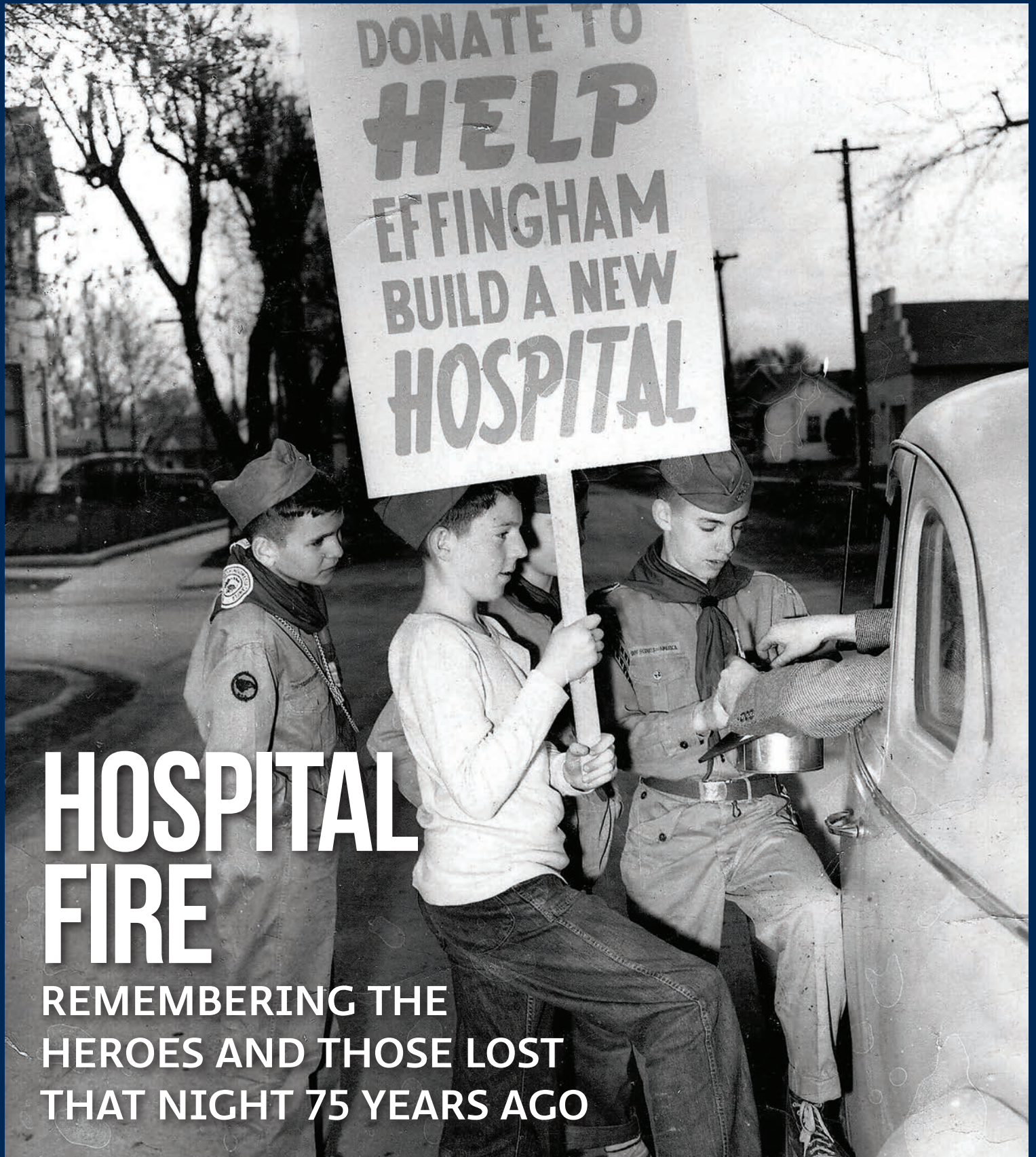


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FEATURE STORY



Crowds flooded the grounds near the hospital for a special memorial service on April 12, 1949. EDN file photo.

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Myths, Facts & Mysteries

by Linda Ruholl

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Jeff Long is the editor of the Effingham Daily News. He is a 1987 graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and has worked for newspapers in England, Pennsylvania and Virginia. For 13 years, he was a reporter and later an editor at the Chicago Tribune. A past president and current board member of the Illinois Associated Press Media Editors, he lives in Altamont with his wife, Karen.



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ON THE COVER: This image of Boy Scouts raising funds for a new hospital was published in the Effingham Daily News on April 17, 1949.

TOP LAWYERS EFFINGHAM AREA BASED UPON A SURVEY OF THEIR PEERS



These **LEADING LAWYERS** have been recommended by their peers to be among the **TOP LAWYERS** in Illinois.

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Darrell A. Woolums	Samuels Miller Schroeder Jackson & Sly	Decatur	217.429.4325	AG; Banking; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; RE: Comm; Trust/Will/Estate
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This **EMERGING LAWYER** has been identified by their peers to be among the **TOP LAWYERS** in Illinois who are age 40 or younger OR who have been admitted to the practice of law for 10 or fewer years.

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This special issue of Effingham Magazine is devoted to the heroes of the devastating fire at St. Anthony Hospital 75 years ago, on April 4, 1949. And to those who lost their lives, and those whose lives were forever changed.

Over the years, that tragic time in our community's history has been chronicled and reviewed many times in the pages of the Effingham Daily News. And rightly so. The legacy of that fire lingers to this day. We share some of those stories again in these pages, and also bring you some new perspectives.

As I've done many times before, I've been paging through the book "Terror to Triumph: The St. Anthony Hospital Fire," by a former EDN editor, the late Donna Riley-Gordon.

"The stories that came from that night are both heroic and tragic," she wrote. "They tell of humanity's greatest strengths. They strike chords in the heart and empower those who feel life has dealt them a terrible blow. The stories should be told and retold again, lest we forget the horrific price that was paid that night, or the heroic deeds embraced."

Donna's book included the following poem, which seems appropriate to reprint here.



Jeff Long
Editor

In Memory of St. Anthony Hospital

Written by Paul H. "Cooney" Miller

*I hear no voices
In the chapel tonight
No doors do I hear slam,
For St. Anthony Hospital
Stands no more
A symbol of Effingham
It makes no difference
Who you are
No difference who am I,
We all must suffer together
When our friends
And relatives die.
I'll never forget those words
That Bishop O'Connor said,*

*May God bless these people
That sleep among the dead,
And we say to our self,
It couldn't be God's desire
To let these Christian people
Die in a blazing fire.
He who makes the sunshine
And makes the waters flow,
Only He could tell the story,
Only He will ever know.
So let us all take warning
How dreadful fires can be
And unite ourselves together
With a better way to see.
And to one Frank Ries,
The hospital engineer,
Who tried so hard
To save someone
Whose life was sweet and
dear,*

*Although he lost the battle
He tried to win,
He died a gallant hero
And won the hearts of men.
And those nurses dressed in
white
Who faced their death so
free,
They did their job
The best they could,
As brave as they could be.
So to you Fern Riley,
Your death's a terrible shock,
But like a gallant shepherd
You died with your little
flock.
Oh, such courage that you
had,
You gave all that you could
give,*

*You will always be
remembered
Your name forever live.
And to you, Mrs. Clements,
A generous heart had she.
She said go help the others
Please don't bother with me.
And then to Frances
Pitchford,
While disaster took its toll,
Who stood her ground so
calmly
And performed her greatest
role.
And the hospital Sisters,
Who tried to relieve the pain,
God bless them all,
Who tried to help
And risk their lives in vain.*



▲▲ Shirley Clements, 21, a nurse, led multiple patients to safety before leaping from the hospital with her clothes aflame. "Don't worry about me," she told rescuers. "Get those inside." She died the following evening.



▲▲ Shown in this Ries family portrait are, in the back row from left: Frank Jr., Frank and Walter; in the front row from left Bobby, Marie and Marylene. Frank Ries, 48, the chief hospital engineer, was among the fire victims. His wife, Marie, was a nurse caring for a patient in the hospital that night. She survived.



◀◀ Fern Riley, 22, was a nurse in the hospital's second floor nursery. "I've got to stay with my babies!" another nurse heard her cry, according to the book "Terror to Triumph: The St. Anthony Hospital Fire." She perished with them.



◀◀ Ethel and John Riley learn of the death of their daughter Fern.

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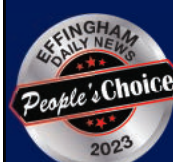
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MYTHS, FACTS & MYSTERIES

A retrospective on the St. Anthony Hospital fire 75 years ago



Crowds flooded the grounds near the hospital for a special memorial service on April 12, 1949. EDN file photo.

Linda Ruholl

For Effingham Magazine

Before the end of 2024, a new book about the 1949 St. Anthony Hospital fire will be available. The working title is, “The St. Anthony Hospital Fire of 1949: Assessment, Analysis and Consequences.” The roots of this new history are deep.

My parents were members of St. Francis Parish in Teutopolis. It was the era of “pew rent,” and we sat in the same place every time we went to services. It was along the east aisle of the church, and just next to one of the stained-glass windows commemorating the life of St. Francis of Assisi. Those art windows were created by the Emil Frei Art Glass Company of St. Louis and installed by Franciscan Father Theodosius Plassmeyer in 1923.

My dad's operating maxim was "go early so you're not late." The parish offered a 5 a.m. Mass favored by people with livestock and timed to beat the summer heat. The pull-open ventilation window to the left of the pew was another selling point in those days before air conditioning, which meant I had plenty of time to contemplate the brown robe of the Franciscan in the stained glass above my head.

My parents were cradle Catholics, and we were privileged to have a Franciscan religious in our family. My mother's sister, Georgiana Schwerdt, was one of the Joliet teaching Franciscans. Those were the times when Sisters' visits home were limited to a week or so every other summer. But while she was there, I was given ample exposure to Sister Theophane Schwerdt's view of life. Part of her vision included a religious vocation for me. She would drape a portion of her habit in front of me, and proclaim, "You look good in brown." I must admit I am still fond of brown, but the vocation didn't happen.

I went into the nursing profession instead, and attended a diploma school of nursing in Terre Haute. The school was run by Franciscan Sisters. Although they were a branch of a different Founding Mother from the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis in Effingham, their habits were similar. Both ver-

sions were derived from the same Franciscan robe I spent so much time contemplating from Pew No. 24 when I was 5.

We learned about the Effingham hospital fire in sociology class during our first year at nursing school. The teacher showed a brief grainy black and white film that included many of the photographs featured in newspaper articles in 1949.

The take-home lesson from the film was that fire safety was important, and that the lives of your patients depended on your knowledge of what to do in the event of fire, as well as making a commitment to do it.

Student nurses spent more time in the clinical area in the 1960s than they do today, and that made entry into practice fairly seamless. My first job after getting my license was in the Terre Haute St. Anthony Hospital OB Nursery. My helper on the 3-11 shift was an aide right out of high school. There was a comfortable routine on the unit and on the shift, with the support of experienced RNs willing to teach and consult.

The 1949 fire was discussed on several occasions, around the time of fire drills. It raised some predictable "What would you do?" questions, as well as a number of "I wonder why?" puzzles.

In our youthful naiveté, my aide and I speculated we might have been able to load Fern Riley's newborns into two rolling bassinets, sandwiched in tightly side-by-side. The next step was to push the bassinets over to the fire escape door. By that time, the babies would have been awake and screaming, and that would have attracted the attention of potential rescuers down below the stairs and along the side of the hospital building.

The final root of the book is my love of history and the process of researching it. History and biographies have been favorites over the years, but researching and writing history had to wait until I retired from full-time teaching at Lake Land College in 2008.

After that, I taught Nursing Research several times as an adjunct in the EIU BSN-Completion Program, and that gave me an opportunity to present my earlier hospital fire findings to a nursing audience.

Their interest spurred me on. I remember one student, who was a St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital employee, saying, "Now I know why they take fire drills so seriously!"

Dispelling some myths

One widespread myth says the 1949 St. Anthony fire was the second worst hospital fire in the United States.

The truth is that the St. Anthony fire was the worst hospi-



View of St. Francis from Pew 24. Submitted photo.

tal fire in the United States. The second-worst fire myth got started on April 5, 1949. A United Press reporter made the comparison of 125 deaths in a Cleveland fire to the 57 known deaths at that point in Effingham, and logically concluded that 125 deaths was worse than 57 deaths.

The story ran on page 7 of the Effingham Daily News on April 5, 1949. Unfortunately, the reporter hadn't fact checked the context of the numbers in his story, leading to an "apples vs. oranges" error.

The Cleveland Clinic building where so many died wasn't a hospital. There were three buildings in the Cleveland Clinic complex at the time, and one of them was a hospital, but the fire that caused the deaths wasn't in the hospital building. The hospital structure was completely separate and situated south and well away from the outpatient clinic where the fire happened.

The outpatient Cleveland Clinic building was a diagnostic and treatment center. Nobody stayed overnight. There were no adult inpatients, no babies in a nursery, no people trapped in traction, and no nursing home beds in the attic. People came to the clinic to

have x-rays and blood tests in order to diagnose a medical problem. Some did have minor surgery to correct a specific problem at the Cleveland Clinic, and some received anesthesia during the surgery. But every one of these individuals were discharged on the same day.

