConkey, D.O., managing medical director, OSF Medical Group in Alton. “We’re constantly evaluating the health care landscape, and just by looking at the numbers going back to 2022, our growth shows that we’re meeting the needs of residents in and around the Riverbend region.”

Providers that OSF Medical

Group (Alton and Godfrey) welcomed in 2025 include:

Marissa St. Peters, APRN, PNP-BC, OSF Medical Group – Pediatrics (Godfrey)

Jill Heitzig, DNP, APRN, FNP-BC, OSF Medical Group – Primary Care (Godfrey)

Major Erin R. Swan, M.D., OSF Medical Group – Orthopedics (Alton)

Stacy Marriott, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC, OSF Medical Group – Primary Care (Alton)

Meredith Walter, MSN, ANP-BC, OSF Medical Group – Cardiology (Alton)

Ayham Alkarmi, M.D., OSF Medical Group – Otolaryngology (Alton)

“Because we’re projecting more growth for 2026, we’re poised to bring more primary and specialty care providers to the Riverbend region this year.”

Learn more about OSF Saint Anthony’s – and OSF HealthCare – by visiting [www.osfsaintanthonys.org](http://www.osfsaintanthonys.org).

## Concordia Nebraska introduces Master of Arts in Leadership program

SEWARD, NE - Concordia University, Nebraska today announced the launch of a new graduate program at the university: the Master of Arts in Leadership.

This new M.A. in Leadership degree - which is pending Higher Learning Commission approval - is intentionally distinct from MBA programs and fills a different formation and vocational space in the university's graduate program offerings. While the MBA focuses on business operations, finance, accounting and corporate management, the M.A. in Leadership centers on people, purpose, culture, ethics and organizational transformation, preparing students to lead mission-driven organizations where relational leadership and faith integration are central.

"The Master of Arts in Leadership reflects Concordia's deep commitment to forming leaders who are grounded in Christ, guided by ethical conviction and equipped to transform organizations through relational, servant-hearted leadership," said Concordia Nebraska MBA and Master of Arts in Leadership Program Director Dr. George Arnold. "This program is intentionally designed to prepare men and women to lead with purpose, cultivate healthy cultures and faithfully serve their vocations in ways that make a lasting Kingdom impact."

Rooted in Concordia's Lutheran identity, the new M.A. in Leadership program integrates Christian values, servant leadership and ethical formation with applied leadership practice and real-world organizational learning. Program emphases options include classical leadership, organizational leadership, philanthropy leadership and adventure, sport and recreation leadership. Learn more about this new program offering at <https://www.cune.edu/academics/graduate/leadership>

Dedicated to providing Christ-centered lifelong learning opportunities in a variety of focus areas, Concordia Nebraska offers a myriad of Studia Vitae continuing education units (CEUs), single graduate courses, graduate certificates and full graduate degree programs. Individuals affiliated with eligible preferred partner organizations receive exclusive tuition rates for these programs. These partnerships make high-quality, faith-based education more affordable and accessible, empowering students to grow in knowledge, strengthen your vocation and serve others with excellence. Learn more about graduate academics at <https://www.cune.edu/academics/graduate> students as a whole individual-academically, emotionally and spiritually.

## ST. PAUL SCHOOL IS NOW PART OF THE RAISE RIGHT GIFT CARD PROGRAM

(formerly known as Scrip)! Physical gift cards for Amazon, Wal-mart, Home Depot, and Lowe's are now available for purchase at the school and parish offices. Proceeds from this program will assist with the operating expenses of our school. Sign up now at the Raise Right site: Raise Right Site and use our enrollment code: 2YW6HGI8ENPN

## Mobile Unit Coming to the Weinheimer

By Bill Napper

HIGHLAND - The Illinois Secretary of State will bring its Mobile Unit to the Weinheimer Community Center on several dates throughout the year. Visitors can renew driver's licenses, take written or road tests, purchase license plate stickers, and complete other standard services.

For full details, visit the Illinois Driver Services website.

The Weinheimer Community Center will host the Mobile Unit on March 24, June 16, September 15, and November 17 from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Service will be provided by appointment only.

To schedule, call the Weinheimer at 618-654-6071.

## Chili Cook-Off to Bring Food, Music, and Family Fun to VFW Post 5694

HIGHLAND - A chili cook-off at VFW Post 5694 will bring families, cooks, and community members together on March 22 for an afternoon of food, music, and friendly competition. The event runs from 1 to 4 p.m., with contest entries due by 2 p.m. at the post, located at 1900 VFW Road in Highland.

Organizers are inviting both seasoned chili makers and first-time entrants to compete for prizes while sharing their best recipes with the public. Attendees can sample a wide variety of chili styles, enjoy live music, and take part in a 50/50 raffle benefiting VFW Post 5694. Event planners say the cook-off is designed to be fun for all ages, with activities and food options suited for families.

Lois, the event contact, is coordinating entries and can be reached by call or text at 618-830-2573. Proceeds from the afternoon will support the ongoing work of the local VFW post.

The cook-off continues a long tradition of community gatherings at the post, offering residents a chance to connect, share a meal, and support local veterans. Organizers encourage early entry submissions and a strong turnout from chili lovers across the region.



## KC Bingo

The Knights of Columbus invite everyone to join them each Wednesday evening for an evening of fun at the weekly bingo games held at the KC hall in Highland!

Pioneer photo/ By Bill Napper

## Highland Woman's Club's Trivia Night to Benefit Meals on Wheels

HIGHLAND - Meals on Wheels, an organization that supplies meals to seniors and disabled community members, sounds like a non-profit with a mission as simple as its rhyming name - meals . . . wheels. However, rhymes can be deceptive. That is why the Highland Woman's Club has named Meals on Wheels one of the recipients of their March 21 Trivia Night proceeds. In the past two years, the Highland Woman's Club has donated over \$12,000 to this worthy non-profit service and hopes to add to that total.

Currently, "the new Meals on Wheels grant guidelines for 2026 are unknown per Madison County at this time. With the uncertainty of funding and a potential reduction in funding, there are many question marks for this year," commented Donna Plocher, Executive Director of Meals on Wheels in Highland. Although Meals on Wheels has fundraisers throughout their fiscal year, it is difficult to meet financial obligations to HSHS St. Joseph Hospital, where the nutritious meals are prepared.

