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SUMMER 2026

MAGAZINE

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# EFFINGHAM

SUMMER 2026

MAGAZINE

## FEATURE STORY

**PAGE 18** | Leveling the Playing Field | by Alex Wallner

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The Effingham Heaters 12-and-under baseball team poses for a portrait after winning the 2025 Effingham Memorial Day Wood Bat Classic 12-and-under division. Pictured are, left to right, second row, head coach Jeremiah Koeberlein, Kael Koeberlein, Miles Patnaude, assistant coach Jeremy Patnaude, Nash Hoene, Jack Morrison, James Dust, assistant coach Aaron Myers and Paxton Nosbisch. Pictured left to right, first row, are Brody Myers, Peyton O'Dell, Henry Bierman, Will Ludwig and Levi Eckert. Submitted photo

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**ON THE COVER:** Leia Klein runs in a track meet at Effingham High School during her junior year. Submitted photo.

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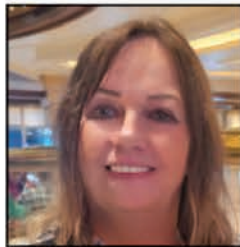
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**L**eia Klein is impressive, inspiring and all-around incredible. The Effingham High School junior doesn't let her prosthetic leg slow her down. In fact, she thrives on competition.

Leia, 16, was born without her right ankle, foot bones and fibula - a condition known as fibular hemimelia. And yet, she's a member of the school's color guard and winter guard, where she catches one of her flag tosses with her leg.

"I don't let it stop me," Leia told Marie Adamick for this edition of Effingham Magazine. "I let it be the reason why I do a lot of things."

She participates in several activities, including cross country, track, volleyball, theater, color guard and winter guard. From fourth to eighth grade, she played softball. The only sport she doesn't do is basketball.

"I can't shoot a hoop to save my life," said Leia.

We imagine she could, if she put her mind to it. But everyone needs a breather now and then.

Elsewhere, Cathy Griffith looks into the Shumway mystery quilt.

Canadian Evelyn Ward has never been to Shumway. But recently the Stratford, Ontario, resident found herself linked to the village after she came across a quilt top in a Mennonite thrift store where she volunteers. Nearly every square on the quilt top had a different woman's signature, hand-stitched with a different date on each. The unusual quilt intrigued her. Ward, a history buff and textile mixed-media fiber artist, has always been drawn to textiles made by women.

"This just jumped out at me, obviously, and I knew the historical value of it," she said.

Ward brought the quilt top home and immediately spent hours researching the names on it and found many of them had ties to Shumway. The Effingham County Genealogical

and Historical Society has been helping her find out more about it, but questions linger.

By the time this issue sees print, the Effingham Memorial Day Wood Bat Classic will be in the books. Alex Wallner takes a look at the history of the competition, which has become an exciting tradition.

The three-day tournament features nearly 70 baseball teams from around the state. Each team is assigned to its respective age group, ranging from 8-and-under to 14-and-under.

"The biggest thing I've enjoyed about (this tournament) is how it's grown; it's something that the kids enjoy coming to," said Sean Lee, who has been the tournament's director for the past 13 years. "It's unique because there's not a lot of wood bat tournaments."

We look forward to seeing the sculpture that local artist Drew Hanfland is creating for the Effingham Performance Center to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

"Let's bring a young artist in who is starting a studio and does some really cool things and can bring a different perspective and point of view than what our generation can bring and figure out what to do," said EPC's executive director, Kim Jansen.

The EPC is one of 22 municipalities and nonprofits in Illinois awarded a grant from the Illinois Arts Council and Gov. J.B. Pritzker's Office. The grant will help create a public art project for the nation's 250th anniversary.

Those stories and more make up the summer 2026 edition of Effingham Magazine.



Jeff Long  
Editor



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



**Marie Adamick** is a general assignment reporter at the *Effingham Daily News*. Before deciding to major in journalism, she considered majoring in international business or chemistry. She graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 2024 with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and a minor in History. A greater Cincinnati native, she enjoys traveling, collecting music, and going on hikes. She moved to Effingham to start her job at the paper and has family in Wisconsin, Cincinnati and St. Louis.



**Cathy Griffith** is news editor of the *Effingham Daily News*. She is a 1998 graduate of Eastern Illinois University with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism. She has worked at the *Daily News* for 25 years in news and magazine publications. She is a lifelong resident of Effingham, where she resides with her husband, Tim, and daughter, Leah.



**Alex Wallner** is the sports editor of the *Effingham Daily News*. He earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2016. Before joining the EDN, he was the sports editor at the *Standard-Democrat* in Sikeston, Missouri for three years. He resides in Effingham.

