

2025

COMMUNITY LEADERS



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Top Under 40 *and* Up & Coming



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DAILY NEWS

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TOP LEADERS AND UP & COMING LEADERS SHARE PASSION FOR COMMUNITY

This year's Top Leaders Under 40 and Up & Coming Leaders represent what makes Effingham County such a great place to live and work—people who show up, work hard, and give back.

Each nomination told a story of commitment and community. Our Leaders Under 40 are professionals and volunteers who go beyond their daily responsibilities to make a lasting impact. They balance busy careers and personal lives while continuing to invest their time, energy, and ideas into Effingham County's growth.

Our Up & Coming Leaders bring that same enthusiasm and purpose, showing that leadership has no age limit. They're already finding ways to contribute, lead, and inspire others, and their potential continues to grow.

As you read through the next few pages, take a moment to get to know these incredible individuals. Their stories reflect the best of who we are—a community built on collaboration, determination, and heart.

On behalf of the Effingham County Chamber Board of Directors, our staff, and the Effingham Daily News, congratulations to this year's class of Top Leaders. Thank you for all you do to keep Effingham County moving forward.



Katie Koester
President & CEO



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& Communications



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EFFINGHAM DAILY NEWS

effinghamdailynews.com



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BIRTH YEAR:
1995

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

I am on the board for the Teutopolis Knights of Columbus

I am the president of Teutopolis Civic Club

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

Bachelors of Information Technology from Southern Illinois University

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

One thing I'm proud of is being a member of the Teutopolis Civic Club. The club is dedicated to providing meaningful services that strengthen our community and support its citizens. I enjoy taking an active role by leading meetings and serving on committees that organize fundraisers.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

A major challenge I have faced as a leader is incorporating the many different philosophies and perspectives that are brought forward within the club. At times, it can be difficult to balance these ideas while still moving the group toward a shared goal. I've worked to overcome this by listening carefully, encouraging open discussion, and focusing on the values we all share. By finding common ground, I've been able to help the group make decisions that benefit both the club and the community.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

I would say my parents have been my greatest inspiration. They are some of the hardest-working people I know, and growing up we were always involved in something meaningful. They never shied away from lending a hand or helping at community events, and their example taught me the value of hard work, service, and giving back to others.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

My advice to young leaders is simple: get involved. Don't use being busy as an excuse. Everyone is busy, but making time for your community is worth it. Strive to be a good role model in everything you do, because others are always watching and learning from your example. And finally, build connections and network with people. You never know who you'll meet or how those relationships might open doors and benefit both you and your community in the future.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

Effingham County has greatly influenced my leadership by giving me opportunities to have a voice in the community. Before moving back, I wasn't very involved, but once I returned, I quickly found meaningful opportunities to get engaged. Through these experiences, I've been able to grow as a leader while also giving back to the community that welcomed me.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

To me, success as a leader means helping families feel more secure about their financial future and achieve goals they once thought were out of reach. It's about making a positive, lasting impact on the lives of those I serve. Success also means giving back to others and the community, just as so many people have supported and encouraged me throughout my journey.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

Work-life balance is an interesting topic for me because I work from home, which allows me to live where I want. A challenge and a benefit of this is that I always have the ability to log in and work a little. The best habit I've found is to get out of the house after work to decompress and shift my focus to personal time. Taking time for yourself is essential to stay grounded, happy, and refreshed.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

I believe a community people are proud to call home needs several key elements: great neighbors who look out for each other, a strong and supportive school system, and a clean, well-maintained town. It's also important for everyone to come together and support local events, and to foster a spirit of generosity and care for others.

*Strive to be a good role model in everything you do,
because others are always watching and learning
from your example.*



BIRTH YEAR:
1991

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

As lead of St. Anthony's "Joy Team", I have the great honor of collaborating with various local organizations through our community impact initiatives. My favorite partnership is our yearly work with Caritas Family Solutions and their Angel Tree program. I've been blessed to lead that initiative within the hospital for four straight Christmases and find it a true honor to be able to organize that special ministry and support such important work.

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

I have a Bachelor of Science Degree in Pre-Counseling. When I was in college, I pictured a future full of grad school, couches and asking strangers how they felt about life, but thankfully I took an 11-year detour in medical administration.

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

I'm most proud of leading the hospital's 150th anniversary committee. I've spent the past year of my life striving to share the incredible story of our three founding Sisters both inside and outside the walls of the hospital. It has been one of the most humbling and inspiring years of my life. I'd like to think that our founding Sisters would be proud of the work we're carrying on for them in their name 150 years later.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Life keeps moving and evolving and my team is no exception. Over the past year we have gone through numerous changes in structure and responsibilities. Thankfully, I have an incredible team who believes in trust, communication and active collaboration, and have been able to overcome new challenges together.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

This is by far the easiest question to answer. I'm so blessed to have been surrounded by some truly gifted leaders at St. Anthony's, but none have impacted me as much as Bobbi Kinkelaar, our former Chief Nursing Officer. Bobbi leads bravely and selflessly. She takes the time to make each person around her feel seen, heard and important. Bobbi tirelessly advocates for the good of her people, patients, and her community, which is why her reputation of trustworthiness extends far beyond the people who report to her. I will forever be impressed and embarrassed that she has the same 24 hours in a day as I do.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

I believe the most essential quality in a leader is trustworthiness. A trustworthy leader inspires greatness and welcomes a following. I also believe a successful leader needs to prioritize open communication and possess the ability to adapt to various situations.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Surround yourself with people who believe in you, invest in you, and inspire you; good people around you truly will make all the difference.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

In the next five years I hope to grow by partnering with local organizations in a more meaningful way and taking the lead on additional community-focused events through my work at the hospital.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

Being a transplant to Effingham County, it took me a while to find my place and my people. Thankfully, I eventually found a job that utilizes my skills while also challenging me which keeps me encouraged, engaged, and affords me so many more opportunities than I would alternatively have in a larger community.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

The definition of success has changed for me recently. It used to be how high I could climb, or the number of feathers I could put in my cap, but I recently realized that to me success is as "small" as being proud of the work I did that day. Success is knowing my worth, doing my best, and finding contentment in the everyday.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

Daily dance parties with my 15-month-old son. Our favorite is "Sapphire" by Ed Sheeran. He does a great job of reminding me that anyone could do my job at the hospital, but at home I am simply irreplaceable.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

People need to feel welcomed, heard and supported within their community. Effingham has an incredible number of active local organizations whose primary focus is to better our community, and fortunately, with a town our size, it's not difficult to have your voice be heard and make a difference. What a gift!

*Success is knowing my worth, doing my best,
and finding contentment in the everyday.*

Congratulations to the leaders at HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital on being named to the **Top Community Leaders Under 40!**

We appreciate your dedication to our ministry
and the community. These young
professionals embody the HSHS mission and
spirit. They are committed to excellence and
making a difference every day.



HSHS
St. Anthony's
Memorial Hospital



Nikki Probst, OT



Erin Hershey

Nikki Probst

HSHS ST. ANTHONY'S MEMORIAL HOSPITAL
LEAD OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST



BIRTH YEAR:
1988

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

I am a member of DAR, Daughters of the American Revolution, Ann Crooker St. Clair Chapter. The main goals of this group are historic preservation, patriotism and education. I am a proud member of St. Isidore the Farmer Parish in Bishop.

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

After graduating from Teutopolis High School in 2007, I earned my Master of Occupational Therapy from Maryville University in 2012. I then became certified in 2013 as Certified Lymphedema Therapist through Klose Training.

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

I am most proud of my contributions as a Certified Lymphedema Therapist, particularly in the cancer community. Supporting patients through cancer treatment has been both meaningful and rewarding, and I continue to be inspired by their strength and resilience.

Over the years, our OT department and St. Anthony's Lymphedema Clinic have grown significantly, now supported by multiple specialists. We hold monthly meetings and pursue ongoing education and research to continually advance our skills and services.

Our clinic is well-known in the community. Reflecting on a time when patients had limited local options for lymphedema treatment, it is rewarding to see how our clinic has grown to fill that gap.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

I served as interim Lead OT during the summer of 2020 - right in the midst of Covid. At the time, we had only three OTs, yet the workload was overwhelming. The stress of managing our caseload, the uncertainty of the pandemic, completing facilitator tasks I was somewhat unfamiliar with, and the exhaustion of being away from home so much felt like a heavy weight.

Often, I'd pause to take a deep breath before walking into a patient's room, reminding myself that no matter how drained I felt, my patients deserved the very best of me.

To advocate for support, I sent weekly emails to my boss and kept meticulous data to provide objective information. Eventually, colleagues were able to return, and the caseload began to normalize. That summer was traumatic in many ways, but we made it through. I am so blessed to be part of an amazing team. Serving as Lead for our team during this time forced me to gain leadership skills I didn't realize I had.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

My greatest role models are my parents, Dennis and Penny Deters. From a young age, I watched my father's strong work ethic as he balanced long days on the job with evenings on the farm, eventually building his own business, Double D Signs, Inc. His success did not happen by chance - it was the result of hard work, determination, and vision, supported every step of the way by my mother. Together, they taught me that success comes from persistence, sacrifice, and surrounding yourself with people who believe in you.

My father always encouraged his children to pursue education and define our own version of success. When I began to consider starting my own business, his advice was simple yet was exactly what I needed: "You should go for it." That encouragement gave me the confidence to take the leap.

Equally, my mother has shaped who I am as a professional and leader. She devoted her career to serving others as a paraprofessional with Unit 40, showing the same loyalty to her school that I now feel toward St. Anthony's after more than 13 years. She is one of the kindest and strongest people I know, consistently pushing us academically while modeling compassion and dedication. The respect she has earned from others continues to inspire me to lead with both competence and kindness.

Together, my parents demonstrated the value of hard work, loyalty, and integrity. Their example has guided me in my career and leadership journey, reminding me to work with determination, remain committed to my team, and lead with both strength and compassion. I also can't overlook the significant impact my in-laws, Rich and June Probst, have had on my life. I am fortunate to have both my in-laws and my parents who consistently provide guidance, support, and encouragement, contributing meaningfully to both my personal and professional growth.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

This is a difficult question because there isn't just one answer. The truth is, we need many different types of leaders. With that being said, there are a few core values that every leader should uphold. First, a leader should show respect - even when there is disagreement. Second, leaders should always work toward improving their leadership and communication skills. And finally, at the heart of leadership is genuinely caring for the well-being of your team.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

If you're feeling the pull, trust it. Make that career change, start that side gig, volunteer, - whatever it is, take the leap. Surround yourself with like-minded people, work hard, continue learning, and don't be afraid to reach out for guidance. The important thing is to start today, because what you begin now is what will shape your tomorrow.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

My five-year goal includes continued leadership growth in my role as Lead Occupational Therapist at HSHS. I am passionate about my career and committed to further developing my skills and knowledge, as I enjoy learning and embracing new challenges.

In addition, my five-year plan includes the growth of my new business, T & N Vend, which my husband and I recently launched. My goal is to expand operations in the Effingham area and eventually hire employees to support the business. While I am excited about this new venture, my future will always remain rooted in the medical field, where I am dedicated to making a meaningful impact.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

My roots are in Effingham County and I am so proud to be in the same community as my family generations before me.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

The definition of success has grown and matured for me over the years. Today, when I think of success, I see my imperfectly perfect family. I feel it during family gatherings, when I look around the room and see people genuinely happy just to be together. I feel it in the close friendships I share with them. True success, to me, is reflected in my husband, Tony, and our children, Grace, Violet, and Annabelle.

For a long time, I thought success meant things like paying off student loans or building my dream home. Last year, I lost my first grandparent. That final weekend, surrounded by family in his home, I saw the true definition of a successful life. That experience showed me that success isn't measured in milestones or possession, it's measured in love, connection, and the legacy of togetherness we leave behind.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

This is something we would all love to say we have figured out. In reality, it is something that takes continuous effort from both yourself and your leaders. I strategically plan my PTO during times when I know I will have more stress. Using this benefit provides me time for all the necessities that life brings, but most importantly, allows me time to create and grow my skills in areas other than my career. I enjoy crocheting, crafting, creating memorial jewelry, reading, and family time. I recently began saying the rosary while I walk at my church. My faith has always been an important part of my life, and over the past two years, it has deepened significantly. It continues to be the foundation that grounds and guides me.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

The word that comes to mind is connection. Preserving our connection, with one another and with our town, is what makes my hometown truly feel like home. This connection shows up in many ways: community events, preserving our town's history, growing spiritually, visiting with neighbors, and upholding the family values we hold dear.

People long to see growth and potential, not only for themselves but for future generations. That bond across generations, knowing we are leaving them a community rooted in faith and togetherness, brings a deep sense of peace.



Congratulations

NIKKI PROBST

2025 TOP COMMUNITY LEADER NOMINEE

Double D Signs, Inc. proudly congratulates Nikki Probst on being recognized as a Top Community Leader!

As an Occupational Therapist and OT Facilitator with HSHS, Nikki seamlessly balances hands-on patient care with leadership responsibilities—all while raising her three daughters in the community she loves. Constantly setting and achieving new goals, Nikki's positivity and dedication inspire everyone around her.

We couldn't be prouder!