According to Mary Jane Campbell, longtime volunteer, of the 70 clients receiving meals five days a week (including Thanksgiving and Christmas), 40 do not have to pay for these meals according to government guidelines, and the remaining 30 pay only \$4 per meal. "Our clients love not having to shop and cook as much. Their smiles and appreciation are heart-felt."

Meals, though, are not the only thing Meals on Wheels clients receive. Volunteer Jonell Safford explained, "We check in with folks who are home-bound and don't get many visitors. They appreciate the daily chat with us." Donna Plocher also said, "Our volunteers see it in the new clients - the joy and relief that occurs is tremendous. Food insecurity is very real in our community."

The Highland Woman's Club's third annual Trivia Night: Spring Fling will be held on Saturday, March 21, with doors of Highland's Knights of Columbus Hall opening at 6:00 p. m. and play beginning at 7:00 p. m. Tables of eight may be reserved for \$160 by calling Cyndi at 618-401-9542. Players may bring their own snacks and enjoy beverages at the KC bar. A Silent Auction, games, 50/50 and lots of fun will be provided!

Along with Meals on Wheels, the Highland Woman's Club plans to support their Vocational Awards and the Highland schools' Angel Fund.

# The Pioneer - Delivering Free, Real-Time Community News on Facebook, and at [www.thepioneernewspaper.com](http://www.thepioneernewspaper.com)

By Bill Napper

The Pioneer has completed its transition to a free, online-only newspaper, offering readers continuous updates throughout the day as local news develops. The publication now appears exclusively on Facebook at The Pioneer Newspaper - Madison County.

Readers can also read the paper as a pdf at [www.thepioneernewspaper.com](http://www.thepioneernewspaper.com), giving the community two convenient ways to stay informed.

As part of the move, The Pioneer no longer charges nonprofits, civic clubs, churches, youth programs, or fraternal organizations for submitting news briefs or advertising.

Editors say removing these fees ensures that community events, service projects, and public an-

nouncements can reach residents without financial barriers.

The editorial staff emphasizes the mission remains unchanged:

## Highland Arts Council Seeking Young Creators for April 19 Youth Arts Expo

HIGHLAND - The Highland Arts Council is seeking young artists to participate in Youth Arts Expo on Sunday, April 19 at the Highland Masonic Lodge. Visual artists, musicians, vocalists, actors and writers in grades 6-12 are encouraged to apply to be a part of this exciting event. All applicants will be featured, and it is free to participate and attend! Anyone interested should contact Shannon at [dramamamamall3@gmail.com](mailto:dramamamamall3@gmail.com). They can also visit the Highland Arts Council website at <https://www.highlandartscouncil.org/> for more information and to access the registration form.

The Highland Arts Council is excited to be hosting talented young artists of the region in the third annual Arts in Action: Youth Arts Exposition

The exposition will give young artists an opportunity to showcase their emerging talents with the public from 10 a.m. to noon. All are encouraged to attend this free event in support of the young artists.

The Highland Arts Council hopes to advance the youth of the community through their support, knowing that these young artists will one day be leaders in fostering the appreciation of the arts in the region.

provide clear, reliable, hometown reporting while giving community organizations a no-cost platform to share their work. The format allows for faster posting, more photos, and broader reach, all while maintaining the paper's long-standing commitment to local storytelling.

Residents are encouraged to check for updates every day as The Pioneer continues to highlight the people, events, and organizations that shape life in Highland and the surrounding region—now delivered entirely online and free to the public.

## Aviston, Cincinnati Residents Win Quilts Hospital Auxiliary Raffle



Lynn Rinella (center), an Auxiliary member at HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital in Breese, displays the 90-inch by 100-inch quilt in the "Christmas Cactus" pattern she won on the organization's Sunday, Dec. 21 drawing. Helping Rinella, of Aviston, with her new bedcovering are hospital volunteers (left) Carol Feldmann, also of Aviston, and (right) Roberta "Berta" Beer of Bartelso. Winning the 42-inch by 54-inch baby quilt on the same raffle was (not pictured) Gail Hankins of Cincinnati, Ohio, who bought her winning ticket while in town visiting family. Tickets at \$1 each or 6/\$5 are now on sale in the hospital Gift Shop for the Auxiliary's Spring Quilt

Raffle Saturday, March 21, and will also be available at the Saturday, March 7, health fair. The March drawing features a "Sweet Dreams" baby quilt in turquoise and white and a 90-inch by 106-inch "Carpenter's Star" quilt in shades of brown, cream and rust. The Gift Shop is open from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and until 1 p.m. Friday. The shop stocks quilts and throws in a variety of colors and sizes, hip and shoulder assistive devices, Easter and spring décor. Items can be delivered to inpatient and Women and Infants Center rooms by calling and using a credit card. For details, contact (618) 526-5351 or [Christine.gebke@hshs.org](mailto:Christine.gebke@hshs.org).

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**CHILI COOK-OFF**

**MARCH 22, 2026**

**1pm - 4pm**  
Entries must arrive by 2pm

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## Brianna Overbey named to Ohio University's Fall Provost's List

ATHENS, OH - Ohio University College of Health Sciences and Professions student Brianna Overbey of Edwardsville, IL has been named to OHIO's Fall 2025 Provost's List.

At the end of each semester, Ohio University's undergraduate students are evaluated based on their semester GPA and hours to determine placement on the President's List, Dean's List or Provost's List.

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# L&C Announces Fall 2025 Honors Lists

L&C Announces Fall 2025 Honors Lists

GODFREY – Lewis and Clark Community College is announcing the lists of full- and part-time honors students for the Fall 2025 semester.

Students earning a cumulative grade point average of 3.75 or higher out of a possible 4.0 are named to the President's List. Those students earning a grade point average between 3.25 and 3.74 are recognized each semester on the Dean's List.

Further requirements are listed in the college's online catalog at <http://catalog.lc.edu>. All questions should be directed to the Enrollment Center at (618) 468-2222.