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# EPC to celebrate America's 250th anniversary with sculpture

**Cathy Griffith**

Effingham Magazine

**W**hen Kim Jansen, executive director of the Effingham Performance Center, needed a local artist for a sculpture to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, she knew exactly who to ask.

"Let's bring a young artist in who is starting a studio and does some really cool things and can bring a different perspective and point of view than what our generation can bring and figure out what to do," she said.

Drew Hanfland was the perfect fit.

"Drew's artwork has always stood out to us," she said.

The EPC is one of 22 municipalities and nonprofits in Illinois awarded a grant from the Illinois Arts Council and Gov. J.B. Pritzker's Office. The grant will help create a public art project for the nation's 250th anniversary.

"It just shows that art and culture are so important in communities because when it is time to celebrate big, when it is time to celebrate 250 years, the governor calls upon the art organizations to make sure that happens and we do it right," said Jansen.

While the project had to in some way embody the anniversary, the grant stipulated that it also had to be relevant in the years to come. Jansen didn't want anything that would become stale over time, like bicentennial wallpaper from the 1970s.

"I didn't want, like, a 250 with fireworks coming out of it to sit up there, because in 10 years, people are going to be like, oh, why is that still there?" said Jansen.

EPC Marketing Coordinator Hailey Niemerg said the project focus was on tying art and theater to America, noting how music and art often bring the country together.

"Because there's something for everyone here at the theater, it does bring a lot of people together and all age groups, all walks of life," added Jansen. "We just kind of told him, make it tie in with the arts, make it tie in with theater, make it tie in with the 250."

Hanfland came up with a concept that Jansen and the EPC team loved. It connected the Statue of Liberty with dance: a performer on a base surrounded by interlocking figures.

Drew Hanfland holds a model of the sculpture he will make for the Effingham Performance Center to commemorate the nation's 250th anniversary. Cathy Griffith photo

“She’s kind of standing on all of us, the world, and twisting us up and bringing us together into this center in her hands up here, and kind of just guiding us toward the center,” he explained, adding that people celebrate their culture through dance.

The robed, dancing figure represents the EPC, much as the Statue of Liberty represents the United States.

The sculpture’s finish will also mimic the famous statue. While the Statue of Liberty is made of copper, the sculpture will be made of fiberglass with a bronze finish that, like the statue, will exhibit a patina over time.

The sculpture will be 10 feet tall, with the dancer 7 1/2 feet tall and the round concrete base 2 1/2 feet tall. It will stand in the center of the EPC courtyard. Since it will be a permanent sculpture, Jansen wanted to make sure it blended with the building’s aesthetics, like it belongs there and is part of the arts. Jansen said the \$15,000 grant is expected to cover the project’s costs, except for landscaping and lighting for the sculpture.

Hanfland isn’t new to larger-than-life fiberglass sculptures that convey a message. Last year, his three big hand sculptures, “You Hold Peace,” were displayed in downtown Effingham’s Sculptures on the Avenues. This year, he has a hand sculpture in front of Joe Sippers Cafe. Titled “Leave A Message,” the interactive piece invites people to do just that, embracing his love for street art and graffiti.

“I feel that people write those to be heard; they have something to share with the world,” he said. “The world is a difficult place right now, and we need honesty more than ever.” Jansen notes the impressive number of signatures and mes-

sages on it, observing that there’s not much room left.

“It’s been cool to watch people just embrace that and have fun with it. That’s an attribution to him and his projects,” she said.

Hanfland says he grew up with YouTube and considers himself YouTube-taught when it comes to art. For more than a decade, he followed a maker community of pioneering YouTubers and met people through it. He followed all kinds of artists, from those doing fiberglass to traditional oil painting to graffiti art to building furniture and large live-edge slabs.

“I could reach out and get all of my education and all of my practice with help, but less structured. And that’s kind of how I’ve always worked. YouTube’s taught me everything I know.”

Now, on Instagram, Hanfland said he has been able to reach people directly.

“When I’m scrolling, finding people that inspire me that are in Tokyo, for example, there’s a potential that you could reach out and start a connection there,” he explained.

Hanfland’s also developed his art skills through trial and error in the studio and through art and multimedia classes at Effingham High School.

“After that, it just kind of made sense to start just doing art right away,” he said.

Hanfland opened an art studio in Effingham after he graduated in 2024. It served as a hub for artists, equipped with woodworking tools, metalworking facilities and a kiln for ceramics.

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Drew Hanfland poses with his sculptures, "You Hold Peace," which were part of the Sculptures on the Avenues in downtown Effingham last year. Photo courtesy of Taylor Peterson



Once he opened the studio, Hanfland started taking commissioned work. However, he has been making commissioned woodwork since junior high.

"He's always just really had ambition and had that entrepreneurial spirit mixed with art, which is really cool because he's been a go-getter and he has that artistic ability," said Jansen.