A second myth from 1949 held that the hospital was a fire-proof structure.

The truth is that hospital was a conflagration risk, and for numerous reasons.

There was a great deal of old wood in the building. In addition, the Sisters ran a very clean hospital, a fact that was commended by patients and inspectors alike. As a way of demonstrating that commitment to sanitation, the Sisters wanted the visible wood along the halls and around the doors and windows to look good. That meant varnish.

Varnish contains linseed oil and it is flammable. Some painting had been done just before the fire, but paint buckets and rags were not the source of the fire. All the painting materials had been safely stored and the fire didn't reach them.

Assistant Fire Chief Charlie Chamberlain was in halls rescuing people immediately upon reaching the hospital. In his words, "The varnish on the floors and woodwork burned in a flash like gasoline."

There were also combustible materials lining the long halls of the first and second floors, as well as in the retrofitted fiberboard partitions in the attic.

The building was a patchwork due to additions over the

years. The stair rails and stair steps were wood. The stairs were completely open from top to bottom. There were no fire doors.

There were laundry chutes and dumb waiters with wooden doors. There was an old elevator that had been closed off. All of these features served as flues that allowed flames to spread vertically from the basement.

There was a void above the suspended ceilings in the halls. There were no fire stops in the long hallways. Those things allowed the smoke and flames to spread horizontally.

There were transoms over the doors to the patients' rooms. In rooms where the transom was open that night, patients were unlikely to survive.

Other than the noses of the people in the building on the night of April 4, 1949, there was no way to detect smoke at St. Anthony. There were no smoke detectors on the walls, and there was no watchman routinely patrolling the basement and halls, alert for trouble.

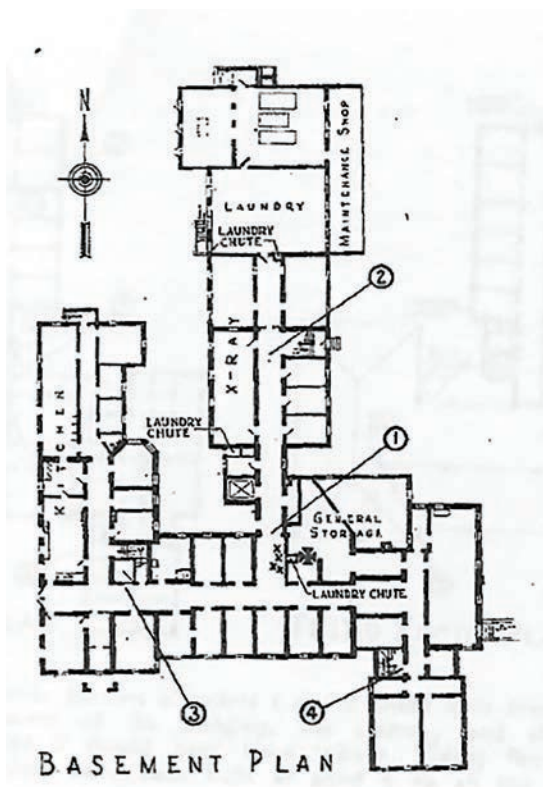
There were no automatic sprinklers and no wired-in fire alarm. There were no fire drills. If there was an emergency plan for the event of fire, it hadn't been practiced recently by the staff on duty.

And there was no building code in Effingham. Advice from Fire Chief Wilkins about the need for sprinklers in an old building was a suggestion – not a mandate.

Considering some facts

There was a severe nursing shortage at St. Anthony Hospital in 1949.

In fact, there was a severe nursing shortage all over the United States. The end of World War II brought some military nurses home, but they didn't look for jobs in the restrictive practice environment of the hospital after the relative autonomy of wartime nursing. Public health nursing offered a chance to work in the community, and better pay. Other nurses got married soon after the war and started families, and their husbands wanted them to stay home. Hospital nursing pay was low and had been for



Fire source in laundry chute east-end basement. The empty fire extinguishers are represented by x's. Submitted photo.

some time. Proof of local conditions emerges from the 1940 census. Consider these statistics for two of the registered nurses employed at St. Anthony in 1939 and 1940. Keep in mind that a registered nurse had completed a three-year diploma program, followed with a comprehensive state exam.

Florence Litzelman was single and age 35. She worked 48 weeks in 1939 and earned \$800. Opal Wakefield was a widow at age 37. She worked 50 weeks in 1939 and her year's pay was \$600. Both of these women worked 56 hours per week in 1940. According to the report on the census, their income ranged from around \$12 per week to \$16 per week in 1939.

In contrast, Ben Biedenbarn was a 41-year-old single male who worked as an unlicensed orderly. His pay for 1939 was \$1,100 for the year. He worked four hours per week less than either of the RNs, which amounted to 52 weeks in 1940. Ben's wages were \$21 per week, at least 25% higher than the better paid nurse's salary. Both the nurses and the orderly lived in hospital-furnished housing, which subsidized their income.

One way around the nursing shortage issue at St. Anthony and other hospitals was to hire practical nurses. These individuals had on-the-job training, but no creditable formal education



Tubular slide escapes were invented in the 1930s. St. Anthony Hospital installed them after an inspection and at the insistence of the state of Illinois around 1940. Shown is the unused slide escape after the fire. Submitted photo.

The following is a list of those who died in the St. Anthony Hospital fire. Their ages are in parentheses.

Adult women

ALTHOFF, Elizabeth (71)
BAKER, Armanda (90)
BATMAN, Mary (79)
BERGBOWER, Julia (87)
BERSIG, Frances (58)
BIRCH, Ella (91)
BROOM, Mabel (79)
BROWN, Martha (88)
CAMPBELL, Odessa (24)
CLEMENTS, Shirley (21)
COLWELL, Cora (80)
GLATKI, Sister Eustachia (53)
GLOYD, Helen (57)
GOSSMAN, Clara (74)
GRIGG, Caroline (63)
HALEY, Mary (79)
HANKINS, Margaret (84)
HAUMUSSER, Otilia (62)
HELREGELE, Clothilda (54)
HENDERSON, Theodocia (65)

HINRICHER, Sister Bertina (62)
HOBSON, Edith (71)
JENKINS, Rose (88)
JONES, Catherine (75)
KESSLER, Mary (65)
KINKELAAR, Margaret (84)
KLITZKE, Blanche (61)
LEE, Eleanor (25)
LOBMEIR, Thresia (80)
MARTEN, Mary Fern (31)
MASCHER, Floy (35)
MAXWELL, Matilda (88)
MCKINNON, Samantha (89)
MICHL, Delores (19)
MUSSMAN, Emma (53)
NASH, Ida (81)
NIEMEYER, Emma (57)
NUTT, Lillie (68)
PETTY, Norma Jean (26)
RAMSEY, Edith (26)
RILEY, Fern (22)

RUHOLL, Laura (20)
SCHUETTE, Elizabeth (78)
SMITH, Flora (78)
WEIS, Gertrude (37)
WILL, Theresa (73)
WOHLTMAN, Mary (70)
WRIGHT, Ella (83)

Female children

BRUMMER, Doris (12)
VAN SANT, Kay (2)

Female infants less than 30 days old

BAILEY, Toni Lee
FANCHER, Shelia
MCMANNAWAY, Linda Lu
SIGRIST, Eileen Mae
SIGRIST, Irene Kay
SPRINGER, Elaine

Adult men

CARRELL, Frank (80)
GENTRY, Harold C. (32)

KABALCYK, Evan (69?)
LOVELLETTE, Dan (80)
RIES, Frank (48)
SANDON, Father Charles (52)
SCHMIDT, Edward (92)
THOELE, Henry (88)
WORTHY, Clyde (47)

Male children

SCAMMAHORN, Richard (11)
ULHORN, Clarence (6 months)

Male infants less than 30 days old

BRUMMER, Edward Jr.
CLAAR, Teddy
GENTRY, Harold D.
HARTKE, Donald
MICHL, Steven
MOORE, John C.
RUHOLL, Ralph
SIDENER, Robert D.
WORTHY, Baby

and no state license. The licensing of practical nurses did not come to Illinois until a couple of years later, and then it required a full year of nursing school followed by success on a state exam.

Fewer nurses meant high patient-to-staff nurse ratios. That had terrible consequences on the night of the hospital fire. For example, the third floor was staffed with two practical nurses on the night of the fire, when there were over 30 people asleep on that unit.

In order to escape from the third, any person on that floor would have to find their way to the tubular slide escapes. The purported advantages of slide escapes were that patients were protected from the fire and from the weather inside a metal tube as they slid to safety. The devices were invented in the 1930s and were recommended to schools and hospitals. St. Anthony had installed them after an inspection and at the insistence of the state of Illinois around 1940.

Photographs show that the slide escapes were intact after the fire was put out. Nobody used them, and it's not hard to see why. Imagine being an 80-year-old woman and asleep in your bed on the top floor. You are hastily awakened and told you have to leave right now. Clad only in your nightshirt, you find your way down the hall to the slide escape door, step inside, and free fall three stories down in the dark. Theoretically, a helpless person could go down on a mattress. But there was little help on the third floor to get people into the slide, and there was no one at the ground level to help them get out.

Risky behavior

The Fire Marshal could not identify what started the fire, but he could pinpoint where the fire started. The point of origin was in or near the bottom of a specific laundry chute. On the basement drawing, a cross points out the location. The empty fire extinguishers found nearby were an important clue. They are represented by x's.

Risky human behaviors raised the risk of an accidental fire in homes and hospitals. More people smoked, and smokers

smoked more heavily in 1949, than the general population does today. Inclusion of cigarettes in military meals during World War II promoted the habit.

If people smoked in bed at home, they did it in the hospital, too. Nurses provided ash trays and emptied ash trays and cautioned smokers who were confined to bed. But patients were frequently prescribed narcotic pain killers and heavy-duty sleeping pills. Some patients smoked to relax as they waited for their medicine to take effect. As the patient dozed off, ashes from the tip or even the entire cigarette could fall into the linens.

Nursing texts cautioned that sedated smokers should be visually monitored, but the nursing shortage and high patient-to-nurse ratios meant heavy workloads for the staff. Watching a patient smoke wasn't high on the staff nurse's list of things that had to be done.

On the other hand, linens were changed frequently as a comfort measure. Patients sweat into bed sheets due to fear, fever and inflammation, and there was also wound drainage and other body fluids. Beds in 1949 had many sheets. At the very bottom was the heavy flat mattress pad, followed by a flat bottom sheet. That was protected from moisture, at least in theory, by a rubber draw sheet topped with a cloth draw sheet.

The draw sheets covered the middle third of the mattress under the patient's back side. Next came the flat top sheet, followed by a blanket and a bed spread. If part of this linen got wet, it soaked through to the rest of the layers.

One of the nurses who testified at the Coroner's Inquest noted that, at about 11:30 p.m., she had taken clean linens to a patient in a specific room, along with a second set for his roommate, "in case he needed it."

Her comment demonstrates how very common linen changes were in 1949, and at all hours of the day and night. Soiled linens were rolled up into a ball, put into a laundry bag, then loaded onto a cart and rolled to the laundry chute, where they were dumped down to the basement. Rolling the



Arnold and June Aderman with their baby, born an hour after June escaped the hospital fire. EDN file photo.

soiled sheets was a deliberate and planned action; the intent was to avoid contaminating other surfaces with infectious microorganisms. That was an important strategy in 1949, because antibiotics were still new and relatively untested.

The oldest of the professional nursing journals, "The American Journal of Nursing," published a piece about institutional fires early in 1949. That article indicated that cigarettes and matches were the most common cause of hospital fires in cases where the fire marshal had been able to discern a specific trigger.

Workers in hospital laundries were not surprised by cigarette burns in sheets. The problem was remedied by patching the hole and putting the mended sheet back into circulation.

I remember clearly that this practice continued in Effingham into the 1970s. However, there is no way to prove the 1949 hospital fire was triggered by a cigarette. The evidence is long gone.

The victims

Many of those in the building on the night of the fire were neither staff nor patients.

Creating a profile of those who died in the hospital fire is straightforward. There were 76 victims and they are listed with their ages. Seventy-five percent of those who died were adults. Of the adults, the majority were women. The range

of ages across the adult victims is wide. The youngest was a 19-year-old woman, and the oldest was a 92-year-old man.

The rest of the victims were infants (20%) and children (5%). A baby less than 30 days old is defined as an infant in the table. Most of the infants were newborns. Not all of the infants were in the nursery.

Creating a profile of the survivors is more complicated and requires a definition. A survivor is defined as an identifiable person who was in the building between 11 p.m. and midnight, who got out of the building, and then lived afterwards for at least a week.

There were more people in the building than was generally recognized at the time. The survivors lists published in the newspapers consisted mostly of surviving patients, but there

were other people in the structure who were family caregivers.

Linnie Austin and Cornelia Boyle were there with their mother, Mamie Austin. Dorothy Bible was sitting with her 16-year-old son, and Bernice Bruner was staying with her teenage daughter. Armon Johnson's 6-year-old had a tonsillectomy and dad stayed by his side that night.

There were others. These adults made sure their child or elderly parent got out of the building. The rescued patients got on the survivor lists, but the family caregivers did not.