The following students in our coverage area include:

## President's List

ALTON – Tiffany V. Adams; Chloe E. Ahlers; Madison C. Albert; Morgan G. Alexander; Lourdes M. Anriquez; Hunter M. Bailey; Sydnee Barnickel; Venice S. Bates; Joel A. Biesk; Hannah J. Bland; Autumn N. Bowman; Samuel A. Boxdorfer; Luke A. Brown; Parker A. Cannon; Taylor J. Carter; Lucille M. Cassenti; Mackenzie S. Cochran; Stella R. Cowan; Ann M. Davidson; Chandra K. Douglas; Dillon R. Dublo; Eve M. Edelman; Gabriela E. Esquivel; Heaven S. Everage; Laci J. Fischer; Ethan N. Fox; Deshelle L. Harris; Justice I. Haynes; Bryn A. Helminger; Madyson R. Henderson; Haley E. Hogue; Lucas S. Holliday; Eden A. Hough; Adam J. Hunter; Ba'Riah R. Hunt-Mitchell; Kruti K. Jadhav; Christopher D. Jarden; Consuelo L. Jones; Rowan M. Kinder; Eowyn M. Kobialka; Rheagan O. Lacey; Anna S. Larson; Wesley I. LeBrun; Lucile E. Lehmann; Grace K. Massey; Tracy A. Mike; Brianna E. Mitchell; Melissa S. Mulrean; Johnathan P. O'Neill; Carly N. Peuterbaugh; John J. Puent; Rayna D. Raglin; Max H. Reedy; Alexander M. Ridenour; Payton Z. Ross; Meredith G. Schaaf; Amanda L. Schrader; Janelle C. Seibert; Anzaria J. Simon; Ja'Ques J. Smith; Sloan M. Smith; Dominick C. Tannler; Cole L. Tarrant; Jose L. Troche, Jr.; Karon J. Vann; Joseph P. Ventimiglia; Daniel L. Whiteside; Jania D. Womack; Adam W. Wright, Jr.; Tiffany Zheng; Brenna A. Zini;

BENLD – Jackson T. Crook; Meghan Fosnock; Ryleigh L. Phillips; Emily R. Schoen; Tristen B. Wargo;

BETHALTO – Jaycie R. Beard; Addison J. Becker; Madelyn L. Bernard; Ty R. Books; Jude A. Breyer; Grace M. Burton; Abigail C. Clowers; Jordyn E. Coleson; Carter R. Ehlers; Kaden E. Franke;

Olivia R. Garcia; Dane M. Godar; Dathan A. Greene; Eric J. Harkey; Abigail M. Harms; Rachel A. Harms; Ariana L. Haskins; Jordan T. Hendricks; Averie R. Huebner; Morgan E. Leathers; Lucas M. Lenger; Aubrey M. Martin; Madison L. McCune; Kale J. McMichael; Hunter T. Meiser; Sarah Rose L. Mueller; Andrew R. Nation; Parker A. Parnell; Audrey E. Pohl; Isla R. Schilling; Claire M. Shaw; Ashli N. Shewmaker; Aubrie J. Spann; Rebekah R. Summers; Nathan C. Taylor; Noah T. Thien; Maren V. Wagenblast; Mason E. Walker; Madelyn A. Waters; Makenna M. Wehmeier; Cooper D. Wilson; Keely M. Windsor; Madeline E. Wood; Brayden T. Zampieri; Makenzie L. Zimmerman;

BRIGHTON – Ike D. Austin; Janessa O. Bailey; Ava A. Ballard; Bram R. Beuttel; Ian C. Brantley; Taylor R. Cairns; Alivia N. Cecchini; Lucy Childress; Madelyn Egelhoff; Ellie R. Goeken; Madelyn Gordon; Emily E. Gray; Alexis R. Harrop; Rudy N. Holcomb; Kinley Lucas; Nicholas O. McGee; Colton L. Nash; Alyssa J. Schuchman; Isabella M. Snyder; Amelia C. Walden; Grant I. Williams;

BRUSSELS – Rachael L. Friedel; Abigail R. Johnes;

BUNKER HILL – Miranda M. Beuttel; Jadalyn Black; Lydia M. Brandon; Kayleigh K. Butler; Sophia Deucker; Braden T. Fulton; Ashley Gerecke; Cameron R. Golike; Madelynn K. Heflin; Hailee King; William C. Marsh; Kaleb Softley; Dean Throne; Trinity Throne; Vivien G. Wilcox; Lydia J. Yates;

CARLINVILLE – Taylor R. Brandenburg; Elyse A. Eldred; Alexis A. Kalaher; Weston E. Kuykendall; Emerald Ondrey; Hannah R. Truax;

CARROLLTON – Madeline J. Brannan; Caleb D. Carter; Samuel B. Droste; Caleb Gourley; Karson N. Kraushaar; Emma J. Nolan; Maya J. Retherford; Zachary Stiles;

CASEYVILLE – Gavin C. White;

COLLINSVILLE – Pearl Abredu; Jessica Carlyle; Justin Hamiel; Milla C. Munsch; Kayu Sakaguchi;

COTTAGE HILLS – Jade L. Bowker; John P. Bowker; Taylor C. Clendenny; Ava J. Fassler; Sidney L. Kudela; Carter J. O'Brien; Noah E. Petersen; Josaline B. Stewart; Keagan E. Thomas; Zakary J. Turner;

DORSEY – Karley J. Deist; Dana C. Lobbig; Michael T. Wilson;

DOW – Peyton R. Finkes; Vivian M. Gray; Nicholas T. Rister; Caleb A. Van Deven;

EAGARVILLE – Sean E. Roach;

EAST ALTON – Courtney N. Adams; KayLynn M. Buttry; Alli E. Franklin; Eric G. Herrin; Abigail P. Hersman; Makenzie L. Keller; Taylor Marsala; Kendra A. Mason; Zach Oster; Thi Xuan Han Pham; Margaret L. Rodriguez; Brooklyn E. Ruot; Ella C. Simsl Kylee A. Slayden; Cade N. Smay; Audrey D. Springman; Peyton O. Stark; Nathan R. Thacker; Lyndon A. Thies; Gina D. Truax; Adrianna J. Ulrich;