Hanfland admits that, as a youngster, he never intended to sell his pieces; it just happened.

"It's not like I was going door to door and trying to sell things," he said. "That's kind of just what Effingham does. They see something useful, and they kind of just push you up."

Now that the popularity of Hanfland's work has grown, he chooses what projects he wants to take on. While commissioned work pays the bills, his current interest is in sculpture.

"Artists are just communicators, so I'd like to communicate with as many people as possible, and I can do that so much more with a sculpture that's going to see thousands of people than a shelf in somebody's house," he said.

The bronzing technique for the EPC sculpture is new to Hanfland. So, in preparation, Hanfland sought help from his social media community.

"I think it's really cool that he goes out there and learns the things and talks to the people and finds those mentor relationships in a non-traditional setting," said Jansen.

Hanfland said he'll first carve the sculpture from foam and then cover it with fiberglass, which he admits can be "pretty nasty" to work with. He calls it "adult papier-mache." Although he did the hand sculpture outside Joe Sippers on his own, he will have his sister's help with the EPC sculpture.

Jansen said they plan to unveil the sculpture just before July 4.

"I cannot wait for everybody to see what he comes up with. I can't wait for the unveiling in July. It's such a cool project," she said.

Jansen said the sculpture is one more example of the amazing artists Effingham has.

"You see it every time you walk through our lobby, and now you're gonna see it when you drive past our building, which is pretty awesome."

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# SCULPTURES ON THE AVENUES



‘WHAT DO YOU WANT TO TELL THE WORLD?’

Effingham artist Drew Hanfland, this year's Leonardo Nierman Award winner, stands with his sculpture titled "Leave a Message" outside of Joe Sippers Cafe. Marie Adamick photo

**Marie Adamick**  
Effingham Magazine

**T**wenty five sculptures are scattered throughout downtown Effingham. Every year, 25 to 30 pieces are on display — each with a unique story behind them.

In 1997, Effingham Mayor Bob Utz formed the Effingham Community Committee for the Arts to commission the "Flame of Hope" from artist Leonardo Nierman that is on display outside of city hall. The following year was the first display of the "Sculptures on the Avenues" with guided tours.

Artists submit their work throughout the year to the city for the chance to be displayed. This year, between 45 and 60 submissions were received, with 25 being chosen. Most of the artists are from the Midwest, but one year, an artist from as far away as Arizona was chosen.

New sculptures are installed in the beginning of April, and the process of creating the culture guide starts. The guide offers readers more information on the pieces and the artists. This year, the guide includes a QR code to a survey for people to vote for their favorite sculpture. People can also vote by emailing their favorite sculpture to [effingham-sculptures@gmail.com](mailto:effingham-sculptures@gmail.com), which is how votes have been cast in previous years.

In January, City of Effingham Marketing Assistant Alyssa Robinson sends invitations out to previous years' artists, universities, art programs and other cities' sculptures tours. During the last two weeks of February, a committee selects the pieces to be displayed.

The committee is made up of Robinson, City of Effingham Tourism Director Jodi Thoele, the city's public works foreman, and Dieterich Art Teacher Stacey Zerrusen. The committee considers multiple factors when selecting sculptures to display, including if it's weatherproof, its dimensions, if it can be bolted down to the concrete and if it's safe to touch. Pieces that can be interacted with get bonus points.

"There's different things that goes into selecting it – can we find a spot for it, and is it gonna work? Are our guys (in public works) going to be able to move it? They're really good at moving sculptures," said Robinson. "They've used tractors, the bucket truck. We had a crane on one of them this year."

Throughout March, last year's sculptures are removed and replaced with the new year's art pieces. Robinson works closely with the City of Effingham's public works department to install and remove each piece.

"Our guys do everything. I mean, it's the easiest thing, really, to be part of the program," said Robinson. "You literally come,



Effingham artist Drew Hanfland creates his “Leave a Message” sculpture in his old studio for this year’s Sculptures on the Avenues. Photos submitted by Drew Hanfland

pull up, our guys unload it, and then they load your old one, and then they take care of installing it the next week — weather dependent — and you don’t even have to be here for it.”

“We have artists that like to be here for the install, and they’re welcome to, but they don’t have to be,” Robinson continued. “Our guys are very adept at getting it installed securely and safely, so I think that’s something that’s really unique about Effingham’s program.”

Each year, guided tours are organized through the library and the community, so people can learn more about each sculpture. Groups such as local schools can schedule tours on their own.

Each sculpture has a plaque that reads the name of the artist, the name of the piece and if it’s for sale or not. On average, one piece is sold every year or two, and prices can range from \$500 to \$10,000.

“It gets people talking, no matter if it gets sold or not,” said Robinson.