BIRTH YEAR
1985

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?
Effingham County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors
Effingham Area Homebuilders Association

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?
Teutopolis High School
United States Military Academy - West Point
Professional Engineer (PE)

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

Challenging a part of the traditional building process by establishing Built Right Door & Trim Co. to solve the problem of two separate, disjointed steps:

1. Buying doors, trim, stair parts, and other interior millwork from one place
2. Then having the material delivered somewhere else to paint or stain. The result is a higher-quality product at an equally competitive cost, that is a simpler, one-stop solution for contractors and homeowners to use.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

In any kind of leadership role, the team can only be as strong and effective as you allow them to be. Don't be the roadblock to your team's goals. Learning to lead better by empowering the team and knowing when to step aside is an area of continuous improvement for me.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

Like many, the people I have spent the most time around in my life have served as my role models. From a young age, mother has instilled in me a "you can do anything you put your mind to" mentality, and my father has demonstrated the path of hard work and dedication it takes to run a business.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

Accountability, work ethic, honesty.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Be involved, be present and speak up. The fear that prevents you from achieving your goals is often just in your own head.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

From a business standpoint, we hope to become the go-to for interior millwork products in your homes because of our reputation for quality and craftsmanship.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

Being a business owner in Effingham County has further impressed upon me the importance of treating people fairly and respectfully. In an environment where you know and continually see the customers you serve, you really begin to understand the importance of each interaction.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Having a reliable and ethical reputation in the community; be someone people hold trust in and would recommend to their family and friends.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

Ultimately, I don't seek to separate the two entirely because in a smaller community like this the overlap is present in most of your interactions and almost everywhere you go. I try to prioritize family time when it's family time and then accommodate my additional duties as a business owner early in the morning or later at night.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

The foundation of the communities within Effingham County are built on groups of people with shared values who provide strong mutual support for each other. With this foundation, many other positive elements will follow like strong social connections, good schools, amenities, etc.

In any kind of leadership role, the team can only be as strong and effective as you allow them to be.

Congratulations Aroyn Borries!

On being named a 2025
Top Community Leader Under 40



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BIRTH YEAR:
1995

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?
FCA and Oil Belt Christian Service Camp

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?
Business Administration Bachelor's Degree from Lincoln Christian University and a minor in Bible. Sales background.

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

Discovery Christian School tournaments. I have done a basketball 3-on-3 tournament for little kids and adults the past five years in Effingham. I don't know how big of an impact it is, but I do know that the little kids that have played in it have always told me how much they enjoy getting together with friends to compete in it. I'm proud of it, because I loved playing in 3-on-3 tournaments when I was a kid, and wanted to share that love with the Effingham community.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Well, being a jr. high teacher, I have always had challenges throughout my day. The biggest one that I see, on a daily basis, is the different learning styles that kids have and how to handle that and make sure that I am teaching in a way that everyone can learn. Understanding this and figuring this out can be complicated sometimes, but it is worth understanding their learning style because when a kid gets the lesson or concept for that subject, you can see that light bulb go off on their head and it just makes their school day easier.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

Both my mom and dad have always been an inspiration to me. My mom has always inspired me to be that soft-spoken person, while also being there for people when they need it most.

My dad has been a role model for me with his work ethic and providing for our family always no matter what had to be done to help us be successful.

I have been so blessed to have parents that cared for me and showed me what it means to work hard while doing good at the same time.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

I think the three best qualities to have as a leader are integrity, adaptability, and compassion.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

I would give two pieces of advice. The first piece of advice is prepare for everything and anything. With doing so, your percentage of failure is greatly reduced.

The second thing is find a cause you care about and have a passion for it! This won't feel like a task or a job, but something that comes naturally to you because you care.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

The list could go on forever, ha ha. The first thing I wish to accomplish is growing my family with having more kids.

The second thing I want to accomplish is helping more kids come to know Jesus at Oil Belt Christian Service Camp.

The third thing I want to accomplish is to grow the DCS tournaments so that we can raise more money for our sports programs at Discovery Christian School.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

Seeing and meeting new people in positions of leadership in Effingham County has helped me get an understanding of what leadership is and how you should treat other people within this community. Phil Webster, Nathan Loker, Andy Johnson, Julie Koester, Kathy Wormhoudt, and Jeff Michael are all examples of some great leaders in the county.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Success to me is following God faithfully, while living a life that others can see to help glorify him and bring people to him.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

I think I'm a pretty hard/smart worker, so making sure I use my time wisely and get things done sooner than later helps me not pile things on or stress out about things.

Also, relying on God and getting close to him by reading his word and talking to him helps me stay grounded in my everyday life. Without God, I don't know where I would be in my life.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

I think it has to do with two things. First, I think the element of faith in God will change everything about a city. The more people love God and follow him, I think it will change every aspect of their life and place they live at. The second element is people treating and caring for others within the community. When people come together, big things can happen. I'm proud of my hometown because I know the people that are there still in that community caring for it.

*When people come together,
big things can happen.*

Congratulations to our Teacher and Coach

Nathan Coomer

For being named a
Top Community Leader Under 40!

Thank you Mr. Coomer for Teaching our students
these life lessons:

How to glorify God on and off the court at all times.
How to be a great teammate through every situation.
How to Work hard while developing good habits.



Mr. Coomer's Life Verse

Colossians 3:23 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as if serving the Lord and not human masters".



discoverychristianschools.com Phone - 217-347-5778



Emily Debenham

JOE SIPPERS
OWNER



BIRTH YEAR:
1986

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

We like to participate in the Poss Music Works events and are active in the Downtown Effingham Business Group, Effingham County Chamber, and Visit Effingham. We love to host CEO groups at the coffee shop and are supportive of the arts community with seasonal/rotating art displays and a couple youth open mics throughout the

year. We support a number of local organizations that hold awareness events such as Effingham Recycles, CASA, EARS, Crisis Nursery, and ROSC. We are a proud supporter of the many MANY local charity and fundraising events that the amazing people of Effingham host.

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

I have a Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management and a Culinary Certificate from the University of Alaska Anchorage and an Associate of Arts from Lake Land Community College. I worked in restaurants in Effingham, Anchorage, and Las Vegas. I did my senior year at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas where I was able to work for Caesar's Entertainment and open three Gordon Ramsay restaurants on the Las Vegas Strip. I worked in operations for Gordon Ramsay Burger and led a staff of 80 servers, hostesses, and bussers. Aside from my restaurant experience, I worked at Heartland Dental in the Accounting Department where I learned how to work an Excel spreadsheet like a boss.

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

We underwent a re-brand project last year for the coffee shop. We considered our mission and values, and updated the logo, menu and many other brand materials. We also refreshed the space with paint and groovy wallpaper. The updates took a lot of time and energy, but I think it gave the coffee shop a fresh look and feel and will last for years to come. People have been so excited about it!

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

There's always a lot of challenges when trying to provide excellent customer service and a quality product in a fast-paced environment. Luckily, we have the best staff. One of the biggest challenges is creating rewarding careers for the people who help us out the most.

Our next biggest challenge is working within the limits of our building. We would like to expand our offerings, but first we need commercial hoods, dish station, new HVAC, and a new roof among many other things. We applied for a infrastructure grant through the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to help out with the costs. Hopefully we get the grant, otherwise, we will have to spread out the updates over a longer period of time.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

Ann Deters and Kristi Campbell are inspirations to me. The Chamber had a business mentoring program years ago, and Ann and I were paired together. She is the main reason I've been able to achieve what I have. She believed in me from the beginning, and we are friends to this day. I still call her with business questions.

Kristi hired me at the Firefly Grill when they opened in 2006. I learned how to talk to people in a polished way from her. She moved and grooved around the restaurant, and I wanted to be like her.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

I believe it is essential for a leader to operate from a place of curiosity and humility. As you grow as a leader, you can identify where your weaknesses are and find solutions to cover those weaknesses. Sometimes, you have to be brave and make calculated decisions.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Believe in yourself, create a vision, and try it out ... I see low confidence in some of the youth I work with. I wish they could see what I see in them. Do not let fear of failure get in the way.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

We will continue to work on the infrastructure updates to the coffee shop and invest our time and resources to continue to make Downtown Effingham a destination for residents and visitors.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

Effingham County has been very supportive over the years. During COVID, the community showed up to support our business in a big way to ensure our coffee shop remained stable. Visit Effingham does a great job getting us on the map for tourism, and the city government has resources we plan to take advantage of.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Success is blazing a trail forward and having a positive impact on those around you.

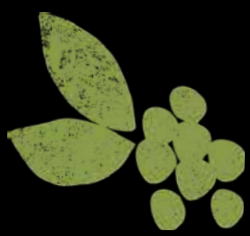
WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

I just work and take care of my tribe. If I'm successful at that, then I'm grounded and happy.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

It's the people of the community who make it great. I watch so many people working every day to serve those in need or to create space for people to feel valued and included. There are so many service warriors in our community, and I'd like to give a special shout out to Erin Goldstein with Poss Music Works, Brittany Sunderman with Joe Sippers, Coach Kylie Moore with Coach Kylie, Erin Browne with Effingham High School Color Guard, Allison Linley with Hazel Jayne, Lisa Siemer with Community Support Systems, Sam Hicks with ROSC, Johnna Schultz with EARS, Meghan Rewers with Crisis Nursery, and Molly and Michelle with CEO - wow, just wow! They make me proud to call Effingham home.

*Believe in yourself, create
a vision, and try it out.*



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BIRTH YEAR:
2001

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

I'm a member of 100+ Women Who Care, play in the Teutopolis Women's Tennis League, and am a new parishioner at St. Francis Church in Teutopolis.

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

I graduated from Miami University of Ohio with a degree in Supply Chain and Operations Management.

After working in supply chain at Parker Hannifin, I returned home to begin a career in financial advising. Since then, I've earned my securities and insurance licenses, obtained the Accredited Asset Management Specialist (AAMS®) designation, and plan to begin studying for the Certified Financial Planner (CFP®) designation this November.

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

While I don't lead large-scale projects or initiatives, the work I'm most proud of is the ongoing effort to build trust and help local community members make confident financial decisions. Through one-on-one meetings, people open up about their finances, which isn't always easy. I guide them through a process that shows how small, consistent steps can lead to meaningful, long-term change. The decisions we make together can impact not only their future, but also the lives of their children and grandchildren.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Starting out in the business has been a challenge, especially getting comfortable asking for help. I'm fortunate to work with supportive and knowledgeable women who have guided me along the way. I've also faced self-doubt around my age and the pressure to appear more experienced to be taken seriously. Each day, gaining more experience builds my confidence. While age has been a challenge, it also allows me to connect with younger community members who may feel hesitant to ask questions.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

My grandfather, Mike Hewing, was the first financial advisor in our family, followed by my mom, and now me. He had a calm, steady approach to life and genuinely cared about helping others. He was always willing to offer support to anyone who needed it. Though he's been gone for a few years, I think about him often and try to carry myself as he did. He made a meaningful impact on many families in our community.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

I believe essential qualities in a leader include compassion and empathy, along with strong listening skills. Humility is important, as is the willingness to ask for help when needed. Above all, a true leader cares about more than just their own success — they also prioritize the well-being and growth of others.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

My advice to young leaders or youth wanting to make a difference is to first discover what you're truly passionate about. Surround yourself with people you admire and want to learn from. Don't be afraid to look silly or make mistakes — these are a part of growth. And most importantly, don't hesitate to take risks; meaningful change often comes from stepping outside your comfort zone.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

Over the next five years, I hope to earn my Certified Financial Planner (CFP) designation and continue gaining experience as a financial advisor. I also plan to become more involved in Effingham's business community and reconnect with the CEO program as an alum, giving back whenever I can.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

The CEO program played a significant role in shaping who I am today by building my confidence, connecting me with successful local leaders, and sparking my interest in business. Effingham County's tight-knit, entrepreneurial spirit has been a strong influence, encouraging me to grow both personally and professionally.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

To me, success as a leader means helping families feel more secure about their financial future and achieve goals they once thought were out of reach. It's about making a positive, lasting impact on the lives of those I serve. Success also means giving back to others and the community, just as so many people have supported and encouraged me throughout my journey.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

I enjoy reading, walking, hot yoga, listening to podcasts, and finding new recipes to try in the kitchen. These activities help me stay balanced and give me a chance to reset.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

A community people are proud to call home is welcoming to anyone who wants to get involved. It's built on neighbors supporting one another and includes events and businesses that bring people together. These elements create a sense of belonging and connection that make a community truly special.

Humility is important, as is the willingness to ask for help when needed.



Congratulations

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Top Community Leader

This honor is a testament to your passion, creativity, and tireless commitment to making Effingham County a better place for everyone. We are Very Proud of You!

From Your Family & Work Family



CN-1948311



BIRTH YEAR:
1990

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?
St. Anthony Church - Prize Stand Chair
Women In Business
Effingham - Board Member

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?
Associate in Applied Science
Veterinary Technology from
Parkland College

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST

PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

One of the things I'm most proud of is when Andrew and I stepped into ownership of his family's business, Jedco Sales, which his grandfather James E. Dial started in 1982. Taking on a third-generation business is both an honor and a challenge, and together we grew sales by 20% in our first year. That growth also meant more opportunities for our team and stronger support for the local businesses we serve.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

As a leader, you must know every part of a business — and you'll face challenges you've never dealt with before. One of my biggest hurdles was stepping into areas that weren't running smoothly and having to rebuild systems from the ground up. What I've learned is that most things in life are "figure-out-able" if you're willing to dig in, learn fast, and take accountability.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

My parents were my first role models. My dad ran a small business and was on call 24/7 for his customers, while my mom managed a career, our household, and even earned her master's degree along the way. From them, I learned resilience and a strong work ethic.