EDWARDSVILLE – Jeffrey M. Andrews; Atticus W. Ball; Jaylinn M. Bell; Jacqueline M. Benson; Braden A. Bowers; Lily V. Bowker; Hailey N. Boyd; Kendall W. Brandon; Briley K. Bruninga; Abigail M. Bukovacl Tobias J. Byrnes; Alyssa C. Colesl Timothy Costello; John L. Dawson; Harrison Dockery; Whitney O. Dyckman; Laura L. Dycus; Colton B. Eagar; Reese L. Edmondson; Dakota D. Eldredge; Vivi K. Elson; Anna Erber; Anna O. Feco; Jack A. Geno; Elise R. Greer; Dominic J. Gruen; Faith R. Hall; Adam C. Hanks; Shaboz S. Hassan; Michael W. Hedge; Caleb Hernandez; Lillian P. Hernandez; Louis M. Hogan, III; Marlie G. Hunter; Emmy Laine R. Hutton; Sarah M. Jansen; Amber N. Johnson; Eva E. Klopfer; Truc D. Krystosek; Katherine M. Loethen; Kylie F. Machens; Brady M. Maher; Claire E. Martens; Carter T. McFarland; Evan M. McNaughton; Ethan J. Micklevitz; Reece A. Noll; Mitchell C. Olsen; Rebecca Pope; Madison E. Popelar; Sylvia E. Popp; Edwin A. Quimbayo Vargas; Sidney B. Rallo; Samantha R. Reifsteck; Alex C. Schmidt; Jake C. Schrobilgen; Taylor Schumacher; John C. Shank, II; Erika Silveus; Victoria L. Simpson; Kylee M. Smith; Mireille F. Spicer; Caroline G. Taylor; Amanda K. Touchette; Joseph R. Towner; Macy L. Turner; Poe L. Wilkens;

ELSAH – Kendal I. Davis;

FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS – Brady Buckley;

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GIRARD – Brittany N. Dorris;

GLEN CARBON – Finley A. Baker; Xander Braundmeier; Malory R. Cerentano; Madison J. Gill; Shelby A. Gorniak; Anthony G. Hedge; Elizabeth A. Johnes; Kenneth P. Kamau; Jameson D. Listner; Alec J. Marchetto; Weston T. Marini; Lara Fabianne D. Oliveira; William N. Patterson, III; Madison M. Rea; Ari E. Reames; Andrah M. Salyer; Chastity Sandage;

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HARDIN – Claire E. Gould; Gabrielle R. Harbers; Alyssa N. Slinkard;

HARTFORD – Tyler A. Fish; Elliott J. Owens; Connor H. Strebler; Chloe J. Stufflebean;

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KAMPSVILLE – Isaiah C. Blagg;

KANE – Delaney R. Deist; Sarah L. Jones; Macie E. Phipps; Griffin D. Williams;

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SHILOH – Boston W. Bruzan;

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STAUNTON – Shane Baker; Jayden R. Carrigan; Sloane M. Dugger; Alexis A. Hester; Wyatt A. Otto; Cole Sternickle;

TROY – Stephanie K. Broyles; Darren P. Davis; Cameron D. Eaker; Ella R. George; Grace O. Grapperhaus; Dometrus A. Hawkins; Allison N. Hollingshead; Alexis M. Klostermann; Dylan G. Meshey; Justin H. Rice; Cody A. Steele;

VIRDEN – James C. Burgess;

WILSONVILLE – Lucas A. Rosenthal;

WOOD RIVER – Sarah R. Baldwin; Kim C. Bruns; Jada F. Dupy; Morgan N. Eberlin; Jamie L. Fosnock; Cassie E. Giffin; Jacob T. Harrington; Kate Kraniewski; Kelsey J. Moore; Payton S. Patterson; Julie M. Pitts; Kindra G. Reed; Chloe L. Sanders; Courtney E. Shook; Endora A. Spencer; Aubrey J. Wiegand;

WORDEN – Lily A. Dyer; Graceanne E. Perrine; Steven E. Renken;

**The Chocolate Affair  
Local Candy Shop  
Prepares Sweet Lineup  
for Valentine's Day**

The Pioneer - By Bill Napper  
HIGHLAND - Who is offering  
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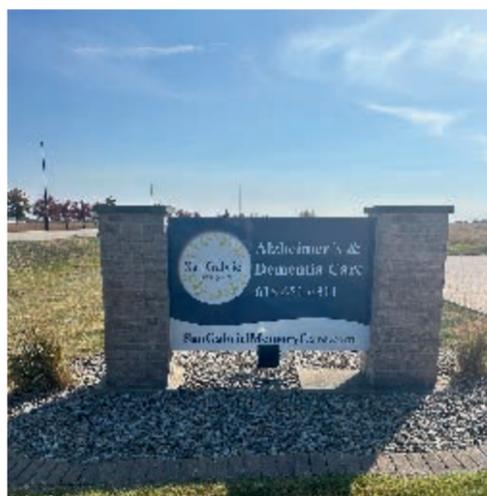
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## University of Arkansas Chancellor's List Includes Area Students

FAYETTEVILLE, AR The University of Arkansas is recognizing students for earning a place on the Fall 2025 Chancellor's List, the university's highest semester academic honor for undergraduates.

To qualify for the Chancellor's List, undergraduate students must attain a 4.0 grade-point average for the semester while completing at least 12 credit hours of coursework required for graduation.