The city doesn’t take a commission if a piece is sold, which is one of the reasons why Robinson believe artists are interested in displaying their art through the city.

“We get a lot of interest, but people don’t realize the value of art and the time that goes into it. So you’re paying for their time, not necessarily the fabric they’re using or the medium,” said Robinson. “A lot of times, they’re putting in an ungodly amount of hours into each piece, just welding and painting and doing all the fabricating of the piece.”

Sculptures on the Avenues is a way for artists to get their name out in the art world. For some artists, this is the first year participating in the program. For others, like V. Skip Willits, they’ve participated every year.

Willits “sees the value in every piece of art. He always comes ... towards the end, when we have the art all bolted to the trailers, ready to install,” said Robinson. “He takes his time, looks at every piece, and he talks about what he sees in every piece.

“I think that’s so interesting because it’s coming from the eyes of an actual artist, and so he always has interesting things to say about the work,” Robinson continued.

Artists are paid \$750 for each piece that gets displayed, and every year, one artist is selected in May to receive the Leonardo Nierman Award — named after the artist who created the “Flame of Hope.” The winner is highlighted on the city’s social media platforms and in the culture guide. They also receive \$1,250 in addition to the \$750.

“We like to show value to our public art and pay our artists what their time is worth,” said Robinson. “I wish we could pay them more, but we’re on a budget.”

For the first time, the winner — Drew Hanfland, 20 — was recognized at a city council meeting.

### Drew Hanfland

This is Hanfland’s second year entering the Sculptures on the Avenues. Last year, he entered three pieces — a red hand, a blue hand and a yellow hand — all titled “You Hold Peace.” They were displayed across from Joe Sippers Cafe. This year, his piece — that is displayed outside of Joe Sippers Cafe — is a white hand titled “Leave a Message,” where passersby can write messages with markers Hanfland left at the base of the sculpture.

While growing up in Effingham, Hanfland saw the sculptures downtown and always wanted to be a part of it. As a kid, he’d imagined sculpting a hand, and thought it was a neat idea.

“It’s just something that I’ve always been interested in, so when

it was time, it was natural to just do hands. And since then, I've kind of fallen in love them them, like, sculpting them and being so close to them, and staring at a model for hours and hours and hours while sculpting this," said Hanfland. "Like, 'Wow, these are beautiful things,' and they just allow us to do everything, like, allow humans to function."

This year, he was inspired by art and messages written on restroom stalls or bus stops. He wanted to create a sculpture that could be interacted with.

"It's like, people write those things for a reason. People want you to see it," said Hanfland. "They're anonymous, but it's, like, this person that wrote that is communicating something, and they want you to see it."

At the end of March, Hanfland moved into his current studio. Before that, he used his father's wood shop to create art, mainly out of wood. Hanfland has always created art, and honed in on woodworking in high school. The hands are made from large pieces of Styrofoam he glued together, with fiberglass and paint on top. The fiberglass makes the statue waterproof and gives it a hard finish. Before "You Hold Peace," Hanfland had never worked with fiberglass before.

"I think there's just something really cool about, 'what do



"The Lady of the Lake" by Erica Hollinshead-Stead is displayed outside of the Effingham Public Library. Marie Adamick photo

you want to leave? What do you want to tell the world? What do you want to communicate?' Especially because we're in such an odd time, politically," said Hanfland. "It's just, like, the world's in a vulnerable place. So, hopefully, this is a good opportunity to... unify us a little bit."

Leah Hanfland, Drew's sister, also has a piece displayed downtown titled, "Mosaic Lillies," outside of Village Wine & Spirits.

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“Talos” by Gregory Mendez is displayed outside of Taylor Law Offices. Marie Adamick photo

## Erica Hollinshead-Stead

This was also Erica Hollinshead-Stead’s second year participating in the “Sculptures on the Avenues.” Last year, she created two pieces titled, “Castles Left Standing I & II,” which were on display outside of the Effingham Public Library. This year, her sculpture, “The Lady of the Lake,” is displayed outside of the library again.

Formed from green epoxy, wood blocks and metal rods for stability, the sculpture resembles a serpent. Hollinshead-Stead sketched it out on graph paper first.

“I guess I’m really arrogant when it comes to art,” said Hollinshead-Stead. “I see something, and I’m like, ‘I bet I could do that,’ and then I have to find out if I can do that.”

“I want to put something in the world that makes the world a little happier or more fun,” continued Hollinshead-Stead. “It’s something that can be just a little moment of surprise and delight as you walk down the street.”

During the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, she and her family were living in Texas. Their house was the last one on the street before the sidewalk led to a park, a place that grew in popularity during the pandemic. Hollinshead-Stead hung up artwork on the fence everyone had to pass to get to the park.

“It would only be happy pictures because at the time, things were going crazy, and it felt like the whole world was turning on each other,” said Hollinshead-Stead.