All things considered, there is good evidence for 69 survivors.

That leaves us with a simple addition problem: 76 people who died plus 69 people who survived equals 145 people in the building.

Chapter 9 of the new book, "The Victims," provides a profile for each person who died. Each of these reports includes genealogical data, census findings, events in their life trajectory, as well as their place of burial, along with a photograph of the cemetery memorial, if there is one. Some profiles include photographs of the victim and/or family.

Chapter 10, "The Survivors," contains similar profiles for the ones who got away. In some cases, the survivor profile is detailed, but a few people were hard to trace.

The recent availability of the 1950 census was very helpful, as was the ability to research on ancestry.com, findagrave.com, and newspapers.com. All these resources have the potential to contain errors, but numerous endnote citation in every chapter will allow the reader to check the source and then make a decision about the profile's validity.

Some mysteries remain

How many beds were in use inside the hospital at the time of the fire?

Pat Kelly was the Illinois State Fire Marshal in 1949. He was new to the job, as he just started in the position on March 8, 1949. He was a veteran fireman with more than 20 years of big city experience.

In his official report, he was noncommittal about the number of beds in the hospital. His account tells of the number of patient rooms at St. Anthony, but that doesn't tell us the number of beds in the rooms on the night of the fire.



Shown is a postcard of St. Anthony Hospital before the fire.

According to Kelly's report, there was a total of 15 adult patient rooms, two pediatric rooms, two convalescent rooms (what we would call nursing home accommodations), and four employee rooms on the third floor. These rooms were not all in the same area. Eleven of the patient rooms were in the north wing. The rest of the rooms were in the attic, on the south side. The collection of attic beds was in what had once been an open area that had been remodeled.

During the remodel, the open area was partitioned into rooms by using 4-by-8 foot sheets of organic fiberboard. The fiberboard sheets were nailed up on wooden two-by-fours to form walls. The organic fiberboard was judged to be highly combustible by the State Fire Marshal.

The third floor descriptive pattern held for Kelly's layout of the rest of the hospital. The second floor had 25 regular patient rooms and a three-bed maternity ward, but the Fire

IN MEMORY

of those who were lost in the fire, and all those who helped during the recovery and rebuilding process



2003 Gingerbread recreation of St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital before the fire.

DR. RUBEN BOYAJIAN AND MRS. EMILY BOYAJIAN

Marshal drew no conclusion about the overall number of beds on the second level. A labor room, a delivery room, the nursery, and the two rooms allotted to the hospital chaplain were also on this floor.

The first floor had 25 regular patient rooms, but here again Kelly did not state a bed count. In most cases, we don't know the number of beds in those regular patient rooms, with one exception. When registered nurse Lucy VanSyoc testified to the Deputy Fire Marshal about her work at the time of the fire, she indicated that Room 138 was a ward with four beds.

Over the 75 years since the fire, the issue of the number of beds remains unsettled. Published documents starting in 1949 contain different numbers with a wide range.

That year the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois celebrated the 25th anniversary of the move of its headquarters from Alton to Springfield. As part of the celebration, a commemorative souvenir book was created sometime before the fire. All the dioceses' Catholic hospitals are pictured in it, and a photograph of the soon-to-be destroyed St. Anthony indicates a 120-bed capacity.

About two months after the fire, in June of 1949, James McElroy wrote about the fire for "Hospitals," the professional publication of the American Hospital Association. He qualified as an expert in his role as a Technical Secretary for the National Fire Protection Association. McElroy stated that, before the fire, St. Anthony had been a 100-bed general institution.

Ben Biederhorn, an orderly, talks to officials shortly after he was forced to stop his rescue efforts because his hands were badly burned. EDN file photo.



Twenty-seven years later, Sister Francis Cook, OSF, was the author of a history of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis and their first 100 years of service in the United States. Sister Cook was a PhD-prepared historian with full access to the Order's archival material. Chapter 8 in her volume was devoted to the story of St. Anthony Hospital, and Sister Cook noted that the capacity of the hospital increased to 120 beds in 1945.

Twenty-nine years after that, St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital published a history monograph for local consumption. The title was "St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital: A Tradition of Caring ... Since 1875." This 2004 document stated that a 1945 third-floor remodel increased the hospital's bed capacity to 110.

Following that, and sometime after 2011, a four-page sepiatoned document entitled "The History and Heritage of HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital" was released locally. It was widely distributed. This leaflet echoed the monograph's count of 110 beds.

So we are left to wonder, were there 100 beds in the building that burned in 1949? Or 110 beds? Or perhaps 120 beds?

Emergency calls

Why didn't the Sister in charge on the night shift call the fire department first?

Sister Anastasia Groesch, OSF, was an experienced registered nurse. She graduated from St. John's School of Nursing around 1913. According to her Apostolic Service Record, she had been stationed at St. Anthony in Effingham since July of 1948.

Before that, she had worked at St. John's in Springfield, St. Mary's in Decatur, and St. Mary's in Streator, Illinois, and also at St. Vincent's and Sacred Heart Hospital in Wisconsin. Her nursing service in those hospitals extended over a 40-year period.

Secular (nonreligious) nursing publications dating back to 1930 emphasized the need to call the fire department first when a fire was detected in a hospital, because the first five minutes after discovery is crucial for the survival of those in the building.

In her testimony to the coroner and the Illinois Deputy Fire Marshal, Sister Anastasia stated that she called engineer Frank Ries first, then the

Effingham Fire Department, and finally the other Sisters in the convent.

Frank Ries ran over from the house next door and started using a fire extinguisher, but at that point smoke and flames flared up out of the laundry chute when he opened the door on the first floor.

According to the Assistant Fire Chief's testimony, the call came in to the fire department at 11:48 p.m. Mr. Chamberlain was already on duty there, so the response was rapid. The first fire truck got to the hospital in two minutes, but the firemen could see that their immediate priority was to get people out of the building as fast as they could.

Things went downhill rapidly and photographs of the building at 12:10 a.m. show flames shooting through the roof.

From testimony given to the coroner and to the state Deputy Fire Marshal, it is obvious that Sister Anastasia was a busy woman. She was in charge of the hospital switchboard and of the ER entrance down in the basement, as well as any new admissions.

A new patient had just come in with his wife and sister, and it was up to Sister Anastasia to get his paperwork prepared so he could be formally admitted to a room on the first floor



Sister Anastasia Groesch. Submitted photo.

by one of the two RNs on general duty there.

Frances Pitchford, who would have admitted him to Room 120, testified to the Deputy Fire Marshal that she didn't even know the man's name at 11:30 p.m. because, "his card had not been sent in as yet."

Sister Anastasia was the senior nurse of the Hospital Sisters on duty. It may be that she was keenly aware of the implications of sounding a fire alarm at night in a busy hospital with minimal staffing. There had been a couple of fires in the basement in the past and those had been resolved without alarming the patients.

Sirens, flashing lights and firemen with hoses, boots and ladders a half hour before midnight would have wreaked havoc. Sister Anastasia had no way to independently verify that there actually was a fire until she herself could smell and see it. But by then, it was right in front of her.

The absence of fire drills at St. Anthony in 1949 was a powerful confounding factor.

How can you know what you are supposed to do in an emergency if you've never rehearsed it in the environment you find yourself in when the disaster begins to unfold?

Funerals were held throughout the region following the fire. EDN file photo.





SET IN STONE

Retired firefighters to unveil statue commemorating St. Anthony Hospital Fire

Members of the Effingham Retired Volunteer Firefighters Association and Effingham City Commissioner Libby Moeller stand by the spot where the group's statue commemorating the St. Anthony Hospital Fire will be erected in April. The statue will be located just outside of HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital in Effingham. From left are Libby Moeller, Jim Wolters, Nick Althoff, Howard Janis and Dave Budde. Nick Taylor photo.

Nick Taylor
Effingham Magazine

A local group of retired firefighters has been leading efforts to commemorate the St. Anthony Hospital fire, which has long been considered to be the most significant event to ever occur in Effingham.

"If our age group doesn't keep it going, it's part of the history of the community that's gonna be lost," said Nick Althoff, a former Effingham Fire Chief and a member of the Effingham Retired Volunteer Firefighters Association.

Less than a year since the association announced its plans to have a statue erected in the city memorializing the victims of the fire, the group has already raised the \$40,000 needed to cover the cost.

"The community has been very giving," said Jim Wolters, also an association member and a former assistant chief with the fire department.

"It's a hell of an accomplishment," Althoff said.

The statue, built by Effingham Monument Co., depicts a nurse cradling a newborn baby which is, in part, meant to honor the babies who died that day despite the efforts of nurses to save them. The design for the statue was created

by local artist Jamie Stang Ellis.

"It's all hand carved out of granite," said association member Howard Janis.

Two plaques will be placed on the statue. One will display the names of everyone who died in the fire, and the other will display an explanation of the statue and a brief history of the fire. Additionally, lights will be placed around the statue, so it can be illuminated at night.

The statue, which is being shipped from China, is now complete and should be arriving in Effingham soon. The foundation for the statue has already been laid near the Healing Garden, just outside of HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital, which will become its permanent home.

"They were very receptive to this," Althoff said of hospital officials.

The statue's unveiling is scheduled for April 14 – 10 days after the fire's 75th anniversary.

Hospital President and CEO Chad Markham expressed his strong support for the project, praising the efforts of the Effingham Retired Volunteer Firefighters Association to memorialize an event that HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital will likely never forget.



Jamie Stang Ellis of Stang Arts drew the rendering of the statue the Effingham Retired Volunteer Firefighters Association is planning to erect at HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital. Submitted photo.

"We are grateful for the firefighters and first responders who responded that day as well as those who respond today to emergency situations. Their efforts to erect this statue demonstrates their commitment to recognizing those who served heroically at a difficult and tragic time for our community," Markham said.

Planning for the statue began in September of 2023, when members of the association ran into Effingham City Commissioner Libby Moeller and Jenn Alwardt, the executive secretary of the Effingham Fire Department, at the Effingham Event Center. Members of the association were sitting at the bar, waiting for their monthly meeting to begin.

"Jenn Alwardt and I had been talking about the upcoming anniversary and that we really wanted to do something," Moeller said. "It was just like complete kismet."

Moeller and Alwardt approached members of the group about working with HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital in sponsoring some items like T-shirts and stickers commemorating the 75th anniversary of the fire.

"We were about ready to start our meeting, so we invited her in to talk to the group. And everybody thought it was a great idea," Wolters said. "And when they left, we spent quite a bit of time talking about it ourselves, and one of the members came up with the idea of the statue. And everybody jumped on that."

The member of the group responsible for coming up with idea was Gary Poynter.

Once everyone involved agreed to move forward with plans for a statue, Moeller brought the idea to the Effingham City Council, which voted to provide some funds.

"The city kick-started the first \$15,000 because we made that case to the city, and they agreed, that it's the most significant historical event that's ever happened in our community," Moeller said.

Wolters said they began receiving donations almost immediately after kicking off their fundraising campaign.

"The day after we talked about it, Libby called me and said, 'I got two checks,'" Wolters said.

HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital Director of Philanthropy Michael Wall has been assisting the association in its plans to have bricks placed around the statue that will display the names of donors.

"No matter the amount of what they've given us, they'll be recognized with a brick, and the bricks are all going to be the same," Althoff said. "That's only fair, because that's the way the hospital was built. They used to call them 'nickel-and-dime donations.'"

According to Janis, the total amount of donor bricks could be as high as about 200, and he noted that the association received many individual donations in addition to larger corporate donations.

"Right now there are 92 bricks, but there will be more," Janis said.

For years, the Effingham Retired Volunteer Firefighters Association has dedicated much of its efforts to preserving the history of the fire. This has included the restoration of one of the fire trucks that was used to respond to the scene of the fire, the Caledonia, which they plan on bringing to the unveiling ceremony for the statue in April.

Just about everyone in the Effingham area seems to have some type of personal connection to the fire. This includes Janis, whose father-in-law lived in a home located near the hospital when it caught fire. The fire is still a somewhat sensitive subject for Janis, who fought back tears while he recounted his father-in-law's experience.

"I had a father-in-law who poured water on his roof to keep the roof from burning, and then he took in people from the hospital. Their house is right on the corner by the hospital fire," Janis said. "He was putting the roof out while his mom was taking people in."

Wolters also has a personal connection to the fire. His late wife, Carol "Cookie" Wolters' mother was among those who jumped from windows on the second floor of the building during the fire. She managed to escape with her life, but she broke her back as a result of the fall.

Moeller said it's stories like these that have kept the memory of the fire alive for future generations. Although she wasn't alive when it happened, the city council member is well aware of the significance of the fire and is reminded of its legacy just about every day. She also noted that she, her husband and her children were born at HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital.

"I look at the hospital like multiple times a day out my kitchen window when I'm doing dishes at the sink, and it's hard not to think about it because you know the story and the history," Moeller said. "And it's really important because the last people that were a part of it, they're not going to be here much longer, as sad as that is."

Despite the loss of life caused by the fire, association member Dave Budde highlighted the importance of the impact the fire had on National Fire Protection Association codes, the effects of which can be seen in the HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital building today.

"A lot of laws have changed as a result of that disaster," Budde said.