Local students included on the Fall 2025 University of Arkansas Chancellor's List include:

Trey Dicks of Glen Carbon, Finance Bachelor of Science in Business Administration

Grace Lanier of Collinsville, Special Education Bachelor of Science in Education

Ruth Prenzler of Edwardsville, Architecture Bachelor of Architecture

Jadyn Renth of Edwardsville, Elementary Education Bachelor of Science in Education

Ava Jackson of Edwardsville, Criminology Bachelor of Arts

Arabella Ford of Edwardsville, Psychology Bachelor of Arts

Ella Koerkenmeier of Glen Carbon, Spanish Bachelor of Arts

Berik Selberg of Glen Carbon, Public Health (Pre-PBHL)

Brianna Paul of Worden, Marketing Bachelor of Science in Business Administration

Sara Gouy of Edwardsville, Biomedical Engineering Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Engineering

William Cowling of Edwardsville, Finance Bachelor of Science in Business Administration

Kailey Stauthammer of Maryville, Biology Bachelor of Science

"Earning a place on the Chancellor's List reflects not only a perfect GPA, but also the hard work and sustained commitment to excellence required to achieve it while balancing coursework with life's many responsibilities," said Chancellor Charles Robinson. "Students like these strengthen the University of Arkansas in significant ways, from elevating the classroom experience of their peers and professors to reinforcing our reputation for developing some of the nation's brightest and most capable graduates. I congratulate them on this achievement and look forward to the great things they'll accomplish in the years ahead."

The Fall 2025 Chancellor's List is available online.

All students on the Chancellor's List also automatically earn recognition on the university's Dean's List, which honors undergraduates who achieve a minimum 3.75 grade-point average for the team while completing at least 12 credit hours.

An official University of Arkansas announcement including local students who made the Fall 2025 Dean's List will be forthcoming.

## ICC approves IPA 2026 Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan

The Illinois Commission (ICC) approved the Illinois Power Agency's (IPA) 2026 Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan (LTRRPP) on Tuesday which guides procurement of new renewable generation in Illinois over the next two years. The IPA's plan encourages investment in both utility scale and community solar, utility-scale wind, hydropower, and other clean energy projects in Illinois.

"Getting affordable energy capacity projects built in Illinois will be an essential part of protecting ratepayers from our country's growing energy demands for years to come. The latest renewable procurement incentives approved by the ICC aim to help rectify our state's expanding energy needs while still protecting consumers' pocketbooks," said ICC Chairman Doug Scott. "The updated plan includes program improvements, procurement targets, and budgets designed to keep Illinois on track to affordably and fairly meeting its decarbonization goals."

The 2026 LTRRPP includes the IPA's proposed procurement of Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) for Ameren Illinois, Commonwealth Edison Company, and MidAmerican Energy Company for program years 2026-2027 and 2027-2028 and includes proactive, stakeholder-supported measures to help address projected near-term funding challenges and federal uncertainty.

The IPA's first plan was approved in 2018. Since then, Illinois has become a national leader in driving the transition to clean energy.

Illinois has installed over 14GW of renewable energy generating capacity as of 2025. The installed capacity value is a combined result of IPA-facilitated procurements and programs (indexed REC procurements, Illinois Shines, Illinois Solar for All, etc.) and independently developed projects.

Illinois leads the Midwest in installed solar capacity, ranking 4th nationally for most solar installations nationally, according to the Solar Energy Industries Association.

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance's Community Power Scorecard awarded Illinois its highest grade, above all other states, for state policies to expand energy democracy in both 2024 and 2025.

Since April 2025, 20 percent of all electricity production in Illinois constituted renewable energy, eclipsing both coal and natural gas, according to the U.S. Energy Information Association.

The ICC is required by law to review the LTRRPP every two years. In accordance with updates made to Illinois law under the Clean and Reliable Grid Affordability Act, the IPA is required to file an updated 2026 plan on June 1, 2026.

For more information on the current plan, read the ICC's final order in Docket No. 25-0945 and the IPA's 2026 Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan.

*About the Illinois Commerce Commission*  
The Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) is a quasi-judicial body made up of five Commissioners. Through its Public Utility Program, the Commission oversees the provision of adequate, reliable, efficient, and safe utility services at the least possible cost to Illinois citizens served by electric, natural gas, telecommunications, water, and sewer public utility companies. Through its Transportation Regulatory Program, the Commission oversees public safety and consumer protection programs with regard to intrastate commercial motor carriers of general freight, household goods movers, relocation towers, safety towers, personal property warehouses, and repossession agencies. The ICC's Rail Safety Program also inspects and regulates the general safety of railroad tracks, facilities, and equipment in the state.

To learn more about the Commission, its offices, and bureaus here. Consumers who need help resolving a utility dispute can call 800-524-0795 or file an online complaint. For all transportation-related complaints, call 847-294-4326.

HIGHLAND WOMAN'S CLUB PRESENTS  
ITS THIRD ANNUAL  
**TRIVIA NIGHT**  
"SPRING FLING"  
Saturday, March 21  
Doors Open 6PM  
Game Starts 7PM  
KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS HALL  
Highland, IL  
- Cash Prizes for Top 3 Tables  
- Silent Auction, 50/50, Mulligans, Booze Barrel Raffle  
- BYO snacks! No outside drinks; libations available at bar!  
- Proceeds to Meals on Wheels, Vocational Scholarships, and Angel Fund  
**\$160 PER 8 PERSON TABLE**  
To Reserve Your Table:  
Cyndi Huelsman 618-401-9542

## Mobile Unit Coming to the Weinheimer

HIGHLAND - The Illinois Secretary of State will bring its Mobile Unit to the Weinheimer Community Center on several dates throughout the year. Visitors can renew driver's licenses, take written or road tests, purchase license plate stickers, and complete other standard services.

For full details, visit the Illinois Driver Services website.

The Weinheimer Community Center will host the Mobile Unit on March 24, June 16, September 15, and November 17 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Service will be provided by appointment only.

To schedule, call the Weinheimer at 618-654-6071.

## Concordia Nebraska announces preferred partnership with Association of Lutheran Secondary Schools

SEWARD, NE - Concordia University, Nebraska today announced that it has partnered with the Association of Lutheran Secondary Schools (ALSS) to offer the university's Studia Vitae continuing education units (CEUs), single graduate courses, graduate certificates and full graduate degree programs to employees of ALSS member schools at an exclusive rate. Individuals affiliated with eligible preferred partners such as ALSS receive special tuition pricing and enjoy mission alignment through courses and programs that advance the shared priorities of both organizations.

"This partnership is especially significant because of its direct impact on the faculty and staff serving in ALSS member schools. The breadth of graduate-level offerings at Concordia University, Nebraska, combined with a preferred tuition structure for employees of ALSS member schools, represents a tremendous opportunity for continued professional growth," said ALSS Executive Director Dr. Cole Braun. "One of the most pressing challenges facing pre-K through 12th grade Lutheran education is the recruitment and retention of exceptional talent. When we intentionally invest in our teachers and administrators through collaborative initiatives like this, we strengthen our schools, our ministries and ultimately the students and families we serve."