Park visitors then began leaving their own pictures on the fence. This inspired Hollinshead-Stead to leave out chalk, blank pieces of cloth and markers for people to draw on.

“It was really interesting to see ... the way people acted and the way people interacted with each other there,” said Hollinshead-Stead. “Maybe in part, I was looking for another version of that.”

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**“I want to put something in the world that makes the world a little happier or more fun.”**

**— Erica Hollinshead-Stead**

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Similar to Drew Hanfland, Hollinshead-Stead’s last two sculpture submissions were the first time she had created something of that scale. Before 2025, she only had experience making small clay pieces and sewing. However, she enjoys experimenting with new mediums to learn and perfect various art techniques.

“I wanted it to be something that you see from a distance, and you’re like, ‘I want to go take my picture with that.’ I want you to walk up to it,” said Hollinshead-Stead.

“I think it would be cool if more people that lived right here thought, ‘Oh yeah, I could do that,’ and then did it because we can do cool things,” said Hollinshead-Stead. “We just need to get out there and do it.”

## Gregory Mendez

Gregory Mendez, 44, entered three pieces in Sculptures on the Avenues this year: “Kometes,” “Talos” and “Red-Tailed Lantern.”

Based out of Decatur, Indiana, Mendez has been entering his artwork into the downtown program for six years, and has been a full-time, professional artist since 2011. He created “Kometes” over a decade ago, “Red-Tailed Lantern” five years ago and “Talos” three to four years ago.

Since Mendez works on multiple sculptures at once, he was also working on an old-time railroad piece when he created “Red-Tailed Lantern.”

“Talos” is considered the first robot, according to Greek mythology, which is where Mendez drew inspiration from. At the time, Mendez was also working with the Bill Blass estate to create a few fashion sculptures inspired by Blass’ fashion designs.

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**“Ultimately, the best way for the public to gain appreciation and really enjoy the sculptures is to come up with their own stories and their own interpretations of them.”**

**– Gregory Mendez**

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“The stance that he’s in, instead of just standing there, he’s kind of standing in a stance that a fashion model would be posed at the end of a runway,” said Mendez.

His three statues on display are made of stock steel — his favorite medium to use.

“As a younger artist, that was appealing to me because I felt like I was exercising and making myself work out as I was working, and it wasn’t something everybody could do,” said Mendez. “Your muscles and bones have a lifespan ... Now, one of my favorite things about it is that it can be forgiving, even though it’s a solid material.”

Since Effingham is one of the first cities out of all the locations he displays his artwork in to start its sculptures exhibit, this allows Mendez the opportunity to showcase more of his pieces. However, since Mendez has multiple sculptures he could choose from, he has to narrow down which ones he submits to the Sculptures on the Avenues. He considers several factors, such as if the piece has already been displayed in the city.

“I would encourage anybody taking the tour to read the title of the sculptures, but ultimately, come up with their own interpretation of each sculpture because that’s what public art’s intended to do. I think the artists have their own idea of what their influence was, what their inspiration was,” said Mendez.

“There might even be a narrative that they’re trying to say with their pieces, but ultimately, the best way for the public to gain appreciation and really enjoy the sculptures is to come up with their own stories and their own interpretations of them.”



**“Red-Tailed Lantern” by Gregory Mendez is displayed outside of the Effingham County Sheriff’s Office. Marie Adamick photo**



The Effingham Heaters 12-and-under baseball team poses for a portrait after winning the 2025 Effingham Memorial Day Wood Bat Classic 12-and-under division. Pictured are, left to right, second row, head coach Jeremiah Koeberlein, Kael Koeberlein, Miles Patnaude, assistant coach Jeremy Patnaude, Nash Hoene, Jack Morrison, James Dust, assistant coach Aaron Myers and Paxton Nobsch. Pictured left to right, first row, are Brody Myers, Peyton O'Dell, Henry Bierman, Will Ludwig and Levi Eckert. Submitted photo

# Effingham Memorial Day Wood Bat Classic Tournament *levels the playing field*

**Alex Wallner**  
Effingham Magazine

**A** mainstay in the Effingham community for over the last decade has been the Effingham Memorial Day Wood Bat Classic.

The three-day tournament features nearly 70 baseball teams from around the state. Each team is assigned to its respective age group, ranging from 8-and-under to 14-and-under.

"The biggest thing I've enjoyed about (this tournament) is how it's grown; it's something that the kids enjoy coming to," said Sean Lee, who has been the tournament's director for the past 13 years. "It's unique because there's not a lot of wood bat tournaments."

Throughout the summer, players are accustomed to

using aluminum bats when they play for their travel ball organizations.

This tournament lets younger players use a bat that they'd only see when watching their favorite professional teams play.