Like Budde, Markham sees the anniversary as an opportunity to remember the breakthrough in fire safety that occurred as a result of the historic disaster.

"It led to a nationwide hospital inspection for fire hazards and led to major changes that made hospitals and other large facilities safer today, such as fire barriers, smoke compartments, and stairway enclosures," Markham said.

Additionally, Markham reflected on the lasting impact the fire has had on the hospital beyond changing fire safety codes.

"The St. Anthony Hospital Fire is part of our history, one that is never far from our hearts as the current hospital



Chad Markham is the president and CEO of HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital in Effingham. Markham has been strongly supportive of the Effingham Retired Volunteer Firefighters Association's efforts to erect a statue commemorating the St. Anthony Hospital Fire. Photo submitted by HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital.

has 'Memorial' in the name in honor of those who lost their lives. It is something that touched our hospital family, the community, the nation and the world, as well as our Hospital Sisters who founded the hospital," Markham said. "The Sisters' mission and ministry continues on through the hands of our nurses, doctors and all our colleagues today."

While the statue is meant to honor the victims of the fire and those who responded to the scene that day, it's also meant to honor those who helped raise the funds to rebuild the hospital.

"The amount of money that came from overseas, across the United States is just unbelievable," Althoff said.

"Everything is relative to time, but at that time there was a committee from the Effingham area that started a fundraiser for the new hospital," Wolters said. "They collected \$650,000, which is several million today."

Between the fire and the construction of the new hospital, many newborns, including Budde, who was born in 1952, were delivered at doctors offices and clinics in the surrounding area.

"My father-in-law was born at St. Anthony's because he was born right before the hospital fire. Then my mother-in-law was born in Flora because there was no hospital," Moeller said.

The Effingham Retired Volunteer Firefighters Association has made it clear that the purpose of erecting the statue is not to upset those that remember the horrors of April 4, 1949. It is meant to honor those who lost their lives as a result of the fire and those who came together to help find victims and rebuild in the aftermath.

"Somebody mentioned this real early in the game. They said, 'What are you guys doing? Are you celebrating this event that killed 76 people?' I said, 'No. It's not a celebration. It's a memorial,'" Wolters said. "This has got to be remembered. That's history."

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IN THEIR OWN WORDS

On the night of April 4, 1949, a raging fire lit the sky over Effingham as St. Anthony Hospital burned. Devastation of the structure would take only minutes, but the fire's devastating impact lingers to this day. The fire claimed 76 lives. Linda Ruholl, nurse historian at the Effingham County Museum, collected "oral histories" from people affected by that night. The Effingham Daily News shared these stories of tragedy and triumph throughout April of 2019 to memorialize the 70th anniversary of the fire. We share those stories again, on the eve of the 75th anniversary.

THE NIGHT MY DAD'S LIFE AND MINE CHANGED FOREVER

Michell Clements Dupske

For Effingham Magazine

My parents were Hilary and Shirley Clements, and they were from Granite City and Belleville, Illinois. They left there and came to Effingham to start a new life and raise a family, because there was too much negativity back in their hometowns.

My mom was a nurse at the hospital and my dad was a Fuller Brush salesman. My mom quit her job a week before the fire. Her parents weren't pleased with her working and having a baby at home. She loved her nursing career, but to keep the peace, she decided to stay home.

However, the hospital called her to work one more midnight shift as a private nurse, and she said yes.

She was at work that night for about an hour when dad's life and mine changed forever. My dad lost his wife, and he was left with a 9-month-old baby. He didn't know anyone in Effingham and he was totally devastated.

Dad wanted to keep me, but he was just 20 years old. Mom's parents wanted to raise me, which in the 1940s was the custom if the mother of a child died. My dad fought to keep me and won. We moved back to Granite City and lived with his parents.

Dad had me stay in touch with my mom's family, but grandma and grandpa had no love for my dad. They believed because he let my mom go to work that night, it was his fault that she died. They would take me to mom's grave, and

photograph me holding flowers, but they would tell me very little about her. Her death was a closed and bitter chapter. I remember them saying that I would never be a decent woman because my dad was raising me.

My own daughter is very independent, and she has asked me, "Why did you put up with all that?"

It was because I was raised not to correct my elders. I listened, but I was determined to prove them wrong. Dad knew what they were saying to me. They had to blame someone for their loss. This was in the 1940s, when men were expected to be strong and hide their emotions.

It was not until I was in my 40s that my dad was finally able to tell me how everything had affected him.

My dad had been through a lot even before the fire. He served in World War II, and was in Guam. Before that, he lost all his siblings. Two of them died young, one from smallpox and the other from scarlet fever.

When he was 14, his younger brother was 9 and looked up to him and always wanted to do things with him. One of my dad's chores was to go get the weekend paper on Saturday evenings. His little brother always wanted to go with him, but their parents always said, "No, you are too young."

Finally, one Saturday, they gave in. The boys were standing together at the side of the road. Dad's little brother bent over to tie his shoe. At the very same time, a truck jumped the curb and ran over his head, right in front of my dad.

Even though I wasn't told much about my mom, I knew she loved me. She wrote a letter to my dad's parents before she died, worded as if I had written it. It has been on display at the Effingham County Museum, and is very touching.

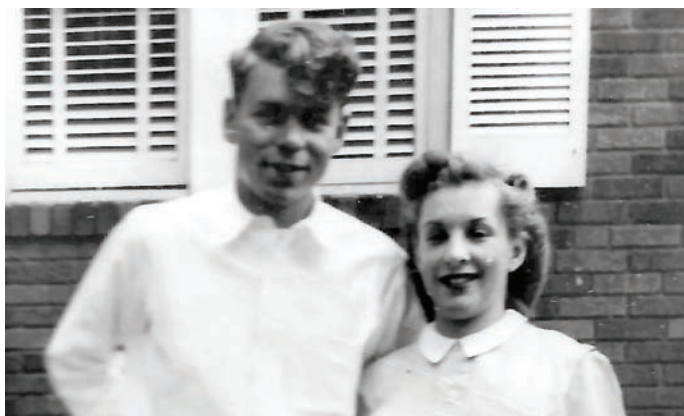
I was part of the wedding of my mom's sister when I was 4. At that celebration, my dad met a lovely lady who he married, and so I got a new mom. I can only believe my mom who died had something to do with it. As I grew up, people would say that I resembled her, by being caring and thoughtful. It must be in my blood.

When I was older and my kids were in their teens, I had a dream about my mom. She asked me to always take care of her mom, my grandmother. Grandma was fine at the moment, but I never forgot that dream. As time went on, she developed Alzheimer's. Everyone wanted to put her in a nursing home. But I said, "No way!"

I had my own day care business, so I moved her in with my family. I cared for her for 4 1/2 years. After she came to live with us, she declined from grandma to toddler to infant, and died in my arms. I could feel my mom and Mother Mary there encouraging me. And my dad would tell me that my mom would be proud of me. It was one of the hardest



As a child, Michell Clements Dupske visits her mother's grave.



Hilary and Shirley Clements.

things I have ever done, but I would do it again in a heart-beat.

The exhibit for my mom at the Effingham County Museum had given her sisters closure they never really had. My mom's things had been in a storage box in the closet. Her sisters, my aunts, got to see them and reminisce about the events of their life with Shirley. My only regret is that my dad isn't alive to see what has happened over these past few years to the love of his life. God called her home that night, but not just as someone whose time on earth was over, but as a hero who cared for others more than for herself.

She is my hero!

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on April 4, 2019

I JUMPED FROM 2ND FLOOR AS THE HOSPITAL BURNED

Anita Sidener

For Effingham Magazine



Anita Sidener in 1949.

My name is Anita Sidener and I was at the hospital when it burned. I am 92. My family lived south of Altamont.

My husband brought me to the hospital because I was getting ready to have a baby. I already had a 2-year-old daughter at home. At the end of the day, my doctor went home because he did not think my labor was going fast enough. My husband went home so I could sleep.

I was sedated, but I don't know what the drug was. I don't

remember getting a shot, so it was probably a pill. I was in a bed in a room by myself at the end of a hallway. It didn't seem to be a regular patient room. There wasn't much furniture. There were two windows, and those windows were on two walls next to each other, which is why I believe I was at the end of a hallway.

It was loud voices and yelling that woke me. I don't know the time. I was fuzzy from the sedative. The noise I heard seemed to be coming from outside the building. I went to the window to look out. I didn't see any people, but I did see smoke and concrete down below.

The door to my room was closed, and when I went to open it, I could see smoke and fire to my left. I went across the hall to a room where there were two other women. I think they had already had their babies. They were awake and walking around the room. We were all afraid. We didn't know what to do.

I didn't see any staff around at all. We decided we had to jump. It was 2 ½ stories down. I went first. I don't know what happened to the other ladies, if they fell on top of me or what.

I was put on a stretcher and taken to a nearby house. I don't know whose house it was, but the people who lived

around the hospital grounds were very good to take people in. At some point, I was taken to a clinic.

I credit Dr. Webb with saving my life. He saw how badly hurt I was, and if he hadn't taken care of me, I would not be here. Meanwhile, my husband had come back to town and was looking for me. That meant he was looking at the dead bodies in the morgue. I felt so sorry that he had to do that.

I went back into active labor and my little boy was still-born. He was a full-term baby and we named him Robert Dale Sidener. I did get to see him, and to hold his hand. I was grateful that we got to bury him as he was, and not like all those other babies that were in the nursery.

I was sent to a hospital in St. Louis for a long time, and then I went home. It took me months to heal because I had so many fractures. I was in a full body cast from my neck on down, because my back was broken.

There was a second cast on my right arm that went from below the armpit down to my hand. I could not bend my elbow, because the cast went straight down. My right ankle was broken and my right heel had been crushed when I jumped. That cast went from my toes to my pelvic area. The heel problem stayed with me, and it still affects how I walk today.

Because of the way I delivered, I had female problems. Anemia was the result, and the nurses had to give me iron shots to build up my blood. The shots were big, and medicine was black in color. They had to use a big needle and they hated to do it because they knew it would hurt.

When they would come into my room, they would tell me how sorry they were that they had to give me those shots.

It took me many years to recover from the mental effects of the fire. I still don't like to hear ambulance sirens. Worst than that was the guilt over my little boy's death. I kept thinking that it was my fault that he died. People, and even ministers, would tell me that I hadn't done anything wrong, that I couldn't help it that he died. But I couldn't make myself believe it.

It is only in recent years that my current minister was able to counsel me in such a way that I could accept the truth.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on April 9, 2019.

MY MOTHER SAW FIRE BLAZING IN THE HALLWAY

Sandy Springer Mihlbachler

For Effingham Magazine

In contemplating the effects of St. Anthony graduates in the 150-year history of the school, the years of 1940 to 1950 came to my mind because they had a huge impact on our family.

The years of World War II were coming to an end and many of our graduates were serving overseas and in the States. My dad, Clarence Springer, was a cook in the Navy and my mother, Clara, worked as a secretary in one of the war offices on the naval base.

Clara was a graduate of St. Anthony Grade School and finished two years of high school at St. Anthony, which was all that they had at the time. She graduated from Effingham High School. After the war, they returned to Effingham, where my dad bought the Green Lantern from Dusty Rhodes.

Then on April 4, 1949, disaster struck the city of Effingham. The St. Anthony Hospital burned, and more than 70 people lost their lives. My mother, Clara Springer Hardiek, was in the hospital on the second floor maternity wing after delivering my sister, Elaine Kay, nine days before.

She and the baby were due to go home the next day. My mother woke up that night when she heard commotion in the halls. She went to the door of her room and opened it to look out. She saw fire blazing in the hallway.

Due to the fact that the transom on the door was closed, she was able to push the door closed. She went to the window and beat out the screen. She saw Charlie Chamberlain on a ladder at the window next to hers.

She yelled for him to help her, but of course, he had to complete the rescue where he was at and he knew that if she waited for him, it would be too late. He told her to jump.

Someone brought a mattress and put it under her window

and she jumped. She broke her back in the process and was taken to the home of Frank Ries, where someone called my dad to let him know that she was safe.

Baby Elaine perished in the fire.

My mother had to lay flat at home for four months while her back healed. My dad was faced with the task of burying the baby. They identified the babies as best they could from the necklaces that were put on them at birth. Due to the fact that there were so many burials that had to take place in the county, there were not nearly enough funeral conveyances to go around and my dad rode to the cemetery with Elaine's casket on his lap.

My sister, Carol, and I, both St. Anthony graduates, went to live with my aunt and uncle, Harriett and Walter Wenthe, on their farm north of Effingham while my mother was recuperating. My sister Carol was only 2 at the time and every time that she would cry for mom, my cousins would get her a cookie. By the time that we went home, everyone was calling her Cookie, a name that stuck until the day she died.

There were many heroes that night. Frank Ries and his son, Walt, a St. Anthony graduate, were two of the first people called after the fire department. He went to investigate the smoke that was coming from the laundry chute, where they thought the fire had started. He perished in the fire. There were very few families who didn't lose a relative or a friend in the fire.

Not long after the ashes had cooled, many city leaders began a campaign to raise money for a new hospital. My dad was instrumental in raising over \$10,000 from the tavern operators and started it off with a \$500 donation. He was aided in this endeavor by Junior Stevens and H.G. Jansen. Donations came from all over the country. In 1954, the Hospital Sisters officially opened the doors of our new memorial hospital.