The Concordia Nebraska preferred partner program is a unique collaboration opportunity that makes high-quality, faith-based education more affordable and accessible, empowering preferred partner employees and members to grow in knowledge and serve others with excellence.

"We are delighted to partner with our brothers and sisters in Christ through ALSS," said Concordia Nebraska President and Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Director of Academic Ventures Dr. Bernard Bull. "It is an incredible joy and honor to be part of a more than five-hundred-year global movement and legacy of Lutheran education, and we are excited to explore how this partnership can further advance that shared work."

Eligible individuals of preferred partner organizations can access their benefits by indicating their active membership or employment status during the graduate course or graduate program application process or during the CEU course registration process.

Concordia Nebraska's preferred partnerships offer lasting value to participating organizations, offering exclusive tuition discounts and Christ-centered education that strengthens vocations and serves the church and world. Concordia Nebraska's custom learning opportunities are designed to meet the unique needs of partner organizations.

Concordia University, Nebraska's preferred partners program creates meaningful connections with Lutheran and Christian organizations that share the university's mission. The university welcomes conversations with additional schools, ministries and associations interested in joining this partnership network.

For more information about Studia Vitae, please visit [cune.edu/ceu](http://cune.edu/ceu).

For more information about preferred partnerships, please visit [cune.edu/partners](http://cune.edu/partners).

About Concordia University, Nebraska

Concordia University, Nebraska, founded in 1894, is a fully accredited, coeducational university of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod located in Seward, Nebraska, which currently serves more than 1,700 students. Concordia offers more than 100 undergraduate, graduate and professional programs in an excellent academic and Christ-centered community that equips men and women for lives of learning, service and leadership in the church and world. For more information, visit [cune.edu](http://cune.edu).

# University of Mississippi Announces Fall 2025 Chancellor's Honor Roll

UNIVERSITY, MS - The University of Mississippi announced students named to the Fall 2025

Honor Roll. Tianna Thiems, of Edwardsville, IL, in the B.S.C.J. in Criminal Justice program, is on the Chancellor's

Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Sela Hubbard, of Edwardsville, IL, in the B.A. in Biological Science program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Chase Keshner, of Alton, IL, in the B.S.C.J. in Criminal Justice program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Evan Schrage, of Troy, IL, in the B.B.A. in Real Estate program, is on

the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Ava Waltenberger, of Edwardsville, IL, in the B.S. in Integrated Mktg. Communications program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Jacob Huber, of Edwardsville, IL, in the B.S.C.S. in Computer Science program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Reece Korte, of Highland, IL, in the B.S.M.E. in Mechanical

Engineering program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Clara Wineland, of Bethalto, IL, in the B.A.Ed. in Elementary Education program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Jocelyn Combes, of Bethalto, IL, in the B.A. in Allied Health Studies program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Addison Hohlt, of Glen Carbon, IL, in the B.A. in Political Science program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Ella Proctor, of Edwardsville, IL, in the B.S.E.E. in Electrical Engineering program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Alivia Peck, of Maryville, IL, in the B.S.L.S. in Law Studies program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Natalie Peterson, of Maryville, IL, in the B.S.E.S. in Exercise Science program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

McLaren Seaton, of Edwardsville, IL, in the B.A. in Allied Health Studies program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Grace Malawy, of Edwardsville, IL, in the B.A.Ed. in Elementary Education program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

Reese Hampton, of Edwardsville, IL, in the B.Accy. in Accountancy program, is on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

"We are very proud of the students earning the Chancellor's Honor Roll designation," Chancellor Glenn Boyce said. "This recognition reflects their academic excellence and achievements and exemplifies the hard work, commitment and dedication that define our university community."

To be eligible for honor roll designation, a student must have completed at least 12 graded hours for the semester and may not be on academic probation during the semester.

The University of Mississippi, affectionately known as Ole Miss, is the state's flagship university. Included in the elite group of R1: Doctoral Universities - Highest Research Activity by the Carnegie Classification, it has a long history of producing leaders in public service, academics and business. Its 16 academic divisions include a major medical school, nationally recognized schools of accountancy, law and pharmacy, and an Honors College acclaimed for a blend of academic rigor, experiential learning and opportunities for community action. Recognized among the nation's most beautiful, Ole Miss' main campus is in Oxford, which is routinely acknowledged as one of the country's best college towns.

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**2026 Lenten Mission**  
Featuring: **Patty Schneier**  
Theme: **See the Beauty, Discover the Joy**  
Monday, March 9, through  
Wednesday, March 11  
6:30 p.m.  
**St. Elizabeth Catholic Church**  
Babysitting Provided  
Reception following  
Wednesday Evening

## University of Maryland Global Campus Announces Fall Graduates

ADELPHI, MD - University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) graduated more than 6,400 students worldwide in the fall 2025 term.

Dustin Tarrant of Collinsville (62234), Bachelor of Arts in History  
Cathy Sterna of Edwardsville (62025), Bachelor of Science in Business Administration

Matthew Ellenwood of Edwardsville (62025), Bachelor of Science Cum Laude in Cybersecurity Technology

Clifton Hibbler III of Alton (62002), Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity Technology

Yibemeh Lewis of Glen Carbon (62034), Associate of Arts

University of Maryland Global Campus was founded more than 75 years ago specifically to serve the higher education needs of working adults and military servicemembers. Today, UMGC is the largest provider of postsecondary education in Maryland and continues its global tradition with online and hybrid courses, more than 175 classroom and service locations worldwide, and more than 135 degrees and certificates backed by the reputation of a state university and the University System of Maryland. For more information, visit umgc.edu.

# Ali Foley Named First Assistant State's Attorney After Loughrey Is Appointed To Judgeship

The Pioneer Newspaper

EDWARDSVILLE—Madison County State's Attorney Tom Haine has appointed Assistant State's Attorney Ali Foley as First Assistant State's Attorney.