Jeremiah Koeberlein, who also assists with the day-to-day activities of the tournament, said that wood bats help "level the playing field."

"Using wood bats levels the playing field because you don't have all of these 'hot' bats [to use]," he said.

Before the tournament, each team receives a pair of maple wood bats from Dinger Bats to use. It's one of the many perks that teams receive when they pay the entry fee.

Another perk is the fields that the teams play on.

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## "Using wood bats levels the playing field because you don't have all of these 'hot' bats [to use]."

— Jeremiah Koeberlein, tournament assistant

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Each field at Community and Evergreen Hollow Park is used over the weekend, along with batting cages and warm-up areas, age-appropriate fences, playing under the lights, free parking and no gate fees.

Overall, this tournament has become one of the most well-respected in the downstate area because of those perks.

It is an event that teams look forward to every year.

"When people play in a tournament, they want it to be well-run and well-organized. They want good concessions and diamonds cleaned up," Lee said. "They also want every team treated fairly."

This year's tournament was different from most, as there was no 14-and-under age group playing due to a conflict with the Illinois Elementary School Association State Track Meet, which was that same weekend.

That left six age groups.

The competition doesn't change, though.

Another perk of the tournament is seeing different teams.

Yes, most of the teams do come from Illinois, but Lee mentioned that teams from Missouri, Indiana and Kentucky have entered before.

"The nice thing is you don't have to play all the local teams all of the time. It's such a highly sought-after tournament, so teams have to get in pretty quickly," Lee said.

Koeberlein said that it takes an "army" to run the event.

"It's a hectic weekend," he said. "There are a lot of moving pieces."

One part of that army is the staff that works for Effingham Park District Maintenance Director Jim Raddatz.

He, Wyatt Jones, John Wendt and Preston Latch ensure that the fields are well-maintained.

"They're the biggest reasons why the diamonds look the way they do and play the way they play," said Raddatz of his workers. "They take a ton of pride in their work and would run through a brick wall for me."

Raddatz said field management varies from year to year.

"Some years are wetter than others," Raddatz said. "It helps that we do a lot of prep work leading into that weekend by getting the diamonds as level as possible so the water will run off and trying to keep the grass at a manageable height."

The job becomes more challenging when there's excessive foot traffic on the fields.

It's nothing Raddatz and his staff can't adjust to, though.

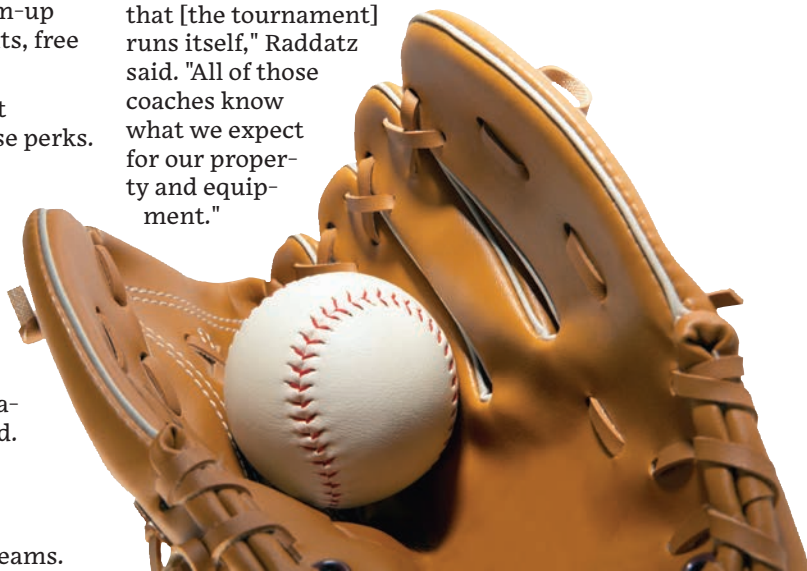
"It makes it a little tougher, because we like to do a lot of leveling after the winter," Raddatz said.

Raddatz explained the importance of rolling and leveling a diamond — something the general audience may not know about.

"After the winter rains and snow, the ground all moves. We'll end up with trenches where the water moves to the side and runs off the quickest," he said. "We try to stay on top of keeping those trenches filled and leveled."

When this tournament comes around, Raddatz said those in the event do a fine job of meeting the staff's standards for field quality.

"The thing that's changed the most since the first year of the tournament has been that [the tournament] runs itself," Raddatz said. "All of those coaches know what we expect for our property and equipment."



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Leia Klein (right) goes ziplining with her father, Justin; sister, Isla; and brother, Liam in Tennessee. Submitted photos.