I've also been inspired by local women business leaders who have shown me what steady leadership and longevity look like. One woman once said, "Roll up your sleeves, learn every part of the business, and do it better than anyone else." That advice pushed me to dive into every aspect of Jedco and lead with confidence. And from my husband, Andrew, I've learned to pause and celebrate progress instead of always moving the goalpost further away. Together, they've taught me to lead with integrity, vision, and persistence.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

Integrity, humility, courage, empathy, and perseverance. You can fake charisma, but you can't fake those — and if you don't have them, people see through you pretty quick.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

You're going to fail — so fail forward. Too many young leaders wait until everything feels perfect before they start, but perfection kills progress. Most things in life are figure-out-able once you begin, and the faster you learn to adapt, the faster you'll grow.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

Over the next five years, I plan to expand Jedco Sales, reach and strengthen our in-house production, while using that growth to give back locally through sponsorships, scholarships, and community support. I also hope the newly founded Women in Business Effingham grows into a place for young women to find mentorship and collaboration. When businesses and leaders grow, the whole community grows with us.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

Effingham has a way of keeping you grounded. It's the kind of place where everyone knows your name, your family, and whether you follow through - and that accountability has shaped my leadership. Growing up here has given me mentors, opportunities, and a stage to learn on.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Success as a leader is when you bring the best out of others. In business, that means building a team that's confident and capable. In the community, it means encouraging collaboration and lifting each other up so that when one of us grows, we all do.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

As a business owner, it's hard to truly unplug and leave work at work, but it's necessary. I make it a priority to protect family time, get outside, and keep Sundays for church and a reset. I've also learned the hard way that saying yes to everything leads straight to burnout, so now I focus on what really matters and leave room to breathe.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

A strong community needs three things: opportunity, belonging, and stewardship. People need real chances to work and grow, they need to feel connected to something bigger than themselves, and they need leaders who will take responsibility for the future. Without those, it's just a zip code. With them, it's a place people are proud to call home.

*Too many young leaders wait until
everything feels perfect before they start,
but perfection kills progress.*



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2025 Top Community Leaders!

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Laren Dial

recognized for her
leadership, growth, and
community impact.

"Leadership is the challenge to be
something more than average."

-Jim Rohn



BIRTH YEAR:
1988

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

Professionally, I'm a member of the American Institute of CPAs as well as the Illinois CPA Society. I'm currently the Treasurer for the board of directors of the United Way of Effingham County. I've also volunteered packing bags for Blessings in a Backpack.

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

I have a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Quincy University and Bachelors of Science degrees in both Accounting and Finance with a minor in Sports Management from Culver-Stockton College. I also have a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) license.

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

My work with the United Way of Effingham County has been the most fulfilling because of the wide impact it has on the community. By working with the local United Way, I'm able to help support numerous local organizations through grant funding raised through the support of our community. Every year during our grant process, we hear from numerous agencies in our County that need support in a variety of ways. I've been the chair of the grants committee several times throughout my tenure at the United Way and take very seriously the importance of evaluating the community needs and properly allocating grant funding. Working with this organization helps meet the community's needs where they are as they are ever-changing.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

I've come to learn that being a good leader doesn't mean you need to do everything yourself. A major challenge for me in learning to lead was to get comfortable with delegation and let go of the control. I've found that teaching others instead of trying to do it all yourself helps to grow the success of a group exponentially whether it be in a career or with a volunteer group. The impact of many is far greater than the impact of one.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

My parents have always been role models in my life. Reliability, determination, and hard work ethic are all values that were instilled in me. They taught me to respect leaders growing up and listen to what they had to teach me. Leaders could be found in teachers, coaches, and even peers. This principle has stuck with me and is how I've honed my leadership style now. I was also taught to lead by example, something they did themselves in showing the importance of caring for your neighbors, being dependable and loyal.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

In my opinion, a successful leader leads by example. To instill dedication and hard work in others, you must show that you believe those things are important by modeling them yourself. Honesty, effective communication, and dependability are also amongst the top qualities a leader should possess.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Ask a lot of questions! I think we all have spent too much time fumbling through things that we don't understand or know about and there are a lot of great people in our community that are willing and eager to help. These people have already gone down the path the young leaders are starting. While everyone's path isn't the same, there is a lot to be learned from those who have done it already.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

I'd like to mentor some of our community's up-and-coming leaders to get the next generation excited about helping our community thrive. The community is only as good as the people who live in it and care about it, and I think it's very important to instill those things in the next group of leaders.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

Between the people I've met through my career at West & Company and those I've met on the boards I've served on, it's incredibly gratifying to know there are so many people helping each other in this community. In Effingham County there are helpers everywhere you look and our community really shows up for each other whether someone is in need, a sports team is raising funds, or a business is providing good services in town. There are great leaders sprinkled all over the county to look toward for inspiration.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

I see success in building something better for the next generation of leaders. The old adage of leaving things better than you found them comes to mind. Change and improvement can be challenging to implement and while we may not see the results in our careers or lifetimes, it's important to see them through to leave things better than you found them.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

I like to look for things to do that cover needs in both work and life — golf outings, Business After Hours, fundraising events, etc. These things fulfill the fun we want to have with friends and family along with helping others and networking. It's a way to take time away from the office and out from behind the desk while still fostering relationships in the community.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

Community involvement is a key element. A community can only be as good as the members that help uplift it. People helping each other, encouraging each other, and connecting are all contributing factors that help a community thrive. All of these things contribute to the safety, support, and growth that make people proud to call Effingham County home.

*A community can only be as good as
the members that help uplift it.*



KAYLA DUNCAN

The Partners and Staff of West & Company, LLC, would like to congratulate Kayla Duncan on being named one of Effingham's Top Community Leaders Under 40. Thank you for your dedication to our clients and our employees.



Kelly Frohning

FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF CARM
VP, RISK MANAGEMENT & FINANCIAL ANALYST



BIRTH YEAR:
1986

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?
Effingham County FISH, Meals on Wheels, Effingham County Imagination Library - Dieterich Expansion, active St. Isidore volunteer, Dieterich Park District Coach

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?
Bachelor of Science - Finance from Eastern Illinois University

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

Bringing the Effingham County Imagination Library to Dieterich has been a fruitful project for me. This organization was brought to Effingham County by a great group of ladies. I just happened to raise my hand to help bring it to the children of Dieterich and Montrose. Today, due to the success of the program, children ages birth-5 in those communities are receiving a free book each month. The additional access to literacy is aiding in developing the community's greatest asset, our children!

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

A lot of times in community or civic leadership you see the same challenges: balancing different perspectives, limited resources, and resistance to change. I have found that open and respectful communication helps to guide those discussions in a productive manner. Understanding the why in those situations (from both sides) often helps the teams pull together to keep moving forward.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

There are many that inspire me by their actions and/or just their true self. I'd be remiss if I didn't start with my parents — they have always encouraged me to do the right thing. This has come full circle for me, as I try to motivate my kids to also live life this way. I've been blessed with a great husband and four children, all of whom are constantly inspiring and challenging me to be my best self.

There are also some really great women in my circle that I am constantly learning from and leaning on — moms and friends who keep showing up for their church, family, communities, professions and everywhere in between. Effingham County has so many great volunteers, many of whom are so generous with their time and talents.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

Above all else, I think integrity is the most essential quality in a leader. Teams are built on trust. It's easier to empower and grow people when they trust their leader.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Getting involved in something you're passionate about helps those "I have to" statements turn into "I get to" statements. That's a great place to be! I'd also encourage them to raise their hand for experiences or opportunities that might be outside of their comfort zone.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

Working on my mom and wife skills is always at the top of my list! I would also like to help our church continue on as a place of faith, fellowship, and sustainability.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

I've had the opportunity to work with several leaders within Effingham County. Each one of them was unique in their own right. I'd like to think that I have drawn some of my growth and leadership from those experiences. I've also had the privilege of working alongside some individuals who genuinely care about the community they live in. There are countless individuals that work tirelessly for missions they believe in, without any expectations in return.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Success to me means creating a place where people feel supported and proud to belong, a place where future generations will want to stay and work toward their own goals and for the betterment of our communities.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

When you can identify your priorities in life, it's much easier to create boundaries to help you protect the things that mean the most to you. You don't have to say yes to everything; it should be those things that are meaningful to you. That looks different for everyone, but understanding what that looks like for you is key.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

I would venture to guess that most people are proud to call a place home when their community is a safe place to live and reflects their values. To me, it also includes a place where they feel connected, cared for, and feel empowered to dream about the future.

Above all else, I think integrity is the most essential quality in a leader.

Congratulations, **Kelly Frohning**

on being named one of Effingham County
Top Community Leaders



Kelly Frohning
Vice President, Risk Management
and Financial Analyst

Your kindness, intelligence, loyalty, and true team spirit make you a shining example of leadership. This honor is so well deserved, and we couldn't be prouder to see you recognized for the incredible impact you make every day. Way to go, Kelly—you're making great things happen!



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Clint Holkenbrink

WABASH COMMUNICATIONS CO-OP
MARKETING & SALES SUPERVISOR



BIRTH YEAR:
2000

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

NTCA Marketing Committee
Smart Rural Community Advisor Council
Effingham County Chamber Ambassador
Effingham Sunrise Rotary

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

Bachelor's in Business Administration from
McKendree University

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

I'm most proud of being part of the team that helped bring reliable, high-speed internet service to communities across Effingham County. Many areas had limited options or poor connectivity previously, and witnessing families, students, and businesses finally gain dependable access has had a significant impact on how they live, learn, and work.

I also helped launch free public Wi-Fi in downtown Effingham, providing residents and visitors with secure and convenient access, while supporting local businesses and events. Both projects have strengthened community connections and improved the quality of life throughout the county.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

One of the biggest challenges I faced early on was stepping into a leadership role at a relatively young age and working with individuals who had been in the industry for much longer than I had. Initially, not everyone knew me or fully trusted my guidance. I had to earn that trust by showing up consistently, listening to their input, and proving that I was willing to do the work alongside them.

Over time, my actions built credibility. I focused on communicating clearly, following through on commitments, and making decisions that were in the best interest of the team and the company. That approach helped bridge the gap and turned initial hesitation into strong working relationships.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

My biggest inspiration has always been my parents. From a young age, they showed me what it means to work hard for what you have and what you want. They built everything through determination and consistency, and that mindset has stuck with me. Their example taught me that success doesn't come easy - you earn it through effort, accountability, and showing up every day ready to do the work.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

I believe a good leader shows up for their people. You don't have to be great at everything yourself to lead well - you have to empower the people around you to be great. Leadership is about trust, support, and giving your team the tools and confidence to succeed. A strong leader listens, helps remove roadblocks, and stands beside their team, not above them.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

My advice to young leaders is simple: have a voice and use it. Don't sit on the sidelines - get out, get involved, and volunteer. You don't have to have all the answers to make a difference. What matters is showing up, caring about your community, and putting in the time to help where it's needed.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

In the next five years, I want to keep pushing to expand reliable internet access across our region and continue improving the customer experience for the communities we serve. I also want to keep growing as a leader - mentoring others, strengthening our team, and finding new ways to give back locally. My goal is to help make sure Effingham County and the surrounding areas stay connected, supported, and moving forward.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

Effingham County has played a big part in shaping my growth as a leader. Working here has shown me how strong a community can be when people come together with a shared purpose. The support, collaboration, and pride people have in this area push me to do better and lead with the same commitment. Seeing the impact of reliable connectivity and community involvement firsthand has taught me the value of showing up, staying consistent, and always keeping people at the center of what I do.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

To me, success isn't about titles or recognition — it's about impact. As a leader, success means seeing the people around me grow and our community move forward because of the work we've done together. It's knowing that what I'm doing makes life a little better for the people who live here. If I can help my team succeed and make a positive difference in the community, that's real success.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

For me, staying grounded means spending time away from it all. Stepping back, disconnecting from work, and being around family and friends helps me reset. Whether it's a weekend away or just a night spent catching up, those moments keep me balanced and remind me why I do what I do.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

A community people are proud to call home is built on connection, opportunity, and reliability. People want to feel supported, safe, and included. They need access to good services, local involvement, and leaders who care about doing what's right for the community, not just what's easy. When people feel heard, valued, and part of something bigger than themselves, that's when a community really thrives.

*To me, success isn't about titles or recognition —
it's about impact.*

Congratulations

CLINT HOLKENBRINK

On Being Named One
Effingham's Top
Community Leaders
Under 40!



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BIRTH YEAR:
1993

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

Over the past couple of years, I have had the opportunity to work with many local high school students through the Health Occupations program. I have also served as a preceptor for local nurse practitioner, physician assistant, and medical students as they complete their pediatrics training.

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

I attended the University of Illinois for my undergraduate education, graduating with a bachelor's degree in molecular and cellular biology. After college, I completed four years of medical school at the University of Iowa. Following medical school, I moved to Indianapolis, where I completed a three-year pediatrics residency at Riley Children's Hospital.