Both my sister Cookie and I went into the medical field. Cookie was a nurse for Dr. Bristow for many years and finished her career as a school nurse for the health department. St. Anthony schools were assigned to her.

I worked in the Radiology Department at St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital for almost 50 years. Every time we had fire training on how to use the extinguishers and how to rescue people in case of a disaster, I thought of the many people who had worked so hard to save those people – and thanked God that I never had cause to use any of that training.

I know my mother was afraid every time that she had to go to the hospital. She would always make my husband, Ted Richards, and my brother-in-law, Jim Wolters, both volunteer firefighters and both St. Anthony graduates, promise that they would get her out in case of a fire.

I am sure that there are many more St. Anthony grads who were instrumental in some way in the rescue effort and the subsequent rebuilding of the wonderful hospital that we have today.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on May 1, 2019.



St. Anthony Hospital is shown after the fire was extinguished.



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WE COULD SEE SMOKE AND ASHES FLOATING THROUGH THE AIR

Jerry Katz

For Effingham Magazine



Jerry Katz in the 1950s.

I was 10 when the hospital burned. My family lived on Franklin Avenue, so we were just a couple of blocks away. I was very familiar with the hospital grounds.

The area west of the hospital building wasn't developed at that point; it was essentially a vacant lot. My friends and I played there. There was a fairly consistent group of 10 boys of about the same age who hung around together, although sometimes my kid sister tagged along. We used the space mostly to play baseball and football, and there was plenty of room to do it.

On the night of the fire, my sister and I were asleep in our beds. Our mother woke us up and we stood in the doorway of the living room. I wanted to go outside, but my mother said, "no."

We all looked northeast in the direction of the fire. I remember there was a strange reddish glow that was visible through the roll-up shades over the windows that faced in the direction of the fire. We could see smoke and ashes floating through the air in our direction.

My father, Robert Katz, went to the hospital to help evacuate bodies to the morgue, and more than a day passed before we saw him again. It hadn't been too many years since he had returned from the scenes of World War II, so he had recent experience in being face to face with terrible things.

One story I remember him telling had to do with another helper who didn't have any wartime experience. The Red Cross was on the scene to provide coffee and donuts, but my father's co-worker couldn't handle them; the sight and smell of food made him want to throw up.

The day after the fire was a school day, so of course, we went to school. But our teacher didn't give any lessons. She knew that many of the kids had been up all night. The fire happened after 11 p.m., when we were in bed, but the town kids heard the noise or were told by their parents. Rather than forcing us to try to pay attention, our teacher told us to just put our heads down on the desk that day. But then the next day, school was back on as usual.

We did not lose any family members to the fire. I did know the Aderman family. They lived two blocks west of the hospital and pretty close to our house. Mrs. Aderman was actually in the hospital during the fire because she was going to have a baby. She got out of the building in time, and had her baby at home. We always called him "Lucky," because he was lucky to get out of the hospital.

There was a teacher from Central School who was in the hospital. She jumped to get out, but was hurt badly enough that she wasn't able to come back to teach at Central for some time.

We kids were attracted to the site of the burned-out hospital, but of course, we weren't allowed to go there. For awhile, there were National Guard soldiers blocking the streets that led to the hospital because so many people wanted to go see the ruins.

As time went on, the part of the hospital that was still standing was demolished. Loads of debris were dumped in the area where we used to play. There were interesting things in the pile.

I saw twisted instruments and things that looked like medical tools. There were also thousands of small white octagonal tiles. They must have come from the wall or floor of a surgery or some other room like that. What surprised me is that those tiles did not appear to be damaged. Other loads of debris were taken a little farther away and dumped in a vacant lot on St. Louis Avenue.

One last memory I have of the fire has to do with Charlie Chamberlain. Mr. Chamberlain and my father were both present on the night of the fire. At some point later on, Mr. Chamberlain told my dad a story about himself. When my dad was in World War II, he was wounded while in a fox hole. He was taken to a hospital for treatment. During his stay there, the Germans bombed the hospital. The shell passed through the roof, went down to the basement, and exploded.

My dad and many others were literally blown through the walls. What my dad didn't know at the time was that Charlie Chamberlain was on active duty there at that same time. He was one of the soldiers who helped to load my dad onto a stretcher so that he could get treatment for a new set of wounds. Those injuries left my dad with a damaged back that caused him pain for the rest of his life.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on April 11, 2019



NATIONAL GUARDSMEN WERE UNLOADING BODIES IN BLACK BAGS

Mary Ellen Eversman
For Effingham Magazine

I was born in 1938, so I was 10 years old when the old St. Anthony Hospital burned. My family was related to Mathias and Elizabeth Vogt Moenning, the childless couple who made the land agreement for the site where the original hospital was built.

I knew the grounds around the hospital well, because my family went to the fundraising picnic held there every year. And, when I had to have my tonsils removed, they came out at St. Anthony. I was a post-operative patient up on the third floor. This was before the days of air conditioning, and I remember the heat was stifling.

At the time, our family lived in a house on South Second Street. It had been built by Bernard Hoedebecke in 1893, and it was close to the Illinois Glove Factory. There was an alley next to the factory, and delivery trucks would pull in one end and out the other. The rumbling from their motors was so loud that sometimes the walls would shake.

But on the night of the fire, my family did not get a call about it, even though we lived fairly close to the hospital. The reason is probably unique to my immediate family. Under other circumstances, my dad would have been called on to help, as he was 40 at the time, a World War II veteran,

National Guardsmen in front of Odeon Hall and Sacred Heart Grade School in the 1940s.



Mary Ellen Eversman in 1949.

and had a rare blood type. In addition, my mother was an experienced registered nurse. I believe that others in the community did not summon them because they knew the medical situation of my younger sister, Carol.

Carol was born after my father returned home from the war. In 1948, she was diagnosed with an optic nerve tumor. The cancer put pressure on the nerve in a way that rendered her essentially blind. She

needed constant care and attention, so there was always a grandparent or some other relative present to help, and the house did not necessarily get quiet after dark. My dad worked days at the Effingham State Bank, but he got little sleep at night due to the extra people in the house, as well as his need to care for my sister. The result was that no one in my immediate family learned about the fire on the night it happened.

So when I got up on the morning of April 5, I walked to school as usual. School had not been called off, so there were many children headed off to the old Sacred Heart Grade School on South Banker Street. There was a second building next to the Grade School, a hall called the Odeon. It was originally constructed as a gymnasium for the school, but during World War II, it was renamed the Armory, and served as a training site for the Illinois National Guard. When the war ended, we started to use it as a gym again, and our lunches were served there as well. It was not an elaborate building, just a basic design with a cement floor.

On the morning of April 5, 1949, the whole area looked entirely different. The street was clogged with trucks and ambulances. The Odeon was being used as a morgue, and the National Guardsmen were unloading bodies in black bags from the ambulances and trucks, and carrying them into the hall. The smell of the burned flesh was unmistakable and overwhelming.

Even 70 years later, I haven't forgotten it.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on April 12, 2019.

AMBULANCE SIRENS WAILING IN THE NIGHT

Claudine Rush

For Effingham Magazine



Claudine Rush.

I was a junior in LaGrove high school in Farina when the hospital burned in 1949. My name was Claudine McManaway then. My parents were Claude and Marie McManaway, and we lived near Farina. I didn't learn about the fire until the next day, when I went to school. I don't recall exactly how that came about; it may have been a teacher, or I may have learned about it from another student. There was no general announce-

ment to the student body.

People who lived in the Mason and Edgewood area heard ambulance sirens wailing in the night, but they didn't know why. We were in the same situation. We didn't have a radio or a telephone in the house at home, so my parents didn't find out about it until I got home from school at the end of the day and told them. We didn't learn many details about the fire at first, probably because no one in our immediate family was involved.

That changed during the summer of 1949, when I started dating my future husband. His family did experience a loss in the fire. His aunt's husband, Harold Gentry, died in the fire. Harold was originally from Tolono, Illinois, and he was an only child. Harold was at the hospital because he was staying with his infant son, who was ill. The baby's name was Dennis, and he had been born in February. Harold's wife, Ina Myers Gentry, was at their home in Edgewood at the time. Dennis died in the fire with his father. Family lore claims that Harold was seen at the door of the hospital, and that he could have gotten out safely, but he went back to get his little boy and that was it. They both died. This was a

terrible blow because Ina and Harold had been married for ten years before baby Dennis finally came along, and in a few minutes, both were gone.

There was a problem with locating Harold Gentry's body during those first few days after the fire. The Myers family lived in Edgewood. Ina Gentry's family was at the burn site the next morning. Her brothers, Charles and Don Myers, were asked to view remains, with the intent to identify Harold. Both of them had served in World War II, and the family believed these men were accustomed to seeing severe injuries, so perhaps they had a chance to be successful. They were not. Ina made the decision to have a funeral as if there was a body present, and so a grave site was established with a stone, but an empty casket.

Some things that happened after the fire caught my attention. Zona B. Davis was a very successful reporter, and she was hired by Mr. McNaughton at the local radio station because of the positive feedback he received about her reporting and the way she presented it on the air. Zona B. had a special gift. She was diligent in following up on a story. Zona B. would persist in getting more facts, which was very important before the days of the internet, Facebook and cell phones. She worked extremely hard, and the long hours she put in were neither recognized nor appreciated. I have often thought that was because she was a woman doing a job in a field where men largely predominated.

During the first Christmas season that followed the April hospital fire, I was admitted to the small temporary emergency hospital that was created from the Hospital Sisters' convent building. It was on a lot near the old hospital. It was the only place you could go in Effingham other than a doctor's office to receive medical care. I needed immediate blood transfusions. The hospital didn't have blood bank storage facilities. My future husband was asked to find blood donors. He contacted his friends in Dieterich. They came in and donated fresh blood on the spot. It was cross matched and transfused into me. Later on, my doctor told me, "It was a close call."

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on April 30, 2019.

I COULD SEE SMOKE IN THE SKY

Joe Adams

For Effingham Magazine



Joe Adams in 1949.

I was 15 years old in 1949, a freshman at Teutopolis High School at the time of the hospital fire. I had five older sisters, but only one of them still lived at home. My sister Marge was a senior in High School.

The other four, Marie, Frances Delores, and Adele, were already out of the house. All of them were nurses. My sister Adele was married and lived nearest to home, in Effingham.

On the night of the fire, I went outside and stood at the

end of the driveway of my family's house in Teutopolis. Our place was on Green Street, and looking west, I could see smoke in the sky from the direction of the hospital.

After that night, however, the fire didn't have much effect on my life as a teenager still in high school. I don't recall my parents talking about it at home. There may have been some discussions about it in the classroom, but those did not make a long-lasting impression. I am sure the good Notre Dame Sisters had us all pray for those who died, but that had less of an impact because my immediate family did not lose anyone.

So, although there were four nurses in my family, only one of them worked in Effingham. One thing I do remember is that my sister Adele's husband thought at first she might have been caught up in the fire. She had been on duty that night. He drove to the hospital to look for her, but she had already left around 11 p.m., so they just missed each other.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on April 30, 2019.

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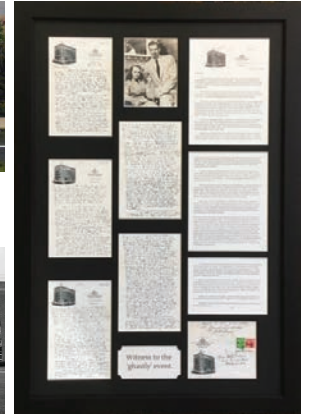
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Mural depiction of the Tragic fire.



Photo of the new hospital, dedicated in 1954.



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RAISING FUNDS FOR THE NEW HOSPITAL

Maxine Dehn

For Effingham Magazine



Maxine Dehn.

My husband was an attorney. We moved to Effingham earlier in the year of the fire.

My father-in-law, George Louis Dehn, was co-chairman of the Finance Committee. This group of men brought in a large amount of

money through various appeals, one of which came to be known as the Dehn Letter. This letter asked for a dollar donation and the name of a person to which a similar appeal could be sent. It proved to be very successful and money poured in.

Another method used was to scan the phone books of large cities, Boston for example, with large Irish populations, to ask for contributions in the name of Fern Riley, the young woman who stayed with the babies in the nursery and died with them. This approach was unique and again successful.

The period immediately after the fire was a time when the entire city of Effingham was of one mind. The city was not very large then, and smaller communities are often clannish. This was set aside by the large group of volunteers who worked in shifts to address envelopes and stuff them.

The letters asked for donations to be sent to the "Hospital Fund, PO Box 449, Effingham, Illinois." Many letters were returned with large donations. There is a picture of the committee with large stacks of mail around them. Another one I remember is of a thermometer in front of the courthouse that showed the progress of the campaign.

One very unusual return was a dollar bill tied to a small rock, with the PO Box

written on the rock. However the donations reached them, the group was very proud when they reached their goal.

In the early days after the new hospital opened, there were commemorative plaques placed on room doors honoring the efforts of the many people who worked hard after the fire.

Many years later, when I was doing

some research on the fire, I looked for them. The hospital staff thought they might have been removed during some remodeling and perhaps they were somewhere in the basement. They looked, but could not find them. They seem to be lost, which is unfortunate.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on April 23, 2019.