Foley joined the Madison County State's Attorney's Office in 2010 as a legal intern and began her career as an Assistant State's Attorney in 2011. In 2021, she was named Chief of the Children's Justice Division, where her focus has been the prosecution of cases involving crimes against children, working closely with victims, law enforcement, medical professionals, victim advocates and social services.

Foley is a board member of the Illinois Child Death Investigative Task Force, serves on a regional Child Death Review Team, and serves on the Illinois Sex Offender Management Board, roles that reflect her extensive experience and leadership in child protection and public safety.

"I'm honored to step into the role of First Assistant State's Attorney and continue serving the people of Madison County," Foley said. "Our office has a vital responsibility to pursue justice with integrity, and I'm committed to supporting our team as we work to protect our communities and uphold the law."

The First Assistant serves as second-in-command to the State's Attorney, assisting in the overall management and daily operations of the office. The position's duties include supervising attorneys and staff, advising on major case decisions, helping set prosecutorial priorities, and acting on behalf of the State's Attorney when necessary.

Foley earned her law degree from Saint Louis University School of Law.

Haine said Foley "has demonstrated exceptional judgment, leadership, and dedication to justice throughout her career. Her experience, work ethic, and commitment to protecting the most vulnerable members of our community make her exceptionally qualified to serve as First Assistant State's Attorney."

He added, "Ali brings institutional knowledge, steady leadership and a deep understanding

of the responsibilities entrusted to this office. I am confident she will continue to serve the people of Madison County with integrity, professionalism, and compassion in this new role."

Foley replaces Chad Loughrey, who recently was selected to serve as an Associate Judge.

Foley said Loughrey "set a strong example of dedication and professionalism in this role, and I'm grateful for the foundation he helped build."

Haine added: "We will certainly miss Chad's daily presence and invaluable contributions in the office, but we have every confi-

dence that he will bring the same unwavering excellence, integrity, and dedication to the bench that have defined his career. For almost two decades, Chad has been far more than a highly skilled and effective prosecutor. He has been an outstanding mentor, tirelessly guiding and developing the next

generation of prosecutors while forging an exceptional team in the State's Attorney's Office."

Pursuing truth and seeking justice through application of law.

157 North Main Street, Suite 402, Edwardsville, Illinois 62025 (618) 692-6280 [www.madcosao.gov](http://www.madcosao.gov)



Madison County State's Attorney Tom Haine has appointed Assistant State's Attorney Ali Foley as First Assistant State's Attorney.

## Rep. Miller, Sen. Budd Lead Bill to Close Loophole

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Congresswoman Mary Miller (IL-15) and Senator Ted Budd (R-NC), led several of their Republican colleagues in introducing the bicameral Stop Illegal Alien Cops Act today. The legislation is aimed at prohibiting illegal aliens who work as armed law enforcement officers from possessing firearms or ammunition provided to them by a government entity, such as a police department. This bill aligns with existing federal law that already prohibits illegal aliens from possessing firearms or ammunition in the United States.

"Sanctuary policies in states like Illinois have gone so far as to allow illegal aliens to wear the badge and carry a firearm. That is a disgrace to every honorable officer and a threat to public safety. Law enforcement authority must be reserved for those who respect and uphold our laws, not those who are in violation of them," said Congresswoman Miller.

"Illegal aliens have no Second Amendment rights. It is irresponsible for police departments to arm illegal aliens who have blatantly ignored our immigration laws with firearms and ammunition, let alone on the taxpayers' dime. Federal law already prohibits those who enter our country illegally from possessing

firearms, and it's time we ensure illegal aliens working at local police departments are held to the same legal standard," said Senator Budd.

"Illegal aliens do not have the right to possess firearms or ammunition in America. The Stop Illegal Alien Cops Act would ensure local police departments that try to hire illegal aliens cannot provide them with guns or ammunition," said Senator Blackburn.

"No one who enters the U.S. illegally should get to enjoy our God-given constitutional rights, including the right to keep and bear arms. This bill would close a loophole in current law to ensure illegal aliens cannot possess firearms or ammunition, and I'm glad to support it," said Senator Cornyn.

"This is common sense. Illegal aliens who have already broken our nation's laws should certainly not be carrying a badge or a firearm. We hold our brave men and women in law enforcement to the highest standards and the Stop Illegal Alien Cops Act will only bolster those standards," said Senator Mullin.

"The Stop Illegal Alien Cops Act closes a dangerous loophole by ensuring that individuals who are unlawfully present in the United States cannot be

armed and sworn in as police officers. This commonsense fix strengthens public safety, upholds federal law, and ensures those entrusted to enforce our laws are here legally," said Congressman Gosar.

"Illegal aliens should not be allowed to remain in our country, much less become a police officer. If an illegal somehow manages to get hired by a police department, well... they're a short walk to a cell when we find out," said Congressman Higgins.

"This commonsense legislation addresses a serious gap in current law by making clear that illegal aliens in the United States—who have no right to be in the country in the first place—cannot and should not be entrusted with the authority and firearms of a sworn law enforcement officer. The Stop Illegal Alien Cops Act reinforces the rule of law and ensures that those charged with enforcing our laws meet the same legal standards as every peace officer in America is expected to meet," said Congressman Roy.

"The Stop Illegal Alien Cops Act reinforces a simple and necessary principle: individuals who are in our country unlawfully should not possess firearms or ammunition. This legislation closes a dangerous loophole while preserving commonsense exceptions for visiting law

enforcement partners and lawful sporting activities. As a former law enforcement officer, I believe public safety must always come first, and this bill helps ensure our laws are clear, consistent, and focused on protecting American communities," said Congressman Ezell.

"Illegal aliens are actively disobeying American law and corrupting American culture. Allowing illegals to be cops is ludicrous. Not only would it encourage narco terrorists to infiltrate law enforcement, but it would erode public trust and civil society. Enforcing American law requires American law enforcement officers," Congressman Ogles said.

"I'm proud to cosponsor the Stop Illegal Alien Cops Act because the rule of law isn't optional. We've seen outrageous cases in places like Illinois and within the New Orleans Police Department where individuals who were in this country illegally were handed a badge and put in positions of authority. That's unacceptable and it sends the wrong message to the American people. If you're going to enforce America's laws and wear the uniform, you must respect our laws first, and that means being here legally," said Congressman Moore.