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

I am proud to have been involved in implementing the Reach Out and Read program through our SBL Pediatrics Clinic in Effingham. This program integrates early literacy into pediatric care by providing age-appropriate books to children during well-child visits and encouraging parents to read aloud with their children daily. Since launching the program, we've distributed numerous books to local children and offered literacy guidance to their families.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

As a pediatric provider, one of the biggest challenges I've faced is managing the growing amount of misinformation that many parents encounter online. It can be difficult to navigate the influence of social media and search engines that often present misleading or fear-based content. I strive to form trusting relationships among my patients and their families, creating space for open, respectful conversations. Communication and connection are powerful tools in helping parents feel confident in the decisions they are making for their children.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

My parents have always been, and continue to be, my greatest role models. They both demonstrate qualities I strive to embody every day. Their patience, drive, and commitment to family have shaped who I am as a professional and as a mother. Growing up, they proved to me that it is possible to have a successful career and be involved in the community, while also never losing sight of the fact that the most important time is spent at home with family. Despite both working full time and raising five children, my parents never missed a sporting event, school concert, or big milestone. They have always encouraged me to be the best version of myself through their consistent example and support. I could not be more grateful to have both of them as my greatest sources of inspiration.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

I believe that humility is one of the most valuable qualities of an effective leader. As a leader, being open to feedback allows for growth and strengthens relationships. I feel that it is important to lead by example, demonstrating integrity, empathy, and a willingness to learn, so that others feel empowered to do the same.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

One of the biggest lessons I've learned throughout my education and career is the importance of learning from others and working as a team. I would encourage young leaders to listen to others, ask questions, and stay open to new perspectives. The strongest leaders aren't the loudest in the room, they're the ones encouraging others, seeking collaboration, and focusing on making a positive impact.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

Over the next five years, I hope to continue growing as a pediatric provider and a community advocate, with a focus on promoting the health and well-being of children and families in Effingham County.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

Practicing medicine in a relatively small community has given me a unique perspective as a pediatrician and leader. I not only care for my patients, but also often know their families, schools, and backgrounds. This close-knit environment allows me to understand the whole child within the context of their community, which informs how I provide care. At the same time, working in a small town challenges me to be resourceful, as we sometimes face limitations in access to services and specialists. This has strengthened my commitment to advocacy, early intervention, and efforts to expand the support available to families here.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

To me, success as a leader in our community means making a meaningful difference in the lives of local families. I feel my professional success is best measured by the relationships I build with patients and the support I provide in helping parents care for their kids. It is my goal to help build a community where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and to serve as a positive role model for our community's youth.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

Maintaining a healthy work/life balance is something I prioritize, as it directly impacts both my well-being and my ability to care for others. I enjoy staying active and traveling to visit friends and family. When I'm home with my husband and children, I try to be fully present. Whether playing with the kids or having dinner together, I work hard to be engaged and intentional in each role I play.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

I think the most important elements of a strong community are connection and community engagement. The connection between people is the foundation that leads to a true sense of community. When people feel genuinely connected and valued, they take ownership of their community's well-being. This leads to a cycle where community engagement grows naturally, and the town thrives as a place people are proud to call home.

I strive to form trusting relationships among my patients and their families.

Congratulations

Top Community Leaders



Abby Welsh, MD *SBL Pediatrician*

Dr. Abby Welsh is a highly respected pediatrician at the Sarah Bush Lincoln Bonutti Clinic in Effingham. She is passionate about caring for children and families in Effingham County, bringing both medical expertise and heartfelt compassion to every interaction.

Abby was recently nominated for the Effingham Daily News People's Choice Best Doctor award, reflecting the trust and admiration she has earned from families throughout the region. Her ability to connect with children, reassure parents, and provide top-quality pediatric care sets her apart as a physician who truly makes a difference.

Her training at some of the nation's leading pediatric institutions prepared her to provide exceptional care, and she has brought that knowledge and commitment home to Effingham.

A native of the area, Abby is proud to raise her family in Effingham alongside her husband, LJ, and their two young children. She is the daughter of Jerry Esker, President Emeritus of Sarah Bush Lincoln, and carries on her family's legacy of service to the community. By choosing to practice pediatrics here, Abby ensures that local families have access to specialized care without needing to leave the region. Her professional life keeps her busy, but her dedication to her family and community is equally strong.

Most of her time is devoted to serving her patients and creating fun, meaningful memories with her children, yet she still finds ways to stay active and engaged. Abby enjoys running and participating in local races, and she makes a point to attend community events in Effingham and Teutopolis whenever possible. She also takes pride in supporting local businesses and shopping small, reflecting her deep appreciation for the community she calls home.

Dr. Abby Welsh represents the very best of a community leader—she is a skilled pediatrician, a dedicated mother, and a strong advocate for the health and well-being of children in Effingham County.



BIRTH YEAR:
1990

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

I am involved with the American Public Works Association as a past president of the Prairie Branch in Illinois and remain actively engaged today. At Civil Design, Inc., I serve on our new ESOP Committee, helping research and build the foundation for employee ownership. Outside of work, I volunteer at my church

once a month. In other volunteer work, I serve as the 2nd Assistant Fire Chief with the Brownstown Fire Protection District, where I've volunteered for 16 years and counting. I also help train fellow firefighters through my part-time role as a Field Staff Instructor with the Illinois Fire Service Institute.

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

I attended Lake Land College in Mattoon, where I earned my associate's degree in pre-engineering, before completing my bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. I have been with Civil Design, Inc. since December 2012 and am a licensed Professional Engineer in Illinois, Missouri, and Kentucky. Over my career, I have worked on transportation and site development projects, and for the past two years I have been leading the Water Resources group at CDI.

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

I am most proud of leading the Henrietta Street Water Main Relocation and the Fayette Avenue Sanitary Sewer Relocation projects for the City of Effingham. These projects were necessary due to the widening of Fayette Avenue by IDOT and presented challenges with existing and proposed conditions, multiple utility conflicts, and a tight schedule. By working closely with the city and other stakeholders, we delivered successful solutions that ensured reliable utility service for residents and businesses while supporting a key roadway improvement for the community. In the long term, these projects not only improved critical infrastructure but also supported future economic growth in Effingham.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

One of my biggest challenges has been shifting my focus from production work to leadership and training. I am naturally task-oriented and detail-driven, which served me well as an engineer, but as a leader I've had to step back and look at the bigger picture. I overcame this by reminding myself that the growth and success of the team is more important than completing tasks myself. By focusing on developing others and trusting them with responsibility, I've grown as a leader while helping my team members grow in their own careers.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

A major role model for me has been Adam Bohnhoff at CDI. He has been a mentor throughout my career, guiding me not only on the technical side, but also in leadership and decision making. Adam has helped me learn how to juggle multiple projects at once while still maintaining focus on quality and client relationships. I admire how hard he works and the way he makes clients feel important, because they are. His example has taught me the value of balancing high standards with genuine care for people, and it has shaped the way I approach both my work and my leadership.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

I believe a leader must always have their team's back, lead by example, and stay positive. People want to know that their leader will support them, work alongside them when needed, and encourage them through challenges. When a leader sets that tone, it builds trust and creates an environment where the whole team can succeed.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

The biggest thing is do not wait. Challenge yourself and strive to take on more responsibilities, and do not be scared to try something new. Leadership is built through experiences that push you out of your comfort zone and help you grow. Some of the best opportunities in my own career have come from saying yes to things that were unfamiliar, and those challenges ended up shaping me into a better leader.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

In the next five years, I want to continue to grow CDI's Water Resources service line by adding team members and developing talent. At CDI we strive to make it a great place to work, and I want to build on that culture while expanding our impact. My goal is to continue delivering great engineering solutions not only to Effingham County, but across Illinois and throughout the Midwest. At the same time, I hope to continue developing as a leader in the fire service, training firefighters and helping ensure our team is prepared to serve the community at the highest level. I also plan to stay active in my church, continuing to help with sound production and finding new ways to help more people connect with God. Building Stronger Communities is CDI's vision, but it is also something I carry into every part of my life, whether that is engineering, fire service, or faith.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

Effingham County has influenced my leadership through the projects and partnerships I have been a part of here. The work ethic in this part of the state is excellent, and collaborating with people in Effingham has shown me the value of teamwork, trust, and follow through. Working alongside community leaders and stakeholders has challenged me to be a better communicator and problem solver, and those lessons carry into both my engineering work and my fire service leadership.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

To me, success is about the positive impact you leave on people and the community. It is not measured by titles or numbers, but by whether others are better off because of your efforts. Success as a leader means creating opportunities for growth, building trust, and helping make the community stronger for the future.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

For me, it starts with putting God first. I have not always been good at that, but I am working to be better and keep faith at the center of my life. I have also learned that work will always be there, and it should not be the highest priority. Staying grounded means focusing on faith, family, work, and service through the fire department and my church, which helps me keep perspective and bring balance to everything I do. Keeping that balance makes me a stronger leader, because it reminds me that people matter more than your work.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

I believe a strong community starts with making God a priority. When faith and values guide decisions, it creates a foundation for trust and connection. It is also important for people to be proud of what they have, whether that is their homes, schools, infrastructure, or local organizations. Pride and faith together build a sense of belonging and motivate people to keep making the community stronger for future generations.

Congratulations!

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*Thank you for building a
stronger Effingham community.
Your passion for creating
positive change helps shape a
brighter future for our region*

Laura Koester

EJ WATER COOPERATIVE, INC
ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT & MEMBER SERVICES MANAGER



BIRTH YEAR:
1986

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

I currently serve as the Treasurer for a nonprofit organization called Project J4-29, whose mission is to inspire and support eighth grade and senior students, as well as school staff. I also sit on the board of the 15 County Water Supply Operators Association, a nonprofit organization that provides continuing education and training hours for water and wastewater operators.

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

I am a 2004 graduate of Altamont High School and am currently pursuing a degree in Accounting at Lake Land College. In addition, I am a member of the Maxwell Leadership Certified Team.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

I believe strong leadership is built on a foundation of integrity by doing the right thing even when no one is watching. Effective leaders also demonstrate clear communication, personal accountability, and genuine empathy toward others. Qualities such as adaptability, decisiveness, and confidence (balanced with humility) are also essential, especially when navigating change or making tough decisions. Lastly, resilience — the ability to bounce back from setbacks and keep moving forward — is what helps leaders grow and inspire those around them.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Start where you are, use what you have, and don't wait for the "perfect" moment to get involved, just begin. Making a difference doesn't always require a big platform; it often starts with small, consistent actions that impact the people around you.

Stay curious, ask questions, and surround yourself with mentors who will challenge and encourage you. Most importantly, lead with integrity, kindness, and courage.

Our communities grow stronger when young people step up with fresh ideas, open minds, and hearts willing to serve.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

Over the next five years, I plan to complete my Associate's Degree in Accounting and continue advancing my career with EJ Water Cooperative. I'm committed to ongoing personal and professional growth, and I look forward to taking on new challenges, learning new skills, and making a meaningful impact within the organization and the community we serve.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

To me, success is about accomplishing goals I've set for myself, whether they're big or small. When I commit to something, put in the work, and see it through, that's success. It's not just about the end result, but the effort, growth, and persistence along the way.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

For me, staying grounded begins with putting God first — my faith is at the center of everything I do. It guides my decisions, keeps me centered, and reminds me of what truly matters.

I also prioritize my family and strive to maintain a healthy boundary between work and home life. While there are occasional situations that require attention after hours or on weekends, I believe it's important to keep work at work as much as possible, so that home remains a space of rest and connection.

Another key to balance is doing work that you genuinely enjoy. Finding a workplace that not only supports your growth and development but also encourages you to reach your full potential, without limiting you, is essential for both professional satisfaction and personal well-being.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

A strong community is one where everyone feels they belong. Whether you've lived here for generations or just arrived, no one should feel excluded for seeking a better life for themselves or their family. We grow stronger by welcoming new neighbors, learning from each other, and building a future together.

A strong community is one where everyone feels they belong.



CONGRATULATIONS

LAURA KOESTER

2025 EFFINGHAM COUNTY CHAMBER
TOP COMMUNITY LEADER UNDER 40



**Thank you for going above and beyond—
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BIRTH YEAR:
1992

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

Locally, I am an active member of Sacred Heart Parish, serving on the parish council. My husband and I also enjoy mentoring engaged couples through marriage prep at St. Anthony and Sacred Heart. Together, we support the Effingham Area DeColores community and their retreats.

Professionally, I am passionate about personal

and business growth and have been involved with the Realife Process She-EO program since it launched in Effingham. I am also excited about the Chamber's Women in Business group that just launched. On a state level, I remain active with the Illinois Physical Therapy Association.

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

I graduated from St. Anthony High School in 2010 and earned my Doctorate of Physical Therapy from Maryville University in St. Louis in 2016. I hold advanced certifications in pelvic rehabilitation and obstetric physical therapy through the Academy of Pelvic Health of the APTA. Our clinic continually pursues continuing education to stay at the forefront of pelvic health care.