The fundraising thermometer for the new hospital.



The fundraising committee for the new hospital.

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NURSING SHIFTS AT THE NEWLY BUILT ST. ANTHONY'S MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Anne Harrison

For Effingham Magazine

I wasn't in Effingham at the time of the hospital fire, because I was in my second year at St. John's Hospital School of Nursing in Springfield. I worked at St. John's for about a year and a half after graduation in 1952. When the new hospital opened in the spring of 1954, I came back to Effingham and went to work there.

My position was on OB. One thing I learned very quickly was that staffing at St. Anthony's Memorial was going to be very different from the staffing pattern at St. John's. The Springfield hospital did not employ nurse's aides. St. John's had enough RNs, as well as plenty of help from three levels of nursing students, who spent a great deal of time on the wards.

In those days, being a nursing student was really work. When you were a senior, you knew you would be in charge of a unit on the night shift. There was a supervisor you could call, but you needed a good reason. There were no student workers in Effingham.

On the Obstetric unit in 1954, there was one RN on days, one on evenings, and one on night shift. That RN was in charge of the entire unit -- which included labor rooms, delivery rooms, nursery, and postpartum beds on the other end. So, when you are the only RN, you have to have help to take care of the patients. You couldn't be in the delivery room and the nursery at the same time. The administration wasn't willing to hire more RNs, because OB



Anne Harrison in 1952.

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is often "feast or famine." If you have too much help at one time, people end up doing nothing.

To assist the nurses, the hospital hired aides. These women were willing, but they had never had any training. For example, they didn't know sterile technique. If you don't know this technique, you don't know how to put on gloves or set up a sterile field. So we had to train them as they worked beside us; today that would be called "on-the-job training." It took quite a while to get this all organized. Later on, the hospital hired LPNs, and staffing got better then.

On the OB unit, we had more work to do in addition to taking care of the patients themselves. We cleaned the instruments used during and after delivery, set up and wrapped the delivery bundles, and sterilized them. Each bundle had to have the right kind of towels and drapes, and the correct kind and number of instruments. We made up bottles of formula and sterilized them for the newborn nursery. We cleaned empty glass IV bottles and reused them to ster-



The delivery room in the newly built hospital.

ilize
water. From newspapers, we made up little waste disposal sacks for use at the bedside.

I was a relief nurse for all three shifts. I would work the 11-7 shift, go home, get some sleep and come back for 3-11. That might sound like an eight hour break between shifts, but often it wasn't, because when the unit was busy, I wouldn't get off on time at 7 a.m.

There was one night when we had eight deliveries, and it was just me and an aide. It was so busy that some of the doctors had to put their own patients to bed on the postpartum unit, because I couldn't physically leave the delivery room area. After awhile, the stress of this schedule got to me, and I requested a straight night shift schedule.

Later in my nursing career, I worked at Marshall Clinic and in the office of Dr. John Chalstrom.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on April 17, 2019.

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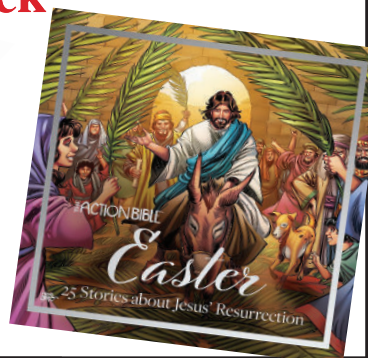
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RIPPLES FROM THE FIRE REACH FAR

Linda Ruholl

For Effingham Magazine

I was born in the old hospital in May of 1946, so I was almost 3 when it burned.

My parents didn't talk about it in front of me. There was a worn copy of the April 6, 1949, Effingham Daily News in my mother's keepsake trunk. But it wasn't nearly as interesting as Josephine Hatke's 1930s jewelry, or the faded sepia tone photos of my Aunt Emma Schwerdt McDonald, who lived in far off New Jersey.

I missed the opportunity to quiz my mother about the fire before she passed away. I'll never hear her insights, and I regret that.

It was only after retirement in 2008 that I started to pay attention. The publication of Eleanor Bounds' and Audrey Garbe's 2009 book about the fire was the flashpoint. As I read, my initial impression was, "My family was lucky. We didn't lose anyone in the fire. It had no effect on us."

I was wrong about that conclusion. As time went on, I started to see connections. Later, I saw the "ripple effect," the intersecting ways some of the deaths impacted on my mother's family, my husband's family, my neighborhood, and

my hometown.

My husband lost his mother, Mary Rieman Ruholl, in 1949. The Ruholl family was from Lillyville, in Cumberland County. Mary Ruholl didn't die in the fire. She had breast cancer, and she was being treated at the old St. Anthony Hospital.

With the hospital gone, Mary Ruholl lost access to radiation therapy. She died the day after her birthday, in June of 1949. She was 47, and my husband was motherless at 7.

I've lived on the same piece of property north of Teutopolis for most of my life, and I'm surrounded by the ripple effects of the fire.

My husband's older cousin, Norbert Ruholl, lost his 22-year-old wife, Laura Repking Ruholl, in the fire, along with their 5-day-old son. Norbert's brother, Henry Ruholl, lives just a couple of blocks north of my home.

A niece on my husband's side, JoAnn Koester Niemeyer, lives a few miles east. Her husband, Allen, lost his grandmother, Emma Niemeyer, in the fire. Emma was at the hospital taking care of baby Clarence Ulhorn, and that baby died also. Allen's father was Emma's son, Bernard Niemeyer. Allen's older sister, Carol Niemeyer Heuerman, lives across the road from Allen and JoAnn. His other sister, Vera Niemeyer Koester, was part of my Teutopolis Community High School graduating Class of 1964.

Several Hotze families live in my neighborhood, also to the east. The Hotze men's mother was Grace Niemeyer Hotze, a sister to Bernard Niemeyer. When Emma Niemeyer died, those Hotze families lost their mother and grandmother.

The Francis Uthell family lives north of me. Peggy Niemeyer Uthell's father was Dale Niemeyer, another one of Emma Niemeyer's sons. Thus, yet another family group was left without a mother and grandmother.

My daughter and her family live just west of my home. My daughter's husband is Corey Dasenbrock. Corey's grandmother was Marge Adams Wall. Marge's sister was Adele Adams Rhodes, so Adele was Corey's great-aunt.

Adele's story is that of the "near miss." She worked at St. Anthony Hospital, but got away safely because she went off duty at 11 p.m., not long before the fire was reported. I didn't hear about this from Corey's Grandma Marge until a couple of years before she passed away.

Further east of me, on the Cumberland Road, also known as old U.S. Route 40, is the town of Montrose.

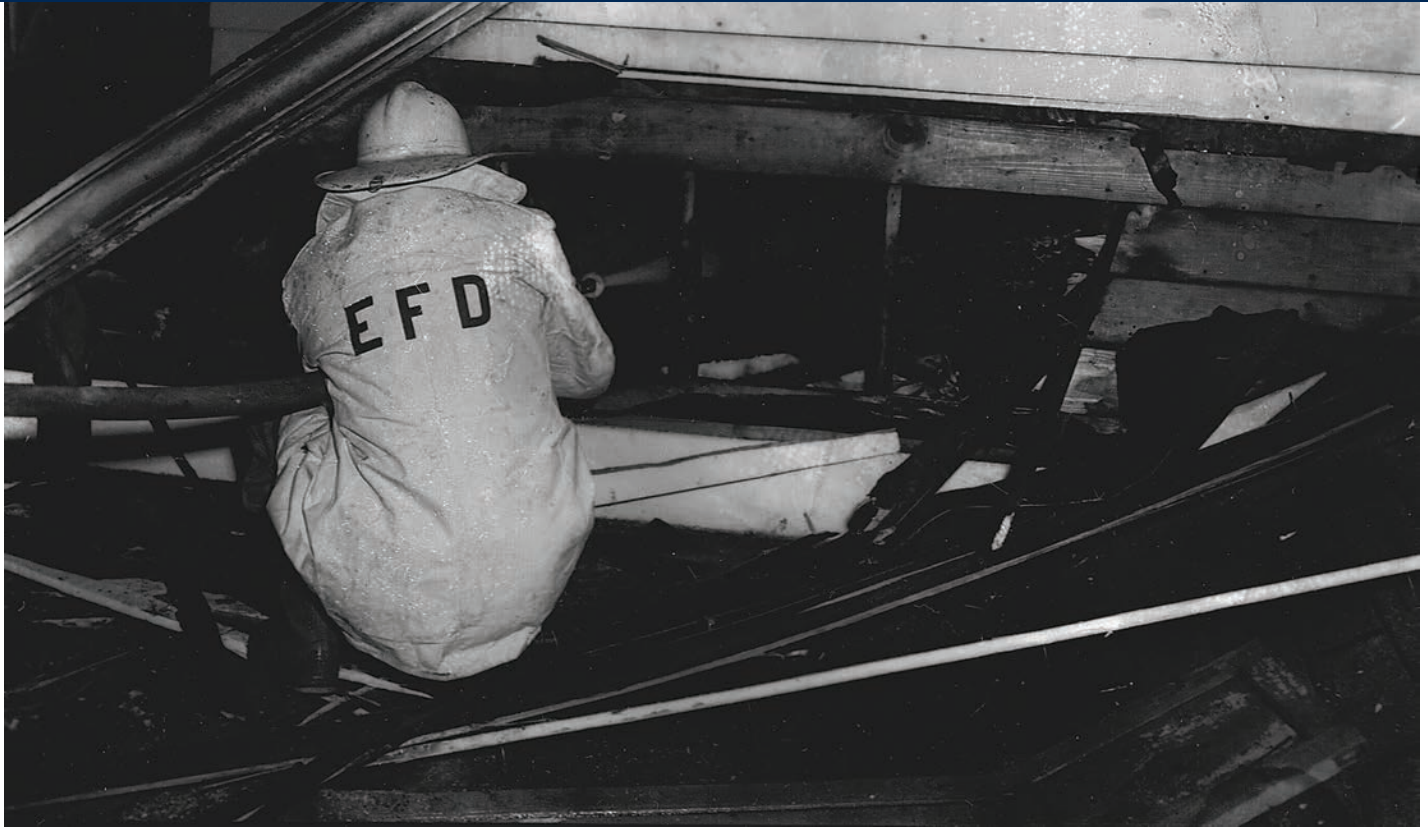
Frances Bersig was from Montrose, and she died in the fire. Two of my aunts on my mother's side lived near Montrose in 1949. Mayme Schwerdt Flood and Veronica Schwerdt Osborne were flower girls at Frances Bersig's funeral, but I didn't discover that connection until I read her obituary many years later.

When I was a young nurse, I worked at the new St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital. I got to know Norma McEnroe, who was a nursing supervisor at that time. I only learned later that Norma's maiden name was Bersig, and that the Frances Bersig buried at St. Rose Cemetery in Montrose was Norma's aunt.

The postmaster in Teutopolis when I was growing up was Fred Weis. All the kids knew him. The Teutopolis post office was in the center of town and catty-corner across the street



Linda Ruholl in 1949.



An Effingham firefighter sprays water into the basement of the hospital. EDN file photo.

from Wessel's store, a popular spot. My aunt, Adeline Hatke Ludwig, lived just six doors down from the post office, and I stayed there sometimes in the evenings when I was in grade school.

Later on, I got to know Fred even better as his health declined, and I worked as a nurse. But I didn't know until years after his death that his sister, Gertrude Weis, had worked at the hospital for many years, or that she roomed at the hospital and died in the fire.

The study and preservation of local history is a mixed blessing. The research process is time consuming, but fascinating. The findings can be revealing, and the conclusions striking. But there will always be regrets about missing data and missed connections.

Editor's note: Linda Ruholl is a retired nurse educator. She led the Effingham County Museum's effort to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the hospital fire in 2019. Her home is north of Teutopolis. This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on April 10, 2019.

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WE'LL MAKE A BOOK

Eleanor Bounds

For Effingham Magazine

I was born in Lucas Township in Effingham County, and I was 20 years old at the time of the hospital fire. My parents were William Everett Poe and Mary Ellen (Workman) Poe.

In 1949, I was living in Effingham and had worked at the Illinois Glove Factory, although I was not working at the time of the fire. I heard about the fire from other people but didn't go see the area because I didn't have a car.

Several businessmen from Effingham led a drive to solicit money to build a new hospital. Other Effingham County communities also took part. Funds came in from all over the country due to the amount of publicity, but I do not remember anyone asking me personally for a donation.

My first child, a son, was born in the hospital in Mattoon because there was no hospital in Effingham. My second pregnancy was twin girls. They were born at Dr. Glenn R. Marshall's office on East Jefferson Avenue in Effingham, where he had a delivery room set up in the basement.

Audrey (Gaddis) Garbe lived a short distance from the old hospital. She and her mother collected articles about the hospital fire from newspapers and magazines. Audrey and I were members of Effingham County Genealogical and Historical Society. We worked together in the Helen Matthes Library. Every time the topic of the hospital fire came up, she mentioned their collection. In February of 2009, Audrey brought the collection to the Library and asked "What are we going to do with these?"



Eleanor Bounds in 1949.

I looked at them and immediately replied, "We are going to make a book!"