# EHS student's prosthetic leg doesn't slow her down

*'I let it be the reason why I do a lot of things'*

**Marie Adamick**  
Effingham Magazine

**L**eia Klein is an Effingham High School color guard member who catches her flag with her prosthetic leg.

Leia, 16, a junior, was born without her right ankle, foot bones and fibula - a condition known as fibular hemimelia. But this doesn't stop her from being in her school's color guard and winter guard, where she catches one of her flag tosses with her leg.

"I don't let it stop me," said Leia. "I let it be the reason why I do a lot of things."

When Leia was 11 months old, she had an amputation. Two months later, she got her first prosthetic.

Leia has been a St. Louis Shriners Hospital for Children patient since she was 4 months old. Shriners Hospitals is a nonprofit organization, and has provided all of Leia's surgeries, prosthetics and treatment free of charge.

All her life, Leia has had the same prosthetist and doctor, making her various processes easier. Her care team usually knows what she needs, how to fix any issues and how to make her as comfortable as possible.

"That's one of the reasons why we love it because her care team has been the same since the very beginning," said Leia's mother, Ashley Klein.

In school, Leia has participated in anything and everything she could, including cross country, track, volleyball, theater, color guard and winter guard. From fourth to eighth grade, she played softball. The only sport she doesn't do is basketball.

"I can't shoot a hoop to save my life," said Leia.

She is on her 16th prosthetic leg, so she averages a new one each year. Her amputee stump is angled because of a bone, whereas most amputees' stumps are flat.

Over the past few years, Leia has been experimenting with various types of prosthetics to find the best fit and style for her activity level.



“Overcoming the way that they’re designed, sometimes, is even difficult to work into [her] everyday life,” said Ashley.

Leia first joined Effingham High School’s color guard and winter guard during her sophomore year, partly inspired by her mother, who was guard captain in high school.

“I was peer pressured by everyone, including my mother. She used to do color guard,” said Leia. “I ended up falling in love with it.”

Effingham High School’s last show, “Arcane” was the first show to feature a rifle line prior to 2020.

“I really love it. We recently got a rifle line last year, and I started doing rifle, and I love rifle so much,” said Leia. “I ended up being really, really good at it.”

In sixth grade during the 2019-2020 school year, Leia needed knee surgery due to having knock knee. Getting metal plates inserted to correct this was one of the hardest experiences in her life, says Leia.

“It was hard,” said Leia. “That was probably the hardest experience in my life, this knee surgery, because I couldn’t wear my leg.”

It was also the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“We had a very narrow window between when they could do that because if you stop growing, it’s harder to correct versus when they are still growing, they can adjust the growth plate a little bit,” said Ashley.

During the 2025-2026 track season, Leia was being fitted for a new prosthetic leg, which takes about six months and requires a handful of St. Louis Shriners Hospital for Children visits.



Leia Klein, 4, and Darren Rottman at St. Louis Shriners Hospital for Children.



Leia Klein runs in a track meet at Effingham High School during her junior year.

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This prevented her from competing in the full track season.

“I would sit down and do certain exercises because it hurt, and then I would have people say, like, ‘Oh, it’s just because you have a prosthetic, and that’s your excuse.’ And it’s like, that’s not an excuse. It actually hurt,” said Leia.

“The most challenging part is having to accept that injuries with my leg are still injuries, and I think it’s an excuse, and it’s not.”

Knowing her own limitations is something that’s hard for Leia.

“I just choose to ignore it until I can’t anymore,” said Leia.

“That’s probably the hardest part about it is accepting that I can still get injured on that leg — and it is a real injury — and it’s not an excuse.”



Like any other injury, it requires rest to recover in order to build up her stamina again.

During Leia’s sophomore year of winter guard, she learned how to catch a flag

◀◀ Leia Klein in eighth grade playing softball through the Effingham Park District.

parallel toss and 45 toss using her prosthetic leg.

“It was out of pure spite when I tried it. It kept getting caught in my leg,” said Leia. “I was getting really annoyed, and someone goes, ‘What if you caught it in your leg?’ And we were like, ‘What if I did catch it in my leg?’ And I threw it one or two times, and I caught it.

“I was like, ‘I just made history,’” continued Leia. “It was really fun to do it at state and in front of everybody and hear everybody lose their minds, and then do it again for a different routine in front of people who I’ve never seen before. I like doing it when people don’t know it’s coming because it’s really fun to see their reactions.”

Next school year, Leia will be a senior and plans to continue to be involved in all of the activities and sports that she can be, including the Effingham County Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (CEO) Program.

In August 2025, St. Louis Shriners Hospital for Children invited Leia to attend training to be a patient ambassador, where she learned how to tell her story and how to speak to people. There were about 20 other patients at the training, and they also do bonding activities, such as going to the Saint Louis Zoo.

Leia has spoken at several fundraising events around the state to help raise awareness for the hospital.