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

I am passionate about connection, relationships, health, and leadership. In 2023, I partnered with Dr. Sieberg to launch the Holistic Health Fair, now an annual January event highlighting local holistic health businesses and their services. This fall, I am thrilled to be launching the first Women's Wellness Retreat in Effingham in collaboration with seven other local, women-owned health and wellness businesses.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Business ownership presents challenges every week, but I have been blessed with a supportive husband and two incredible business coaches who have guided me since the beginning. Early on as I was growing faster than expected, my biggest concern was finding skilled physical therapists who wanted to specialize in pelvic health, and each one of my amazing PTs arrived at just the right time. My faith has deepened through this journey as I've learned to truly trust God's timing and plan with the business.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

My greatest inspiration has always been my mom. She went back to school while raising us to earn her administrative degree. She gave 110% leading St. Thomas and Sacred Heart schools as principal. Her example of hard work and wholehearted commitment continues to guide me.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

I believe great leaders demonstrate humility, take responsibility and action, and are driven to use their God-given talents to improve the world. They must be able to listen and recognize the needs of their employees.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Get involved early - join organizations, clubs and find a faith community. Don't be afraid to speak truth. Find your passion. Find someone older than you that you admire and ask them to be a mentor. Find a local church and have a relationship with Jesus. Effingham is a great community to get involved in and make change!

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

God willing, I hope to grow Effingham Pelvic Health & Wellness into a team of five pelvic physical therapists in order to be able to serve more people. We will continue increasing awareness of pelvic health not only for our community but for health care providers as they often do not know what we do or that there is help for these "taboo" concerns. My mission is to make pelvic floor physical therapy a standard part of care in our community during pregnancy, postpartum recovery, and recovery from reproductive or colorectal cancers. We want patients and doctors to know the benefits of pelvic rehab before and after surgeries such as hysterectomies, prolapse repairs, and prostatectomies. We want the general public to know there is hope and conservative treatment outside of surgeries and medications for leakage, pelvic pain, constipation, or prolapse. Our staff also hopes to all be certified in dry needling and some of us in fertility care within the next couple years.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

I always knew I wanted to return home to work and raise my family. I received the Chamber scholarship in college and I distinctly remember saying that I planned to come back and make a difference in our community. Covid was a blessing in disguise to me in some regards as it gave me the opportunity to step outside of corporate healthcare and open my own practice in Effingham, closer to family and friends. There are so many women business owners in our community. I have been able to connect with them initially through BNI and now through the Chamber and She-EO. Being with other women that understand business and doing masterminds with them has been extremely helpful.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Success is making a difference for the better. That can be helping people feel more confident with their bowel or urinary urgency and not leak in public. I am passionate about improving family life and strengthening marriages. So, success is also being able to help marriages by improving their communication, intimacy (in and outside of the bedroom), and allowing husbands and wives to return to a great sex life without fear and pain. Success is preventing kids from being bullied at school by stopping their poop or pee accidents. Sometimes success simply means taking time to listen and pray with a patient. Ultimately, success is helping people not only feel better physically but also helping them in all areas of wellness including their spiritual journey. My goal is that people see Christ through me. Success is also the ability to balance a professional life while still being fully present for my husband and four children.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

Time-blocking, prayer and adoration, family walks, deep breathing, and minimizing personal social media help me stay grounded and focused on what matters most.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

For a community to be a place people are proud to call home, its members need to feel respected, listened to, cared for, and safe.

CONGRATULATIONS!

APRIL RITZ, PT, DPT

Pelvic Floor Physical Therapist & Owner
of Effingham Pelvic Health & Wellness



**THANK YOU FOR YOUR DEDICATION TO SERVING OUR
COMMUNITY AND IMPROVING OVERALL WELLNESS.
CONGRATULATIONS ON BEING SELECTED AS ONE OF
EFFINGHAM'S TOP COMMUNITY LEADERS UNDER 40!**

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Sarah Schabbing

TEUTOPOLIS UNIT 50
5TH GRADE TEACHER



BIRTH YEAR:
1989

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

Vice President of the TEA (Teutopolis Education Association)

Teutopolis for Tomorrow board member

Teutopolis for Tomorrow Parks and Rec Committee member

Christmas in the Village Committee member

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

Class of 2007 graduate of Teutopolis High School

Bachelor's Degree in Education from EIU in 2012

Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from EIU in 2022

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

Last year I spearheaded the first ever "Christmas in the Village" in my hometown of Teutopolis. In my opinion, this was something our community was missing, and once I was asked about it, I knew we had to make it happen. Last year, our Village President, a village board member, three other moms, and myself pulled this event together in under a month. Our community showed up big time with support for whatever we needed to make it happen, and the nights of the event. So many children watched as Santa was brought to town on a fire truck, and got to visit with Santa. The event was free for the public, and was a great success. We are currently planning our 2nd Annual Christmas in the Village.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Being told that an idea or event won't work and/or being told "no". This happened a lot last year especially when trying to organize a Christmas event for our town, but I think it was important for me to find people willing to work on this event with me, and to honestly not take no for an answer and show them all what our community was missing. Being persistent in getting the job done, learning better time management and delegating tasks to those who are willing to help, and earning trust and being kind are ways we overcame these challenges.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

First my parents- Some of the greatest people you'll ever meet. They show up, they listen, and have supported my siblings and I our entire lives, and I really just want to make them proud.

My Grandpa- He farmed until his 90's and until he physically couldn't go anymore. He was the hardest working man I've ever met, and taught me so much

My kids- because they deserve the best life, and an amazing place to grow up and call home.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

A strong leader isn't just about holding a title - it's about how they guide, inspire, and support others. I believe the most essential qualities of a leader are integrity, communication, and empathy. Integrity builds trust, communication ensures clarity and connection, and empathy shows people that their voices matter. Along with that, a strong leader needs vision to guide others, adaptability to handle challenges, and accountability to take responsibility for both successes and mistakes. A great leader inspires not only with words, but by example.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

My advice to young leaders is to start where you are and use what you have. You don't need a title or a big platform to make a difference — leadership begins with small acts of service and kindness. Listen to your community first; when you understand people's needs and hopes, you'll know where your voice and energy are most needed. Don't be afraid of mistakes — every challenge is a chance to grow stronger and wiser. Surround yourself with mentors and peers who inspire you, and remember that true leadership isn't about being in charge, it's about lifting others up. Even the smallest steps, when taken consistently, can create lasting change.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

In the next five years, I hope to continue growing as a leader by taking on new opportunities that challenge me to serve others in meaningful ways. I hope to stay true to my values, keep learning from mentors and experiences, and be someone who helps create positive change. In my career, I plan to keep gaining knowledge and learning best practices to keep my students engaged, being helping and supportive of my colleagues, and continuing to love this career field I have chosen. In my family, I can't wait to watch my children grow and love this community as much I have living here my whole life. They are my biggest supporters, so I hope to continue to make them proud.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

Effingham County has shaped my growth and leadership by giving me a strong sense of community and connection. Growing up here taught me the value of relationships, service, and accountability - because in a close-knit community, people know and support one another. Opportunities to get involved, whether through school, church, local organizations, or volunteer projects, have allowed me to step into leadership roles and learn by doing. I've been inspired by mentors and community leaders who model integrity, hard work, and compassion, and they've encouraged me to lead with those same values. My hometown has shown me that leadership isn't about recognition, but about working together to make a positive impact where you live.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Success isn't about titles or recognition — it's about making a positive difference in people's lives. To me, success as a community leader means making a positive impact, bringing people together, and inspiring others to continue serving and leading.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

I stay grounded by spending time with family and friends. I am happiest when I get to watch my kids partake in all of their favorite sporting events and other hobbies. I love being able to help coach my daughter's softball team, and son's baseball team. I think it's important to also take time for yourself and just relaxing every once in a while by reading, being outside, and just having fun.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

A community people are proud to call home has several key elements: strong relationships, where neighbors care for and support one another; safety and access to resources like schools, parks, and healthcare; opportunities for everyone to grow and contribute; and a culture of inclusion and respect, where all voices are heard. When people feel connected, valued, and empowered, they take pride in their community and work to make it even better.

Congratulations

SARAH SCHABBING

on being named one of Effingham's

TOP COMMUNITY LEADERS UNDER 40!

We are Proud of You!



From
Your Friends & Family



BIRTH YEAR:
1990

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?
Effingham Imagination Library, Christ's Church Children Ministry, Illinois Association of Student Councils

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?
Bachelor's Degree from Indiana State University in Physical Education and Health Education. Master's Degree from Eastern Illinois University in Educational Leadership.

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

The project I am most proud of leading is founding the Effingham Imagination Library chapter within Effingham County. My grandma started a chapter in my hometown, Paris, Illinois, and it feels like I get to bring a piece of her to Effingham County. As of now, over 1,100 children have been enrolled in this program and receive a free book each month. Helping families within Effingham County build their own home libraries brings families together, builds children's imaginations, and instills a love for reading at a young age. I'm grateful to have a supportive co-director and board members who will make this program run seamlessly for years to come.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

As a teacher, sometimes my "big ideas" are met with many questions; however, these questions have empowered me to learn how to pivot to create even better "big ideas". Change can be both exciting and overwhelming. As a leader promoting change, I was able to become a better communicator and listener to help people to see the positive in new ideas.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

I had a great childhood because my parents were in education, and I knew I wanted the same for my future family, which is why I became a teacher. I grew up as a "teacher's kid" and my parents (and everyone else within the school district) held me to high expectations. I loved going to see my parents at their schools, staying late at the high school gym after a basketball game, and watching as my parents interacted with other teachers and students. I saw how they treated others and carried themselves as "silent leaders." I try to lead more by actions and less by words, just as my parents did.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

I believe a great leader is a servant leader, putting the needs of others first and helping them succeed. Leading by example is essential, showing others the attitude and work ethic you expect from the team. A strong leader also listens to others, valuing their ideas and perspectives. Finally, perseverance is important, staying committed and motivated even when challenges arise.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Surrounding yourself with like-minded people is important when trying to make a difference. It is hard to be a solo leader; you need people in your corner and people who bring out the best in you. Understand not all of your ideas are good ideas and take what you have learned from failure and keep pushing forward. Listening is hard to do with your mouth open; therefore, be open to learn from others and accept their help.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

I hope to continue to build the Fellowship of Christian Athletes program at Effingham High School and lead teens to Jesus. I would also like to grow the Wellness Physical Education class and continue to provide guidance and encouragement to teens who are working towards their life-long fitness goals.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

The leaders within Effingham County have provided me with opportunities within the school district and community. They have shown support, guidance, and trust in my ability to be a leader, and I am grateful to continue to grow as a leader in Effingham.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Success to me, especially as a leader in our community, is measured by the positive impact I have on my students' lives. I believe true success comes from guiding them not only in their academic journey but also in making thoughtful life decisions. Building meaningful relationships with my students is something I pride myself on, and I strive to continue being a positive influence who helps them grow into confident individuals.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

My family and friends are always very supportive of my work within the school and community. I make time for exercise and hobbies, to recharge and maintain balance. I also set boundaries between work and personal life, so I can fully enjoy the moments that matter most with family and friends.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

Effingham is a great place to raise a family and provides numerous opportunities for growth and connection. Thus, when children think back to their childhood within Effingham, the hope is they too will raise their children here and give back to the community. A strong sense of community, where people care for and support one another, is essential. Community-centered activities/events, high-quality schools, and spaces for recreation and connection help create pride and encourage people to invest in their town's future.

Congratulations to *Mrs. Megan Tylka*



2025 Top Community Leaders Under 40 Nominee



"When kids think back to their childhood in Effingham, I hope they remember it as a place where people cared for each other, supported one another, and inspired them to do the same one day."
— Megan Tylka

Effingham High School educator Mrs. Megan Tylka lives with energy, purpose, and a servant's heart. As a PE and Health teacher, Student Council advisor, and founder of the Effingham County Dolly Parton Imagination Library, she inspires students and families to live well, stay curious, and give back.

Unit 40 is proud to celebrate Mrs. Tylka and her contribution to the betterment and overall well-being of those who call Effingham County home.

Brooke Ferrusen

SARAH BUSH LINCOLN
VICE PRESIDENT, PRACTICE MANAGEMENT



BIRTH YEAR:
1988

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?
Sarah Bush Lincoln Women Connected
Illinois Health and Hospital Associated (IHA)
Medical Group Management Association (MGMA)
American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE)
St. Francis of Assisi Church

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

Master of Health Administration, Ohio University
Master of Science in Medical Dosimetry, Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Bachelor of Radiologic Technology/Science, Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Associate of Radiologic Technology/Science, Olney Central College

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

I have a deep dedication to the Effingham area, having been raised in Jasper County and now raising my own family in Effingham County. I am proud to be part of the long-term initiative to grow the services available locally. Today, we provide a wide range of care from primary care to cardiology, neurology, orthopedics, and more and we are in the process of building a second facility that will bring additional specialties such as pulmonology, women's health, gastroenterology, urology, and others. This growth has reduced the burden of travel, kept patients closer to their families, improved continuity of care, and allowed residents to build lasting relationships with providers in their own community — something I am very proud to support and help advance.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

One of the major challenges I have faced in leadership has been recruiting healthcare providers to a rural area like Effingham County. Competition with larger cities and health systems can make it difficult to attract providers, especially in certain specialties. To overcome this, I focused on highlighting the advantages of practicing in a rural community such as building deeper relationships with patients, having a strong work-life balance, and becoming part of a close-knit, supportive community. We also worked to streamline our recruitment process, ensure fair market compensation, and provide robust onboarding and retention support. These efforts have allowed us to successfully grow both our primary and specialty provider base, ultimately improving access to care for our community.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

My parents are my biggest role models and greatest supporters. Through their hard work and dedication, they taught me perseverance while also showing me how to be kind, fair, dependable, and to live with integrity - values I carry with me every day.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

I believe the most essential leadership qualities are integrity, accountability, adaptability, and empathy. Integrity ensures that decisions put patients first. Accountability builds trust with providers, staff, and the community. Adaptability allows leaders to respond effectively in a constantly changing healthcare environment. And empathy is critical for connecting with people to create a culture of compassion and high-quality care.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

I would encourage young leaders to believe that their voice matters, stay curious, and use their talents to serve others, because every community needs the energy and ideas of its next generation.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

Over the next five years, I aim to expand access to care and strengthen key service lines to ensure comprehensive, high-quality healthcare for our region. In addition, I am committed to my own professional growth as a healthcare leader by pursuing ongoing professional development, expanding my knowledge and skills, and gaining experiences that will allow me to guide sustainable growth and deliver long-term value to our patients and community.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

Effingham County has shaped my leadership by teaching me the importance of community-focused care and the need to build trust, be resourceful, and make decisions that truly improve people's lives.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

To me, success as a leader means seeing others grow when they feel valued, supported, and empowered to make a difference in our community.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

As a wife and mom of four kids, balance for me means being intentional about where I spend my time. My family keeps me grounded — whether it's cheering at a game, helping with schoolwork, or simply being together at home. Making space for those moments not only keeps me happy but also gives me the energy and perspective I need to be a better leader at work.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

A community becomes a place people are proud to call home when it offers safety, opportunity, connection, and access. People need to feel safe, have opportunities for work and growth, feel connected to one another, and have access to essential services like schools, healthcare, and recreation.