I took the papers and magazines home and worked at cutting, taping and compiling pages every day for about a month. Because of my previous cut-and-paste projects to make master copies for various family history books, I knew how to proceed. Headlines from numerous newspapers were placed at the beginning of the book. It was important to work fast because the 60th anniversary of the fire was coming up in April of 2009.

I am not sure how many hours it took preparing the master copy for Volume 1, but at least 100-125 hours. I really didn't keep track. I estimated 10-15% of those hours was devoted to creating an every-name index. Indexing is a challenging process, but to be useful, a book needs an index!

Soft-cover books were printed by Ad-Works in Effingham and were ready on April 4, 2009. Some copies of the book were sent to Evansville to be hard bound; that took an additional week or more. Sales of the book went well. Requests for more books led to printing a thousand to fill the orders. Many people, upon seeing Volume 1, began recalling and relating their memories of the terrible fire. Because of the interest in the topic, we asked people to submit their stories to be used in a future book.

The second book, Volume 2, was completed by August of 2009. Neither book shows articles in chronological order, except for some of the headlines in the first book. The second book took longer to put together, because we waited for people to submit their stories about the fire. Many of the stories had to be typed. We did not print as many copies of Volume 2 because we didn't know how much interest there would be in another book.

After the second book was published, I continued saving articles about the fire. Those articles are in seven notebooks on a shelf in the Genealogy section at the Suzette Brumleve Memorial Effingham Public Library. If someone decides to write another book about the fire, the information in those notebooks will be very helpful.

My sister and her husband, James and Mary Belle (Poe) Brockett, didn't hear much about the fire at the time. The only memory of my brother-in-law was that he saw smoke in the sky that night. No one in our family was involved in the fire, so it had minimal effect on us at that time.

The fire did bring some large improvements to the community. Lake Sara was created because it was clear that the water supply was not enough to meet the needs of Effingham. And, of course, Effingham and the surrounding communities got access to a new state-of-the-art hospital. The community benefited from the experience of working together to solve future issues that would arise for the growing city.

The cause of the fire remains unknown. The investigation revealed safety deficiencies at St. Anthony Hospital. All the hospitals in the state worked to identify and lessen fire hazards. The impact of the fire went beyond Illinois as hospitals across the United States made fire protection improvements that are considered standard today.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on April 24, 2019.

PEOPLE WANTED TO READ ABOUT THE FIRE

Audrey Garbe

For Effingham Magazine



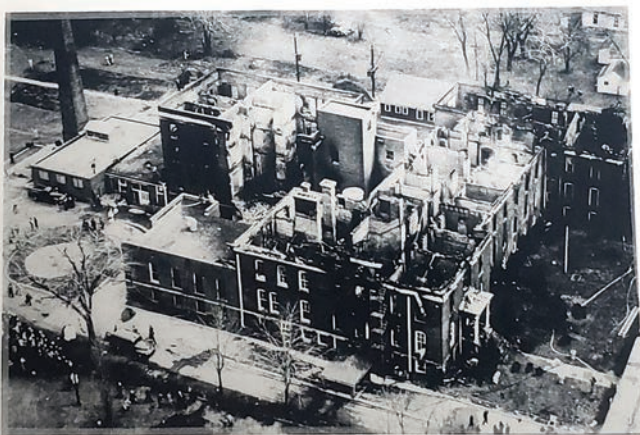
Audrey Garbe in 1949.

Life went on afterwards. There was nothing I could really do about what happened. My mom worked out of the home

I was in high school when the hospital burned. I lived with my family across the road from the hospital, on St. Anthony Avenue. My name then was Gaddis. I had an older sister and brother. My bedroom was toward the back of the house, so I didn't hear or see it while it was happening. Some of our neighbors took people in who had been patients who escaped on the night of the fire.



**ST. ANTHONY HOSPITAL
EFFINGHAM, ILLINOIS
1949**



The book by Eleanor Poe Bounds and Audrey Gaddis Garbe is shown.

Thanks to
Eleanor Poe Bounds
And
Audrey Gaddis Garbe
For creating this book.



The book dedication is shown.

some, mostly in local eating places. And I was in high school, so we weren't around that much during the day to see what changed.

I do remember that the smoke smell stayed in the air for a long time. I think the fire made people think about what the hospital meant to them; they had taken it for granted. As the old saying goes, "You don't think that much about water, until the well goes dry."

I don't know if my family donated toward the new hospital or not. I was too young to be asked to contribute.

After the fire, I didn't live in my family's home that much longer. The most direct effect on me was that, after I got married, there wasn't a hospital to go to have a baby. I went to Marshall Clinic. It was in a different place than where it is now, on the other side of the railroad tracks. It worked out; you didn't stay very long. You went in and delivered, and as soon as they could see you were going to be OK, they sent you home with your new baby.

From the beginning, I was fascinated by all the news coverage of the fire. I started to collect newspaper clippings about the fire. Anything that mentioned the fire, I saved it, even little articles. As time went on, I kept that up. These were all loose clippings, not pasted in a scrapbook or stored in a binder.

Sixty years after the fire, I brought the clippings to the genealogical society. Eleanor Bounds and I put them together to make a book. I am glad we were able to preserve those clippings in a book. People wanted to read about the fire even after all that time, and I think I helped people who were interested to find information. I had a lot of people tell me that when the book came out.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on April 26, 2019.

St. Anthony Hospital Fire leaves

LASTING IMPRESSIONS



The Rev. John Goff speaks during the April 12 memorial service. EDN file photo.

Delaine Donaldson
For Effingham Magazine

Near the main entry to the hospital is this simple declaration: "Saint Anthony's Memorial Hospital erected in the year of our Lord 1952."

However, the story behind those words is one of great triumph over the most tragic experience that Effingham County has ever suffered.

A huge number of people stood outside their homes on the night of April 4, 1949, to view a sky that provided an indescribable sense of surrealism. The sky over the city of Effingham was a strange pink with orange color as a result of the fire which burned at the 74-year-old building known as

St. Anthony Hospital. There were the accompanying sounds as screaming sirens from area fire departments rushed into town to the scene of great disaster.

The destruction did not take long — only about 10 minutes, as fire quickly spread through the hallways of the building. After the firemen had battled the blaze for around three hours, it was finally brought under control. Then came the task of searching for the dead.

That tragic evening, 76 people died in the fire. Temporary housing for rescued patients was quickly established, as was a morgue. Because there was much confusion that evening as families sought word about their loved ones, a headquarters was established for gathering information about the survivors and the deceased.

The emotion of the evening left its mark on the psyche of the area. The piteous screams of those who were burning or leaping from windows left a mark on the minds of people nearby, memories that could not be forgotten.

There were many deeds of heroism and love that night, which also became deeply imprinted memories on the people of the area.

One of the most fitting statements regarding the terrible fire was in the April 18, 1949, issue of Life magazine, which through its photography caught the great emotion characterizing the population of Effingham County.

Entitled, "Sorrow in the Heart of the USA," readers were allowed to see the concerns, emotion, anxieties and fears of area residents. Particularly moving were pictures such as that of the Teutopolis school band standing in front of the burned hospital after the group

had attended the funeral of one of its members; and of a man in the temporary morgue searching under the blankets for the remains of his 6-week-old nephew, a youngster whose parents were too upset to search for themselves; and of a 10-year-old boy sitting in a church service for a funeral being conducted for his father, a man who had died in a frantic attempt to rescue his wife, a hospital nurse. There were also pictures dripping with



emotions, showing families completing their household routines even though loved ones had burned to death in the fire.

There were stories of great heroism. The Life magazine article, for example, dealt with a young nurse who died with 10 babies in the nursery.

“Fern Riley was a Heroine,” detailed how this quiet young woman, immediately after the fire broke out, was heard to say, “My babies! I’ve got to stay with my babies.”

Another heroic story revolved around the selfless actions of another young nurse. Her name was Shirley Clements. In an April 24, 2016, Effingham Daily News article, Linda Ruholl related how the courageous young woman was a heroine the night she died: “When the fire broke out, Clements saved several lives by helping patients out of the building. But when she rushed back inside and up the stairs to potentially save more people, the fire had engulfed the building.

“On fire, Clements jumped from the second story, clutching a rosary. ... In great pain, Clements was rushed to the hospital in Granite City with her husband.



Maurice Rickelman gathers names of the injured, missing and dead. EDN file photo.



“At Granite City’s hospital, where Clements had studied nursing, she told staff to give her a morphine injection in the toe — the only spot of her body that wasn’t burned. There, her class ring was cut off. ... She died about 12 hours later.”

The casualties continued in the aftermath of the fire. One woman who had lost an 11-year-old son in the blaze, after attending a solemn memorial service, died a few hours later from grief and shock.

The gruesome removal of bodies from the burned-out building continued in the days following the fire; then a spirit of renewal and hope swept throughout the county as people began to talk about the need to

Flames engulf St. Anthony Hospital. EDN file photo.



State officials arrive in Effingham shortly after they received word of the devastation. EDN file photo.

rebuild the hospital.

Soon, as the St. Anthony Memorial Hospital Centennial Report later stated, "Out of the havoc, a community unites."

By three o'clock in the morning, during the night of the fire, a Protestant layman, J. William Everhart, paid a visit to the parish home of a Catholic priest to offer his services in the effort to rebuild the hospital. Within one hour, church and hospital officials accepted his generous proposal. Everhart became the chairman



Shown is the rear of the gutted hospital on April 5, 1949. EDN file photo.

of the hospital finance committee.

Before the end of the same day, an enthusiastic organization, "The Effingham Civic Foundation," had been assembled to spearhead the effort to get financial contributions from local citizens, and to publicize the endeavor. There were scores of volunteers who mailed appeals by the thousands, as printers located up to 150 miles from the county produced flyers explaining the monetary needs. High school typing classes joined in the effort as



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they typed letters for mailing. These letters became known as the Dehn letters, named for the author.

About \$125,000 came into the foundation's treasury from the greater Effingham area, as well as \$406,527.67 from the 48 states which composed the United States at that time, and from four foreign countries. Boy Scouts stood on street corners collecting funds. Especially significant it seemed was the impact of that Life magazine article in publicizing the tragedy and in appealing to the generosity of the American public. Other dollars came from the federal government (\$1,690,185.69), the State of Illinois (\$487,888.65), and the Hospital Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis (\$1,646,546.67). The last named group also financed the chapel and garage.

The ground-breaking ceremony for the new structure was



The cornerstone of the new hospital is lowered into place. Pictured left to right: Benjamin Peters, masonry foreman; Alfred Johnson, iron workers' foreman; Paul Shadwell, mason tenders' foreman. The man partially hidden by Mr. Peters is Olan Syfert, general labor foreman. EDN file photo.

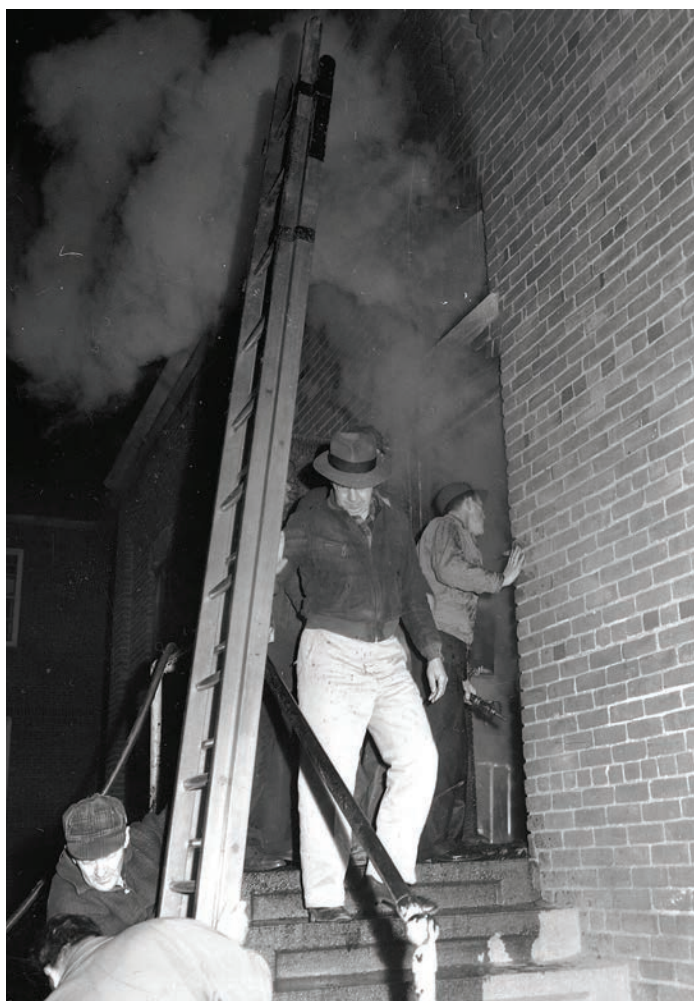
on Aug. 15, 1951, when the cornerstone was set in place in a solemn ceremony led by Bishop William A. O'Connor of Springfield. Approximately 1,000 people gathered for the event to listen to a series of speakers tell the story of the progress in the rebuilding effort.