# Rep. Mary Miller Responds To President Trump's State Of the Union Address

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congresswoman Mary Miller (IL-15) released the following statement after President Donald J. Trump delivered his State of the Union address.

“Tonight, President Trump made it unmistakably clear that the State of our Union is strong and growing stronger because we are once again putting America First,” said Congresswoman Miller. “Under this administration, we are reversing the destructive decisions of Joe Biden and seeing lower costs, a secure border, American energy dominance, and policies that empower families, farmers, and small businesses across Central Illinois.

“I look forward to continuing to work with President Trump and my Republican colleagues to build on this momentum and ensure that the American Dream is stronger and more attainable for the next generation,” Congresswoman Miller continued.



## Mini College Fair

Mater Dei Students Bentley Nicklin and Jude Koopmann, left, are pictured with the University of Kansas admissions representative during the mini college fair held during the lunch periods on February 25. Thanks to College Placement Director Mrs. Donna Goetz for coordinating this mini fair, which included 12 colleges and universities.

## Survey Required For City of Highland Water Customers

HIGHLAND - The City is required by the State of Illinois EPA to conduct a complete inventory of all service lines in the city's service area.

The service line comes from the City's main into your home. The purpose is to visually identify the service material.

The City has been conducting in person service line inspections and would appreciate your cooperation in completing this online.

To further aid them in this inventory, they encourage you to use the city website where you will find information, pictures, and a form online that you can easily submit for our records in place of an in person inspection. Uploading your photo is required.

If your residence/building was built after 1989 then this does not apply to you.

Thank you for your attention to this highly important matter.

Paste the link below into your web browser.

<https://highlandil.rja.revize.com/forms/10093>

## Courtney Garrison, APRN, Joins HSHS Medical Group

MARYVILLE, Ill. – HSHS Medical Group welcomes Courtney Garrison, APRN, to Family and Internal Medicine Maryville at 2401 S. Center St. in Maryville.

Garrison is accepting new patients and provides family medicine care for individuals and families across the lifespan, with an emphasis on preventive care, routine screenings, women's health exams and chronic disease management. She has a special interest in sup-



porting patients managing common long-term health concerns, including high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, and anxiety and depression.

Garrison's patient care philosophy focuses on health promotion, disease prevention and patient education. She emphasizes partnership and clear communication so patients feel heard and empowered to make informed decisions. Garrison brings bedside nursing experience in medical-surgical care, cardiology, neurology, critical care and obstetrics, and she values serving the community she calls home and mentoring nursing students and new graduate nurses.

She earned a Bachelor of Sci-

ence in nursing from Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, Illinois, and completed a Master of Science in nursing at Maryville University with a family nurse practitioner concentration. Her advanced clinical training includes family and internal medicine, women's health and urgent care, along with additional experience in pediatrics and hospital based acute care.

To schedule an appointment with Garrison, visit [hshs.org](http://hshs.org) or call 618-344-3046. New HSHS Medical Group patients may call the HSHS Medical Group Patient Advocate at 844-520-8897 to help set up their first appointment.

## Bradford National Bank, State Bank of St. Jacob Announce Merger

Bradford National Bank has announced the completion of a merger with State Bank of St. Jacob, bringing together two long-standing community banks with deep roots in Bond and Madison counties and the surrounding region. The merger was completed on February 28, 2026.

The combined institutions will operate under the name Bradford National Bank.

Michael Ennen, President and Chief Executive Officer of Bradford National Bank, announced the transaction and emphasized the shared values of the two organizations.

“Both institutions have achieved

strong success through exceptional customer service and deep, lasting ties to the communities they serve,” Ennen said. “Bradford has long been part of the St. Jacob area, actively supporting local events and initiatives for the past 25 years. We're excited to build on our community-focused banking approach—one rooted in local team members, local dedication, local decision-making, and local reinvestment.”

State Bank of St. Jacob has served its community for more than 120 years. Bradford National Bank, founded in 1867, is a full-service community bank and

the tenth oldest bank in Illinois, with locations in Greenville, Highland, Marine, Centralia, Irvington, Nashville, and Breese.

Steven Prange expressed strong optimism about the advantages the merger will bring to customers. “We are excited about the transaction,” Prange said. “By combining our strengths, we will deliver a broader range of enhanced financial services to our customers, including significantly greater lending capacity.”

**What to Expect**

During the first phase of the merger, State Bank of St. Jacob customers can continue banking

as usual. Account numbers, debit cards, online banking access, and everyday banking services will remain unchanged. Customers will be notified directly if any action is required in the future.

Branch locations, hours, and employees will also remain the same.

Bradford National Bank is committed to delivering seamless service and maintaining strong relationships while maintaining continuity of service.

**Community Service**

Bradford National Bank will continue its strong tradition of community support by sponsor-

ing local events like the Strawberry Festival and Little League, while also awarding two \$1,000 scholarships to Triad High School students.

For additional information or questions

Visit [www.bradfordbank.com](http://www.bradfordbank.com) (primary site for the merged institution)

State Bank of St. Jacob (now Bradford National Bank—St. Jacob branch):

Address: 102 West Fourth Street, St. Jacob, IL 62281

Phone: (618) 644-5555

## BREAKING: Rep. Mary Miller Applauds Farm Bill Advancing Out of House Agriculture Committee

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congresswoman Mary Miller (IL-15), a member of the House Agriculture Committee, released the following statement after the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 passed out of committee.

“As a third-generation farmer, I know firsthand that farming is not easy work, and I am committed to ensuring our Illinois producers receive support,” said Congresswoman Miller.

“This Farm Bill provides the

tools and certainty our agricultural producers need to remain the strongest and most productive in the world. I look forward to bringing this legislation to the House floor and delivering the stability our farmers need to plan for the future.”

The legislation secured several key provisions to support producers, including:

More than \$1 billion for specialty crop programs.

Protections ensuring California's Proposition 12 cannot

be imposed on producers outside the state.

Expanded access to credit for beginning farmers.

Codification of President Trump's reforms to the national dietary guidelines.