*As a wife and mom of four kids,
balance for me means being intentional
about where I spend my time.*

Congratulations

Top Community Leaders



Brooke Zerrusen *SBL Vice President of Medical Practices*

Brooke Zerrusen is an exceptional leader whose work has elevated healthcare delivery and community well-being across Effingham County. As Vice President of Medical Practices at Sarah Bush Lincoln, Brooke oversees 57 primary and specialty care

clinics. Her leadership encompasses operations, strategic planning, marketing, provider relations, quality initiatives, and compliance—making her a key driver of our health system's growth and success.

Brooke began her career at Sarah Bush Lincoln in 2016 as a clinic supervisor in Orthopedics & Sports Medicine. Through her dedication, problem-solving skills, and ability to inspire teams, she earned rapid promotions—becoming clinic director in 2018, administrative director in 2020, and Vice President in 2022. Her professional journey reflects her determination, adaptability, and vision for excellence.

Beyond her professional achievements, Brooke is deeply rooted in her community. She is an active member of St. Francis of Assisi

Catholic Church, where she contributes her time and talents to local causes. Her leadership in healthcare extends beyond the walls of her clinics—she actively supports initiatives that enhance community health, promote access to care, and encourage preventive services.

Brooke holds a bachelor's degree in radiologic sciences and a master's degree in medical dosimetry from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, as well as a master's degree in healthcare administration from Ohio University. Her academic achievements have equipped her with the knowledge and leadership skills to navigate the complexities of healthcare while keeping patients at the center of every decision.

Residing in Teutopolis with her husband, Darren, and their four children, Brooke balances the demands of executive leadership with family life, which is a testament to her dedication, resilience, and strong work ethic.

Brooke is a visionary healthcare leader, a dedicated community member, and a role model whose influence will shape Effingham County for years to come.

Beth Schumacher

FAMILY CARE ASSOCIATES
PEDIATRIC NURSE PRACTITIONER



BIRTH YEAR:
1991

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

Member of National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
Reach out and Read Coordinator for the ROR Program at Family Care Associates

Previous Board Member of Crisis Nursery, currently serve as On-Call Medical Professional/Consultant Nurse Consultant at Effingham Child and Development Center

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, 2013
Master of Science in Nursing - Pediatric Nurse Practitioner, 2018

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

In 2020, I was able to enroll Family Care Associates in the national nonprofit initiative, Reach Out and Read. It is a program that aims to deliver books to pediatricians and clinics to encourage families to read to their children. At Family Care, we are able to promote early reading and provide books at well-child visits up until age five. The clinic funds the book, but I have also been able to receive some grants to assist in the funding.

Being a clinic that participates in the program allows us to share with parents the importance of early reading and literacy with infant and young children, and the kiddos love walking out of an appointment with a new book to take home.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

Dr. Colleen Bingham has been a role model of mine since I shadowed her during high school as a Health Occ Student. Her love for Pediatrics, knowledge and empathy were such admirable qualities. I was able to work alongside her some as a medical assistant and then as part-time nurse. When I was discussing returning to school for my Nurse Practitioner degree, Dr. Bingham offered advice and support. I then was hired on as a PNP to work with her yet again.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

As a leader, I feel it's essential to have a clear vision while remaining accountable and empathetic toward those I work alongside.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

I think it is always important to follow your heart and passion. If you are doing something that you love, it makes it easy to share your knowledge and expertise with others.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

I hope to continue to serve as a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner and caring for children and their families. I am hoping as my own young family grows, I will be able to attend some Pediatric Conferences to continue to expand my professional knowledge and skills.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

I have always lived in Effingham County, and I am very thankful I was able to participate in the Health Occupations Program as a high school student. When I returned to school for my Masters and was setting up clinical rotations, Effingham providers were very willing to host me as a student. I have precepted several nurse practitioner students in recent years, and I hope to continue to do so.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Success as a leader means working together to achieve a goal — one that may change depending on the current needs or situation.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

Work-life balance as a working mom can seem overwhelming at times, but I try to embrace the chaos. As a family, we love being outside and currently are loving all the sports we are a part of. In my free time, I also enjoy running and reading.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

A community has to be welcoming and people have to feel safe and supported. I feel like Effingham County definitely is a place for people to look for new opportunities and allows people to grow and connect. I am proud to be called a leader in the community, and my hope is I can continue to contribute to Effingham County for years to come.

A community has to be welcoming and people have to feel safe and supported.

Derrick Ferrusen

TEUTOPOLIS UNIT #50
ACTIVITIES & ATHLETIC DIRECTOR



BIRTH YEAR:
1994

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS, BOARDS OR VOLUNTEER GROUPS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

Effingham County Relay for Life
Illinois Athletic Directors Association - District 14 Representative
Illinois Athletic Directors Association Middle School Professional Development Committee

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND?

B.A. History with Teacher Certification
M.S. Education
Ed. S. (anticipated May 2025)

NIAAA Certifications as Registered Athletic Administrator, Registered Middle School Athletic Administrator, and Certified Athletic Administrator (anticipated March 2025)

WHAT PROJECT OR INITIATIVE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU'VE LED IN EFFINGHAM COUNTY? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

The 100 Years of Basketball Celebration for Teutopolis High School is going to be tough to top. I began work toward that ceremony the summer before school started in my first year at T-Town. There were countless hours of research to find living relatives of people I felt needed to attend, promotion, planning gifts and programs, and script writing. By the time the event was finished that January, we had successfully created an event that will serve as a memory to those it was important to for the rest of their lives.

WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

The biggest challenges we often face in education are often people based. Whether it is a kid, an adult, or multiple adults, people problems are almost always overcome by relationship building.

WHO HAS SERVED AS YOUR INSPIRATION OR ROLE MODEL? WHY?

I was incredibly lucky to have great teachers who influenced me on my way to become an educator - some who have retired, such as Steve Fritcher, Kent Probst, and Al Church, as well as others who I am blessed to share a workplace with every day, like Josh Cottrill, Rich Niebrugge, Misty Mapes, and Justin Fleener. Of course, both of those lists are much longer than those mentioned here. I also believe it is important to view your contemporaries who are doing good work as role models to bounce ideas off of or steal ideas from - people who I am lucky to call friends who I have had the pleasure to work with over the last nine years such as Cole Huber (Sullivan HS), Aaron Lock, Jim Wood, and Brian Deadmond (Charleston HS), Matt Hensley (Mahomet-Seymour HS), Ben Davis (Mt. Zion Schools), Dan Sheehan (Monticello Schools), and Scott Battas (Mascoutah HS) to name just the first few that came to mind.

The most inspiring person I have the pleasure of having in my life is my wife, Sarah. She is an incredible mother to our daughter Reagan.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL IN A LEADER?

I believe the most important leadership quality is humility because it serves as the foundation for every other strength a leader can possess. A humble leader recognizes that leadership is not about power or control, but about service and growth — both for themselves and for those they lead. Humility allows leaders to be self-aware, openly acknowledging their own strengths and weaknesses while seeking input from others to make better decisions. It also fosters empathy, as leaders who set aside

their egos are better able to listen and genuinely understand the perspectives and needs of their team. Humility also naturally leads to a servant-minded approach, where the leader prioritizes the success and well-being of the group over personal recognition. When a leader demonstrates humility, it creates an environment of trust, collaboration, and respect, empowering everyone to thrive and work toward shared goals. In this way, humility not only stands as the most vital leadership trait but also strengthens and supports other essential qualities.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG LEADERS OR YOUTH WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

The best advice I can give is to sum up a few things I believe are important in the greatest leaders you can study.

1. Do the work.
2. If you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room.
3. Don't be afraid to steal ideas. Very few things are truly brand new. Surround yourself with people smarter than you are, and use that network you've built.
4. Turn the "have to's" into "get to's" or "want to's." In life, when you pursue greatness there will be challenges and criticisms. There are challenges in every realm and every aspect of life. If we take 10 people in this room and sat in a circle and threw our challenges in the middle, you would probably be excited to walk out with the ones you came in with, instead of someone else's. You chose your profession or the avenue in which you pursue success — and the challenges associated with it. Each one of those challenges will give you a tool that you need to continue to improve in your field.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

At almost no point in my life have I been able to correctly answer the question "where will you be in five years?" I hope that with schooling and certifications officially out of the way, the focus can be more on home life and personal goals for myself and my family.

HOW HAS EFFINGHAM COUNTY INFLUENCED YOUR GROWTH OR LEADERSHIP?

I think no matter where I went to school, grew up, or lived, I would have been in education somewhere. If it were not for moving back to Effingham County, and the events that led to my involvement with the Relay for Life I would not have even begun to develop any sort of leadership skills prior to teaching. Becky and Ron's willingness to bring in a 19-year-old kid and then remove any barriers to my crazy ideas, as well as modeling the true humility of leadership to disperse credit for success is the root of why I am here today, and something that I am eternally grateful for.

WHAT IS SUCCESS TO YOU - ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Success to me has never been about wins, money, or titles. I've always found success to mean something closer to happiness or satisfaction. Can you look at all the aspects of your life — your job, your family, your physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing — and say "This is what I wanted," "This is how it's supposed to be," or something to that effect? If so, you've had greater success than most.

WHAT WORK/LIFE BALANCE OR HABITS HELP YOU STAY GROUNDED AND HAPPY?

Work/life balance is not something that is possible in my profession. You get to work your 8-4 day, then you get to spend the next 4-6 hours most nights (and most of the day most Saturdays) in a gym or on a ball field. You have to make whatever lemonade you can and soak up the small moments as often as possible.

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO BE A PLACE PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME?

The number one element that is essential for a community to be a place people are proud to call home is history. Everything that there is to be proud of stems from a piece of history. Other essential elements include cleanliness, maintenance, and connection. I feel that many communities in Effingham County showcase their histories, maintain and take care of their communities, and have a tight knit community that gives the people that live there that sense of belonging.



BIRTH YEAR: 2008

SCHOOL: Dieterich High School

GRADE LEVEL: 12

WHAT SCHOOL, EXTRACURRICULAR, OR VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH?

I have been involved in three varsity sports throughout my high school career. I played basketball and softball for four years, and I ran cross country at Dieterich Schools for three years. Additionally, I played club basketball for the Panther organization, which is located in Mattoon.

In addition to sports, I'm actively involved in several organizations at Dieterich Schools, including FFA, the National Honor Society, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and the Spanish Club. I'm also part of the Effingham County CEO class of 2025/2026.

I regularly volunteer at my church, St. Joseph Catholic Church, where I am a member of the St. Isidore Youth Ministry Leadership Team. At church, you can find me helping in various ways, including serving at Mass, cleaning the hall and church, serving at our church breakfast, attending Bible Study, and helping with Sunday School classes.

After school, I work at Homewood Grill in Effingham.

DESCRIBE ONE PROJECT OR INITIATIVE YOU LED (OR WERE HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH) THAT HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT. WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE, AND WHAT DIFFERENCE DID IT MAKE?

Last summer, I coached a baseball team for 8-year-old boys. The park district needed a coach, so my sister, Claire, and I volunteered to be head coaches. There were 12 boys total, including my youngest brother. I started the season scheduling and running practices. Every game, I had a plan for who played each position and a batting lineup. I arrived early to home games to chalk the field. During our turn to bat, I coached the boys from 1st. When the other team batted, we coached from the field. We instructed the kids on all the aspects of playing baseball, from hitting to fielding. We did this while keeping a fun environment with positivity and high-fives. I even brought popsicles for the last game. I really enjoyed getting to know all the players. They were very sweet! I hope those boys became better baseball players and good teammates. Even if I didn't make them better, they experienced a fun baseball season that wouldn't have been possible had I not volunteered.

WHAT IS A LEADERSHIP LESSON OR PIECE OF ADVICE THAT HAS MEANINGFULLY SHAPED HOW YOU LEAD OR CONTRIBUTE? GIVE AN EXAMPLE.