When the dedication of the new hospital took place, on May 16, 1954, thousands went to the hospital grounds to hear Illinois' governor, William Stratton, deliver the main address. Attendees saw that the area had united in triumph over one of the great tragedies in the nation's history.

From the ashes, a structure of great beauty had arisen. The building remains an

object of great pride throughout the region.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Effingham Daily News on Oct. 27, 2018.



Rescuers at the scene of the fire. EDN file photo.



A Life Magazine article brought national attention to the tragedy. EDN file photo.

Effingham & Area Events



March 28: Alvaline Wine Tasting 6 p.m.
at Village Wine & Spirits.

March 29: Fish Dinner from 5 to 7:30 p.m.
at Teutopolis Banquet Hall. Fish/Shrimp,
Baked Potato & Hush Puppies.

March 29: Jacob Kuhns Experience 8 p.m.
at Village Wine & Spirits.

March 30: Easter Egg Hunt 10 a.m. at the
park in Strasburg.

March 30: Easter Egg Hunt at Legacy
Harley-Davidson starting at 11 a.m. for 5 age
groups from 0 to 10 years old. Candy-filled
eggs. Register for the Grand Prize. Bring
cameras for photos with the Easter bunny!
Beverages sold by Fox Holler Coffee.

**April 5: Etta May & The Southern Fried
Chicks.** Tickets online now! Effingham
Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 6: Lake Sara Dam Run starting at
7 a.m. with the Half Marathon, 8 a.m. with
the 8-Mile Run and 9 a.m. with the 5K Walk
& Run. Proceeds support Special Olympics
Illinois. Pick up packets and registration
at the pavilion by the dam on Friday from
5 to 7 p.m. or Saturday from 6 to 8:45
a.m. Door prizes and free food and drinks
for participants. Food and drinks are also

available to family and friends for a free-will
donation. Facebook page and website is Lake
Sara Dam Run. Sign up at <https://raceroster.com/Events/2024/81454/lake-sara-dam-run>. For more info, text or call Ruth at
217-254-9178, Pat at 217-343-6971 or Katie at
217-821-3341.

April 6: Red Hot Chili Pipers at Dvorak
Concert Hall on the Eastern Illinois University
campus.

April 6: Mom Prom 7 p.m. at Effingham
Event Center + The Hall Bar & Patio. Get
out those 80s dresses, grab the Aqua Net,
and crimp the hair! Enjoy a night of dancing
for charity. Open to any woman 21 or older.
Appetizers, drinks, photo booths, baskets for
bidding & more! Benefit for In His Hands
Orphan Outreach in Beecher City.

April 7: Spring Craft Show at Thelma Keller
Convention Center. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. 80+
Vendors & crafters. No admission. Gift card
giveaways.

**April 7 & 8: Dieterich Solar Eclipse Party
in the Path and Pre Party in the Path.**
Live music, food trucks, beer garden, watch
party, inflatables & more. Star lab & eclipse
panel on April 7. www.Facebook.Com/dieterichbusinessassociation/events

April 8: Total Solar Eclipse Viewing Party
at Tuscan Hills Winery. All day event.

April 11: Home Free Crazy(er) Life Tour.
Tickets online now! Effingham Performance
Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 12 & 13: Showers of Savings in
Downtown Effingham. Friday 10 a.m. to 7
p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**April 12: Hairbangers Ball – The Ultimate
80's Tribute Band** at West End Event Center
in Newton at 6 p.m.

April 12: Cruisin Broadway in downtown
Mattoon from 6 to 10 p.m.

April 13: Buckcherry. Tickets online now!
Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 15: Rox Olympics 11 a.m. at On The
Rox Pub & Grub on Rt. 40, Altamont. Games,
scavenger hunts, & more!

April 18: Jordan Feliz & Colton Dixon.
Tickets online now! Effingham Performance
Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 18, 19, 20: Spring Fest 2024 on the
Eastern Illinois University campus.

April 19, 20, 21: Sports Card Show at
Cross County Mall in Mattoon.

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April 20: 4th Annual 5K Run/Walk for Life at 1325 Outer Belt W, Effingham, from 2 to 3:30 p.m.

April 20: Wayne Newton: Up Close & Personal. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 26: EPC Idol Finals. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 27: Murder at the Class Reunion Murder Mystery at Tuscan Hills Winery Doors open at 6 p.m. Dinner at 7 p.m.

April 27: Superhero Trivia Night + \$1000 Raffle to benefit Effingham Unit 40 Mentoring Program. Doors open at 6 p.m. Trivia begins at 7 p.m. at Effingham Event Center. Snacks will be available for purchase by Ginger Ale's. Soda and alcohol are also available for purchase. Prizes will be awarded for Best Dressed, Best Decorated Table & Best Team Name. Registration required. Email Abbey Nosbisch at aknosbisch@gmail.com

May 4: Sheep, Yarn & Quilts Event from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Illinois Amish Heritage Center. Learn how wool is taken from sheep to make a quilt. Period crafts, rope making, kids activities, pony cart rides, petting zoo & more, including demos and displays of the Amish way of life.

May 4: Spring Fling and BBQ Competition at American Heritage Museum in Greenville from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tractor, gas engine and car parts swap meet, flea market and craft vendors. Train rides, historic hill's fort, lil' red barn and more! BBQ samples from 30 teams at the Smok'n on the Farm BBQ Competition. Free parking and music by The Crossroads Band.

May 4: Fear Nothing Derby Day at Tuscan Hills Winery starting at 2 p.m. 100% of funds raised to support cancer patients in our 6-county area.

May 4: Decade of Decadence: A Live Concert Event playing the biggest and best anthems of the 80's era of arena rock and hair bands at Hangar 18 in Windsor, IL at 8 p.m.

May 10 & 11: Chet Kingery Memorial Bluegrass Festival at Chautauqua Auditorium in Shelbyville IL featuring Blue Highway, David Davis & The Warrior River Boys, Joe Mullins & The Radio Ramblers, Kings Highway, The Kody Norris Show and Host Band Mackville www.mackvillebluegrass.com 217-460-1439.

May 17: Effingham County Chamber Golf Outing at Effingham Country Club. Contact Nicole Morrison at (217)342-4147.

May 23-24-25: Neoga Days at Jennings Park in Neoga. Queen Pageant May 23 at 7 p.m. Feudin' Hillbillies May 24 at 8 p.m. in beer garden. Parade May 25 at 11 a.m. beginning at Neoga Elementary School and ending at Jennings Park. Strangers With Kandi band May 25 at 8 p.m. in beer garden. For info on parade, call or text Doug Jackson at 217-690-6256

May 25: Strasburg Village Wide Rummage Sales starting at 7 a.m.

May 25: Nightrain: The #1 Guns N' Roses Tribute 8 p.m. at Hangar 18 in Windsor, IL

June 1: Lions Club Chicken Fry & Fresh Strawberry Shortcake 4 p.m. at the village park in Strasburg.

June 1: Scott Wattles & The Blue Suede Crew Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

June 1: A Night to Unite by Unified Worship Ministries at The Stage at Lake Sara

June 8: Jeepin' for the Paws Jeep Run. Registration at A1 Liquors on Hwy 33, Effingham, at 10 a.m. For more info, Email ears2urescue@gmail.com

June 8: Brush Pull at Beecher City Community Park

In this 2022 file photo, dozens of runners take off on an eight-mile run during the Lake Sara Dam Run. The event, which raises money for Special Olympics, is scheduled this year for April 6.





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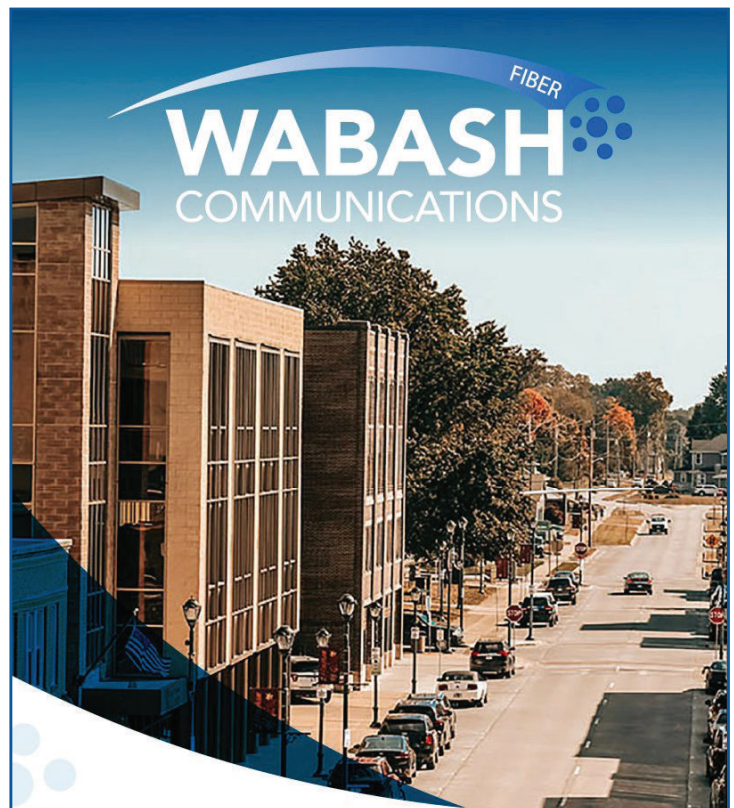
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June 14: Teutopolis Cruise Night and Car Show starting at 5 p.m. at Teutopolis Banquet Hall. Good food, cold beverages for purchase, great DJ & more!

June 14, 15 & 16: Strasburg 150th Celebration. Food, carnival, entertainment, children's activities, fireworks.

June 20, 21, 22 & 23: 10th Annual Moccasin Creek Festival on The Stage at Lake Sara, Effingham.

June 24: Dieterich Zip Code Day 62424. Food, entertainment, activities, big raffles, drone show.

June 27, 28, 29 & 30: Stewardson 150th Celebration. Lions Club tractor pull June 27; bed races, bounce houses, food trucks and The Flynts Band on June 28; car show, tractor show, vendor fair, mud volleyball, face painting, bingo, coffee and food trucks, bounce houses/corn pile, Stewardson history, Backyard Boogie Band, and Flight Fifty Band on June 29; wiffle ball, face painting, parade, vendor fair, monster truck rides, bounce houses/corn pile, Lions Club food stand, Stewardson history and fireworks on June 30.

June 28: Whippoorwill Rodeo at Jasper County Fair in Newton, IL, 7 p.m.

June 29: Buckin for Heroes Rodeo at Teutopolis Banquet Hall starting at 4 p.m. Music by The Flynts 4:30; Rodeo starts 7 p.m.. Music by Flight Fifty at 9 p.m. Food trucks.

In this 2023 file photo, a surprised Will Anderson, front, holds his hands to his face as his wish to go to Hawaii is granted during a surprise announcement prior to the start of the Buckin' for Heroes rodeo in Teutopolis. This year's event, which raises money for Make-A-Wish and Land of Lincoln Honor Flight, is scheduled for June 29.



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Merchandise vendors. Full bar. All proceeds raised donated to Make-A-Wish IL and Land of Lincoln Honor Flight.

June 29: Hardwire: A Tribute to Metallica Band 8 p.m. at Hangar 18 in Windsor, IL.

July 11 thru 16: Fayette County Fair in Brownstown, IL

July 12 & 13: Summer Sales in Downtown Effingham. Friday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

July 12: EffingHAM-JAM Hometown Throwdown BBQ Competition in downtown Effingham. Food trucks, vendors, beer tent and live music starting at 4 p.m.!

July 12: Relay for Life of Effingham County "Masquerading for Hope" 4:30 to 9 p.m. at Teutopolis Jr. High School.

July 12: CSS Art Auction & Community Celebration 5 to 10:30 p.m. at Teutopolis Banquet Hall. Food, drinks, loads of kids' activities, auction at 6 p.m., Captain Rat & The Blind Rivets after auction!

July 13: Lions Club Tractor Pull & Sandwiches at the park in Strasburg.

July 19-20-21: Corn Fest at Beecher City Community Park.

July 19 thru 27: Clay County Fair in Flora, IL

July 20: Eliminator: ZZ Top Tribute Band 7 p.m. at Hangar 18 in Windsor, IL.

July 26-27-28: Farm Heritage Days at American Heritage Museum in Greenville. Tractor pulls & much more! Free parking.

July 27 thru August 3: Effingham County Fair in Altamont, IL.

August 10: Made in America: Tribute to Toby Keith 8 p.m. at Hangar 18 in Windsor, IL.

August 10 thru 17: Cumberland County Fair in Greenup, IL.

September 6, 7 & 8: St. Joseph Church in Island Grove 150th Celebration. Live Bands, Food & Drinks & More!

September 7: Fall Village Wide Rummage Sales in Strasburg.

September 7: Last Chance Pull at Beecher City Community Park.

September 13, 14 & 15: Summer Sundown Music Festival at The Stage at Lake Sara.

September 20: Icons of Country Tribute Show featuring Keith as Kenny Chesney, Erica as Miranda Lambert and Cal as Jason Aldean at 8 p.m. at Hangar 18 in Windsor, IL.



Kyle Lewis of the Tackle My Meat barbecue team prepares tastings during the 2022 EffingHAM-JAM Hometown Throwdown competition. This year's EffingHAM-JAM is scheduled for July 12. EDN file photo.

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