When I was in junior high, my basketball coach told me that I would make a good leader. She said that I could inspire others. I didn't want to take on that role at the time because I believed leaders needed to be loud, opinionated, and overly confident. However, I've learned over the years that those traits do not necessarily define a great leader. Leadership can take many forms; the best leaders are true to themselves. They listen to the opinions of others and lead more through their actions than words.

I choose to lead by consistently showing up, being a supportive and helpful teammate, working hard during practice, and encouraging others to do the same. I strive to make team events enjoyable and make sure that everyone feels included. While I may not be the loudest voice, I aim to shine brightly through my actions.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU FEEL ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN A LEADER? WHICH OF THESE DO YOU SEE IN YOURSELF, AND HOW?

I believe that the best leaders lead by example. They inspire others through passion and excitement for a task, not just words. These leaders also listen to everyone. They consider all opinions, not just the opinions that they agree with.

I have found my voice in leading by example. I do my absolute best in whatever task I work on, and people respond to the hard work. I know that I admire people who lead by example, so I strive to be one of them.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL, AND WHY? WHAT ABOUT THEIR EXAMPLE INSPIRES YOU?

My greatest role model is my mom. She inspires me every day with her ability to juggle various tasks while being an amazing teacher and a caring mother. She is also one of the kindest people I know. My mom has a unique way of assessing situations and highlighting the best traits in others. I strive to replicate her kindness towards everyone she meets. Whenever someone tells me I am just like my mom, I consider it one of the highest compliments I can receive.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE COMING YEAR OR AFTER HIGH SCHOOL (COLLEGE, CAREER, SERVICE)?

After high school, I plan to attend one of the many great universities in Illinois. I want to receive a bachelor's degree in elementary education. I also want to live and teach in the Effingham County area.

HOW HAS BEING PART OF THE EFFINGHAM COUNTY COMMUNITY INFLUENCED YOUR LEADERSHIP OR VALUES?

Being a part of the Effingham County community has significantly shaped my values, as I frequently witness various community events, charities, and fundraisers taking place, particularly in my hometown of Dieterich. I admire the hard work and dedication of our village clerk, Brittny, and the Village Board. I have watched them accomplish things that seemed impossible. Our small town has built a new playground and functional gym, brought new businesses and homes to our village, and improved our pavilion. Seeing the impact that a dedicated group of individuals can make has inspired me to get involved in the community and believe that a small group can achieve lofty goals with dedication and hard work.

*I know that I admire people
who lead by example, so I
strive to be one of them.*



BIRTH YEAR: 2007
SCHOOL: St. Anthony High School
GRADE LEVEL: 12

WHAT SCHOOL, EXTRACURRICULAR, OR VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH?
 I am involved in Women of Worth, Pep Club, Student Council, and Health Occupations.

DESCRIBE ONE PROJECT OR INITIATIVE YOU LED (OR WERE HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH) THAT HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT. WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE, AND WHAT DIFFERENCE DID IT MAKE?

This year I was blessed

to be promoted to a leadership role in Women of Worth. The purpose of Women of Worth is to remind each other that we are daughters of God and to have other sisters in Christ to fall back on when we are struggling with something or need to be held accountable. While I technically have only just begun my role as a leader, I hope that I have been leading by example up until now. Through my words and my actions, I hope that the women of my school have seen what God can do in a life when you are open to His love. I am excited to help guide conversations, share my testimony, and encourage the girls to grow in their faith. I desire for them to know that our group is a safe space and being a strong leader will encourage that.

WHAT IS A LEADERSHIP LESSON OR PIECE OF ADVICE THAT HAS MEANINGFULLY SHAPED HOW YOU LEAD OR CONTRIBUTE? GIVE AN EXAMPLE.

I don't know that anyone has ever given me true life changing advice about leadership. To me, actions mean so much more than words. From a very early age I learned a valuable lesson by watching my mom; you have to be strong and keep going because life is hard at times. You also need to be a good person. While I have made many mistakes in my life, deep down I have desired to be a good person. I always strive to do the right thing in life.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU FEEL ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN A LEADER? WHICH OF THESE DO YOU SEE IN YOURSELF, AND HOW?

I believe that courage, strength, perseverance, and empathy are important qualities in a leader. I see strength, perseverance, and empathy in myself. I see strength and perseverance because although I am only 17 years old, I have had many setbacks in my life. Instead of stopping or giving up, I have persevered and am proud of the young woman I have become. Because of my own life struggles, I find that I have empathy for others and have become a very caring person.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL, AND WHY? WHAT ABOUT THEIR EXAMPLE INSPIRES YOU?

This question is hard to answer because the Lord has placed so many amazing women in my life who continue to guide me every day. My mom is most definitely one of my biggest supporters. She has been through so much in her life and has continued to show up for me and support me every single day. She inspires me to always keep pushing forward when things get hard.

Paige Hussey is also a huge role model for me. Paige is an amazing mother and wife; she inspires me to be the type of mother and wife that she is. She also inspires me to continue living out my life with the Lord. She is always so happy and always has a positive outlook on any situation or struggle I bring to her. Paige has mentored me by helping me grow so much in my faith, and I truly believe that God hand-picked her to assist me on my faith journey.

Lastly, I could never forget to mention every single one of the teachers at St. Anthony. They are all amazing role models, they have never stopped pushing me to excellence and they have never given up on me.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE COMING YEAR OR AFTER HIGH SCHOOL (COLLEGE, CAREER, SERVICE)?

I plan to attend Lake Land College to get my BSN and become a Labor and Delivery Nurse. I have always felt called to work with children because my love for them is so strong. I didn't know I would love Labor and Delivery and getting to work with the mothers as well until I Health Occ. Job shadowing truly opened my eyes to the joys of motherhood and the joys of the nurse being able to support mother and baby.

HOW HAS BEING PART OF THE EFFINGHAM COUNTY COMMUNITY INFLUENCED YOUR LEADERSHIP OR VALUES?

I have seen struggle and hardship in our community, but I have also seen the good. I have witnessed people who are willing to step in to help in a time of crisis. I have seen God working in lives and hearts. I want to continue to be the good that our community needs.

*I want to continue to be the good
that our community needs.*



BIRTH YEAR: 2007
SCHOOL: Beecher City High School
GRADE LEVEL: 12

WHAT SCHOOL, EXTRACURRICULAR, OR VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH?
 I am a part of the volleyball and cheer team. I am also involved in FBLA, NHS, student council, history club, and Spanish club.

DESCRIBE ONE PROJECT OR INITIATIVE YOU LED (OR WERE HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH) THAT HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT. WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE, AND WHAT DIFFERENCE DID IT MAKE?

As a member of the cheerleading team, I was involved with the little girls' cheer camp. I helped teach the little girls the dance and a short cheer. This helped the little girls feel confident enough to show the crowd what we had taught them.

WHAT IS A LEADERSHIP LESSON OR PIECE OF ADVICE THAT HAS MEANINGFULLY SHAPED HOW YOU LEAD OR CONTRIBUTE? GIVE AN EXAMPLE.

One leadership piece of advice that has shaped me is that leadership is about service, not control. I learned this during lecture in my personal finance class. This piece of advice can apply to many different scenarios. As a class officer, it's easy to feel like control is necessary at some points, but instead of taking control I support my class and try to make everyone feel seen as a class member.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU FEEL ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN A LEADER? WHICH OF THESE DO YOU SEE IN YOURSELF, AND HOW?

I believe that some of the most important qualities are accountability, the ability to listen, resilience, and communication. I see resilience in myself through my ability to staying committed under pressure, and bouncing back after a mistake or failure.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL, AND WHY? WHAT ABOUT THEIR EXAMPLE INSPIRES YOU?

My role model is my older sister, Ann. She inspires me by the resilience and kindness she shows, and the values she holds. No matter the challenges that come her way, she faces them with strength and determination. She shows kindness and respect to others and constantly shows genuine compassion for those around her. She shows me the importance of integrity, empathy, perseverance, and motivates me to be a better person every day.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE COMING YEAR OR AFTER HIGH SCHOOL (COLLEGE, CAREER, SERVICE)?

After high school I plan on attending Lake Land College and joining their nursing program. After completing the program I plan on having a career as a NICU nurse.

HOW HAS BEING PART OF THE EFFINGHAM COUNTY COMMUNITY INFLUENCED YOUR LEADERSHIP OR VALUES?

Being a part of an Effingham County community has influenced my values by helping me appreciate a small community. With having a small community, it's easier to know more of the people around you. With knowing more of the community, it is easier to build trust and offer support. It creates a strong network where people look out for one another and celebrate each other's successes.

I believe that some of the most important qualities are accountability, the ability to listen, resilience, and communication.



BIRTH YEAR: 2008
SCHOOL: Effingham High School
GRADE LEVEL: 12

WHAT SCHOOL, EXTRACURRICULAR, OR VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH?
 Student Council (treasurer), Class Officer (vice president), National Honor Society, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Varsity Soccer, Track and Field (upcoming spring season)

DESCRIBE ONE PROJECT OR INITIATIVE YOU LED (OR WERE HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH) THAT HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE, AND WHAT DIFFERENCE DID IT MAKE?

The summer after my junior year, I made one of the biggest decisions of my life. I enlisted in the National Guard on my 17th birthday with the help of Sergeant Gavin Hoene. On June 2nd, I shipped off to Basic Training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where I spent my summer. I faced many challenges during my training, such as being away from home and enduring constant pressure (for instance, being on time for formation or not meeting up to the high standards of my drill sergeants).

Boot camp was mentally and physically demanding, but I have grown from my experiences in the military. Through hard work, I earned the second-highest score on the Physical Test in my platoon and received the honor of carrying the face banner for my platoon.

Becoming a soldier was not easy; everything had to be earned. Our drill sergeants demanded that we become better versions of ourselves as soldiers and as civilians. They pushed us to our physical limits, exposing us to harsh environments, testing our physical fitness, and placing us in the front leaning rest multiple times. In addition, they challenged us mentally, waking us up early in the mornings and yelling at us to keep us disciplined, respectful, and alert. Through all this stress and exhaustion, we were shaped into disciplined, tough individuals.

Overall, it was demanding, but it came with unexpected blessings. I built camaraderie with people from all over the country; I grew into someone better, stronger, and more confident than before. On August 15th, I graduated from Basic Training as a member of the Honor Platoon of Golf Battery.

At first, I took this step to support my future education, but the experience gave me so much more. As one of the few females from EHS to step into this role in recent years, I want my peers to see that opportunities like this are within their reach. I will graduate from high school as an American soldier, and I hope my example encourages others to take bold steps forward in their own lives.

WHAT IS A LEADERSHIP LESSON OR PIECE OF ADVICE THAT HAS MEANINGFULLY SHAPED HOW YOU LEAD OR CONTRIBUTE? GIVE AN EXAMPLE.

The best advice I've been given is to "be kind and caring." Leadership isn't just about giving direction; it's about showing compassion. Whether in student council, sports, or the military, I've seen how kindness builds trust and motivates people to work together. Even outside of my extra curriculum and my military career, I strive to be that person.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU FEEL ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN A LEADER? WHICH OF THESE DO YOU SEE IN YOURSELF, AND HOW?

There are many important qualities that a leader must have. Integrity encompasses them all. A leader with integrity consistently demonstrates strong ethics and honesty. I strive to live this out daily, whether I am managing responsibilities as a class or club officer, staying disciplined in my military training, or being someone my peers can depend on in the classroom, on the field, and even in life.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL, AND WHY? WHAT ABOUT THEIR EXAMPLE INSPIRES YOU?

I cannot name just one role model. I look up to many people who have helped to shape me.

I thank my orphanage family back in the Philippines for their sacrifices, time, and love. Mama Fe, Papa Ken, and other staff dedicate their lives to raising orphans with compassion at Rehoboth, and they gave my brother and me not only a home for several years but also helped us to find a true family here in America.

I am grateful to my mentors, coaches, and sergeant, who have taught me resilience, humility, hard work, and how to strive to be the best version of myself.

I also thank my family here for standing by me, even when I fall short of my own standards in sports, academics, or relationships. Their encouragement has carried me through my hardest decisions, especially when I had to leave home for basic training.

I want to especially thank my twin brother, Ino, who has been a shining light in difficult times. He continues to love people without judgment, no matter their circumstances, and that inspires me daily.

Above all, I look up to God. To me, He works through all of those who have guided, supported, and encouraged me. I hope to reflect His love and grace, remembering all He has done for us despite our failures. I wish to reflect on what He has done for all of us despite our own failures here on earth.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE COMING YEAR OR AFTER HIGH SCHOOL (COLLEGE, CAREER, SERVICE)?

My immediate goal is to complete Advanced Individual Training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas, where I will train as a Combat Medic. Afterward, I plan to continue my education in nursing at Lake Land College and then Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville. I hope to ultimately become a nurse practitioner and to travel the world and work with organizations such as Doctors Without Borders or Nurses Beyond Borders. These goals are ambitious, but I trust God to guide my path and open doors where He sees fit.

HOW HAS BEING PART OF THE EFFINGHAM COUNTY COMMUNITY INFLUENCED YOUR LEADERSHIP OR VALUES?

Being part of the Effingham County community is a true blessing. Moving to America was a unique experience, both exciting and challenging. The environment, people, and opportunities were new and different to me, but through my difficulties to adjust, this community showed kindness and patience to me. This support helped to shape my values.

The environment here is vastly different from my home country, the Philippines, which is tropical with very hot weather and stormy days all year round. I still remember my first experience with snow. It was the first day we arrived in the United States, the day before my seventh birthday. My brother and I played outside for hours while my new family patiently waited for us to go indoors to warm up. It is still one of my fondest memories.

Then we began school. It was the middle of March, nearing the end of the school year. I didn't speak English well — my brother spoke no English — and I was self-conscious about looking different than everyone around me. I was nervous about fitting in as someone from a different culture and language. But the community welcomed me with open arms. Teachers, coaches, and neighbors encouraged me, and their support gave me the confidence to step out of my comfort zone and work hard. Mentors such as my travel youth basketball coach, who taught me teamwork and perseverance, and Sergeant Gavin Hoene, who guided me in my military path, further demonstrated the importance of service and dedication.

The Effingham community has helped me strive and grow; I will always treasure what people here have done for me and for others. I want to pay it forward by spreading encouragement not only within this community but also to places in the world where hope is harder to find. Because of opportunities provided in America — and Effingham County, specifically — I can flourish, learn, and apply the skills I have gained through family, military, extra-curricular activities, work, education, and daily life as I pursue my future career.



BIRTH YEAR: 2007
SCHOOL: Dieterich High School
GRADE LEVEL: 12
WHAT SCHOOL, EXTRACURRICULAR, OR VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH?

At school, I am involved in many clubs and sports. I play high school basketball, travel basketball, and run cross country. I am the Dieterich High School Senior Class President, Student Council President, as well as an active member in FFA, FCA, Spanish Club, Art Club, National Honor Society, and our school

spirit club known as "Maroon Platoon". I have participated in the spring ACES Academic Challenge at Lake Land College for the past two years, as well. I volunteer in the children's ministry at my church, Christ's Church, at least one weekend each month, and I typically spend that time with children under two years old in the nursery.

DESCRIBE ONE PROJECT OR INITIATIVE YOU LED (OR WERE HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH) THAT HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT. WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE, AND WHAT DIFFERENCE DID IT MAKE?

I have been a part of many school projects, such as fundraisers, school dances, fall fun days, spring flings, and others. One project that tends to be the most stressful is prom. Prom is a school dance that takes place in the spring for upperclassmen only. It is put together by the junior class each year. It is easily one of the biggest annual school events, besides homecoming and graduation, and as the class president, I took a leadership role in the planning and execution of the dance. Months before the dance, my team and I were making phone calls to catering services, DJs, and thinking about the materials and budget of this project. We only had so much money to work with, so it was important that everything fit into our budget. We had to compromise and improvise on many things along the way, and our plan ended up looking very different from what we originally thought it would. The days leading up to the dance were stressful, to say the least, and the weight of the seniors' approval was on our shoulders. We are only allowed one full school day to get the gym decorated, and it took a lot of people working together to make it happen. In my leadership role, I had to assign tasks for each of my classmates working, and had to explain what the result should look like. In the end, our prom turned out to be extremely successful, and received the approval of the senior class. I feel like my leadership role provided a vision for those helping to put the decorations together, kept the process organized, and ultimately played a big part in the dance's success.

WHAT IS A LEADERSHIP LESSON OR PIECE OF ADVICE THAT HAS MEANINGFULLY SHAPED HOW YOU LEAD OR CONTRIBUTE? GIVE AN EXAMPLE.

One quote that I always think of when I am part of any team is "You are only as strong as your weakest link". Many people relate that strictly to sports teams, but I feel that it applies to every type of team that exists. No matter what team you are on, whether it be a sports team, a workplace team, or a school club, it applies to you. I feel that keeping this in mind can help a leader be selfless because it helps them to focus on the betterment of every single person. Everyone on a team deserves the same respect, from the CEO to the janitor who cleans his office. If the leader helps everybody on their team achieve more, everybody can excel. I feel like knowing this helps me lead

others better. I know to consider every single person when I am making any sort of plan or decision, and I always make sure those I am working with are confident in their own abilities in finishing their tasks. If they aren't, I always do my best to help them learn.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU FEEL ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN A LEADER? WHICH OF THESE DO YOU SEE IN YOURSELF, AND HOW?

I feel that a good leader requires many qualities, but some of the most important, in my opinion, are good communication, selflessness, and integrity. A leader must have excellent communication skills to be able to clearly share the vision he/she has for the end goal. When everybody on the team knows what expectations the end result needs to meet, it is much easier for that goal to be met. In addition to communication, a good leader needs to put the needs of others before theirs. Being a selfless leader makes the members of your team feel important and seen, which then promotes a positive environment to achieve every goal. Lastly, a good leader needs to have integrity. Being honest with your team and making ethical decisions is important, as this encourages feelings of respect and confidence towards the leader and others on the team. It is also important to do what is right in everything your team needs to accomplish, even if it causes inconvenience. In myself, I can see the leadership quality of integrity. I always say, "I would rather hear a difficult truth than a comforting lie". To me, honesty is the best policy, and the truth always prevails, no matter how many lies you try to cover it with. Being honest from the beginning helps things get done quickly and smoothly, and it builds trust with those who look up to you. I also feel that I have good morals, and I make every decision with those in mind.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL, AND WHY? WHAT ABOUT THEIR EXAMPLE INSPIRES YOU?

My role model is my grandma. She is so caring, compassionate, and hard-working. She is retired now, but she used to hold a big leadership position as the Assistant Vice President of Residential Loans at Midland States Bank. She is the first to offer any sort of help and never fails to make the people around her feel loved. She has all the qualities of a great leader, and I hope that by the time I reach her age, I have made as big of an impact on those around me as she has.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE COMING YEAR OR AFTER HIGH SCHOOL (COLLEGE, CAREER, SERVICE)?

After high school, I plan to attend Lake Land College to pursue an associate's degree in nursing. When I complete those two years of school and pass my licensure exam, I plan on getting a job at a hospital in a high-acuity ICU, where I will work for at least two years while getting my bachelor's degree in nursing through a pathway program to Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville. Then, my goal is to apply and be accepted into a three-year nurse anesthesia program after my two years of required acute care nursing experience in the ICU. Upon graduation, I will have obtained my Doctor of Nurse Anesthesia Practice and passed the licensure exam to become a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist.

HOW HAS BEING PART OF THE EFFINGHAM COUNTY COMMUNITY INFLUENCED YOUR LEADERSHIP OR VALUES?

I think there are just so many good examples of leadership all around me in Effingham County. Everywhere you look, you can find a business that was self-made by young individuals, or you see a fundraiser for a local family who needs some assistance during a difficult season of life. Those are just two examples of the hundreds of ways I see leadership in Effingham County, and I have been heavily influenced by them all. I can't help but want to take after all of the amazing people who make Effingham County stand out positively through their leadership qualities. Ever since I was a young girl, I have always dreamed of doing something important in my life, and with the way I have seen leaders in Effingham County have such a big impact, I feel like I am able to do important things just like they have.



BIRTH YEAR: 2008
SCHOOL: St. Anthony High School
GRADE LEVEL: 12

WHAT SCHOOL, EXTRACURRICULAR, OR VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH?

I teach and participate in dance classes in the community. At school I am involved in several organizations. I am on the yearbook staff, student council, crew member for the school musical and coordinate senior nights committee for the pep club. I am also a member of the National Honor Society (NHS). Throughout the

years at ST A, I have volunteered for special events in the community. Some of the places I volunteered for were EARS (Effingham Animal Rescue Shelter), HSHS and many more.

DESCRIBE ONE PROJECT OR INITIATIVE YOU LED (OR WERE HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH) THAT HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT. WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE, AND WHAT DIFFERENCE DID IT MAKE?

I support and lead a committee through St. Anthony's pep club. I am in charge of organizing all senior nights and managing those who help me make everything run smoothly! I think it makes all the seniors involved feel so appreciated and valued by our school, and I am glad that I can be a part of that joy!

WHAT IS A LEADERSHIP LESSON OR PIECE OF ADVICE THAT HAS MEANINGFULLY SHAPED HOW YOU LEAD OR CONTRIBUTE? GIVE AN EXAMPLE.

I believe that in order to lead you must be honest, encouraging, and be a great listener. People need to feel confident and trust that you are a good leader and will help guide them to grow and be productive. Group projects at school involve several students and ultimately one student leads or encourages their classmates to participate. I believe that we should draw on each other's strengths. Doing this will give everyone confidence and value with their role in the project. Through many years in school, I continually evolve and feel more comfortable leading projects.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU FEEL ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN A LEADER? WHICH OF THESE DO YOU SEE IN YOURSELF, AND HOW?

I think being able to communicate, take accountability, be inspiring, and be able to adapt to change are the most important qualities in being a leader. I feel like I am good at taking accountability when I may have made a mistake. Being good at taking accountability has shaped me into the type of leader I am today.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL, AND WHY? WHAT ABOUT THEIR EXAMPLE INSPIRES YOU?

My dad is my role model. He was valedictorian of his high school. In addition, he was a Commander in the Navy, started his own business, was president of the Aiken County Medical Society, was a board member of a local hospital, and so much more. He takes care of people for a living and loves what he does. He cares for his family and is always willing to help me with anything. He inspires me every day!

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE COMING YEAR OR AFTER HIGH SCHOOL (COLLEGE, CAREER, SERVICE)?

I want to continue to advance my education and work diligently to move up in my class ranking. Next year I plan to attend college and study business management/ hospitality.

HOW HAS BEING PART OF THE EFFINGHAM COUNTY COMMUNITY INFLUENCED YOUR LEADERSHIP OR VALUES?

Effingham County community has influenced me to do more volunteer work. I enjoy meeting new people and helping others when needed. I enjoy how friendly everyone is and their inclusivity. The connections I have made have helped me grow to become a better person.

I believe that we should draw on each other's strengths.



BIRTH YEAR: 2007

SCHOOL: Teutopolis High School

GRADE LEVEL: 12

WHAT SCHOOL, EXTRACURRICULAR, OR VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH?

At school, I hold leadership positions as the President of National Honor Society, the Vice President of Student Council, Senior Class Vice President, and Science Club President. In addition, I am involved in the Academic Challenge Team, Volunteers, InTouch, Spanish Club, and Varsity Club.

Throughout high school I competed on our school's Varsity Basketball team and Varsity Tennis team, qualifying for the state competition in doubles all previous years. Regarding my community service, I have volunteered with organizations such as the Teutopolis Education Foundation, Kiwanis, the American Red Cross, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Charities, Community Support Systems, Teutopolis Civic Club, and the St. Francis Church Ministry. I look forward to volunteering with these organizations and more in the future.

DESCRIBE ONE PROJECT OR INITIATIVE YOU LED (OR WERE HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH) THAT HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT. WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE, AND WHAT DIFFERENCE DID IT MAKE?

Over the summer, I volunteered to host the American Red Cross Blood Drive in my community. Usually during the school year, our Student Council members take shifts volunteering at the drives. In exchange, the American Red Cross awards scholarships to a few of our graduating seniors if we meet the required amount of donors. My drive I hosted individually allowed us a head start on our quota to earn more scholarships for my classmates. Most importantly, the blood drive impacted and saved other's lives.

WHAT IS A LEADERSHIP LESSON OR PIECE OF ADVICE THAT HAS MEANINGFULLY SHAPED HOW YOU LEAD OR CONTRIBUTE? GIVE AN EXAMPLE.

A piece of leadership advice that has shaped how I lead today is one many I am sure have been told. It's the classic "If your friend jumped off a cliff, would you do it too?" From a young age I was asked this question, and my response was always no. Learning to stand out from the crowd facilitated my leadership qualities. As I get older, I continue to remind myself that leaders do not always follow the popular or common path. They take the difficult path and often set a new standard for others to follow

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU FEEL ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN A LEADER? WHICH OF THESE DO YOU SEE IN YOURSELF, AND HOW?

I believe the best qualities a leader can possess are diligence, compassion, and good communication. A leader needs to be able to effectively collaborate and set an example to others by completing tasks in a timely manner. In addition, I believe a leader should be able to understand when someone is struggling and direct them on the right path. I believe my strongest of these qualities is good communication, which I exemplify through my different leadership positions at school.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL, AND WHY? WHAT ABOUT THEIR EXAMPLE INSPIRES YOU?

My parents remain my greatest role models and motivators. They have exemplified the values of hard work, determination, and selflessness. I was taught to strive to be my best self and that if I want something, I will have to work for it. My parents also instilled in me the importance of serving others and treating all people with dignity and respect. I find these qualities inspiring.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE COMING YEAR OR AFTER HIGH SCHOOL (COLLEGE, CAREER, SERVICE)?

After high school, I plan to attend a university to study Biology in preparation for medical school. Upon graduation, I seek to pursue a career in surgery. In addition, I aspire to become an author and write novels one day.

HOW HAS BEING PART OF THE EFFINGHAM COUNTY COMMUNITY INFLUENCED YOUR LEADERSHIP OR VALUES?

I would categorize Effingham County as a giving community. Many are willing to lend aid to those in need even if they do not directly know the person. Whether it's a jeep run, benefit, or fundraiser, the community unites for a common cause. I find these acts inspiring and try to replicate these same values of kindness and selflessness when leading. Growing up in this environment has influenced the kind of person I am today.



Awards Dinner

Thursday, November 20, 2025

at Thelma Keller Convention Center

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