“Whenever they reach out with opportunities to speak or help raise funds, we jump on those as much as we can with what our schedule allows,” said Ashley. “It’s not just appointments. They offer a lot of fun things for the kids to get involved with.”

Leia plans to go to college for both journalism and ministry studies after high school. So far, she’s considering Taylor University in Upland, Indiana and Johnson University in Knoxville, Tennessee.

“One day, I decided I wanted to be a news anchor, and it kind of stuck,” said Leia. “I think it’s because I want to be an actress, but I don’t want to be in Hollywood. I don’t want to be involved with all that stuff. So, broadcasting is the next best thing, I guess, compared to that.”

However, her dream job is to be a Christian motivational speaker.

“I just love Jesus so much. I’m very involved with my faith, with my church, and I want to go to a Christian college,” said Leia. “I cannot think of a better way to spend my life.”



Leia Klein (front on 40-yard line) performing during an Effingham High School football game halftime show during her sophomore year.

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Effingham County Genealogical and Historical Society Vice President Nancy Reisner poses with the mystery quilt top at the Society's room at the Effingham Public Library. Cathy Griffith photo

# Piecing together the SHUMWAY MYSTERY QUILT

**Cathy Griffith**  
Effingham Magazine

**C**anadian Evelyn Ward has never been to Shumway, Illinois. The closest she's come is when she visited St. Louis 20 years ago.

Recently, the Stratford, Ontario, resident found herself linked to the village after she came across a quilt top in a Mennonite thrift store where she volunteers. Nearly every square on the quilt top had a different woman's signature, hand-stitched with a different date on each. The unusual quilt intrigued her. Ward, a history buff and textile mixed-media fiber artist, has always been drawn to textiles made by women.

"This just jumped out at me, obviously, and I knew the historical value of it," she said.

Ward brought the quilt top home and immediately spent hours researching the names on it.

She started with her ancestry program.

"I realized that the dates on the squares are not their birth dates. They're not their death dates. They're not any particular date," she said.

The years ranged from 1933 to 1936, and the months and days varied, indicating the quilt wasn't intended to commemorate a specific day.

"It didn't seem to make any sense, which kind of flummoxed me," Ward said.

Out of desperation, Ward finally typed the last names into an AI program and asked what they have in common.

"Up popped Shumway, Effingham," she recalled.

In February, Ward found the Effingham County Genealogical and Historical Society on Facebook and contacted them. She got an immediate reply.

Ward wanted to get the quilt top back home, so she paid to have it shipped to Effingham.

ECGHS President Eleanor Bounds got to work looking through marriage, cemetery and census records. She found one name.

“From that one name, I went then to another book and another book until I got what I wanted,” she recalled.

Bounds found the names listed in documents relating to Trinity Lutheran Church and St. Mary’s Cemetery in Shumway.

Meanwhile, ECGHS Vice President Nancy Reisner looked through newspapers from the time period. Quilting was popular back then, so she found many articles about people making quilts for raffles and quilting groups.

“But I couldn’t find anything that I thought fit with Shumway or the reason why they might have been doing this,” she said.

Adding to the mystery, Ward found that the squares were assembled long after the years shown on them.

Although the names and dates are hand-sewn, she said the quilt top was pieced together by machine. She added that the teal color of the fabric used to join the squares also indicates it is much newer.

“So, it was done quite recently, is my guess, like within the last 20 years or so,” she said.

### History behind the quilt top

Bounds and Reisner are familiar with visitors bringing items to the Effingham County Genealogical and Historical Society room at the Effingham Public Library. People often want to know the history of these items, whether it’s a photo of family members or an old house. According to Reisner, people will walk in with the items from time to time, mostly for research to help them find their family history.

“So, it’s mostly genealogical, but there’s lots of history in genealogy – and mysteries,” she added.

But the mysterious signature quilt is a first. Signature quilts date back to the mid-1800s and were often associated with autograph books or albums that were popular at the time.



Evelyn Ward poses with the mystery quilt she found at a thrift store in Canada. Submitted photo

Ward said the women would pencil their names on the squares and then go over them with embroidery cotton. These quilts were often made for women’s groups or to commemorate special occasions, such as marriages or moving away.

Bounds made a list of the 34 names on the quilt top to post on ECGHS’ Facebook page. As word of the quilt top spread, people started responding.

Nancy Raifsnider recognized her grandmother’s name, Annie Dunteman, who lived in Shumway, a quarter mile down the road from Nancy’s home.

“She regularly held ‘quilting bees’ in her living room,” she recalled.

Left, Shelbyville resident Bonnie Crandall’s great-aunt, Geneva Brandt, is among the names on the mystery quilt top. Center, Crandall’s grandmother, Lola Brandt, is one of the names on the quilt. Right, who “Grandma” is on the quilt top remains a mystery. Submitted photos

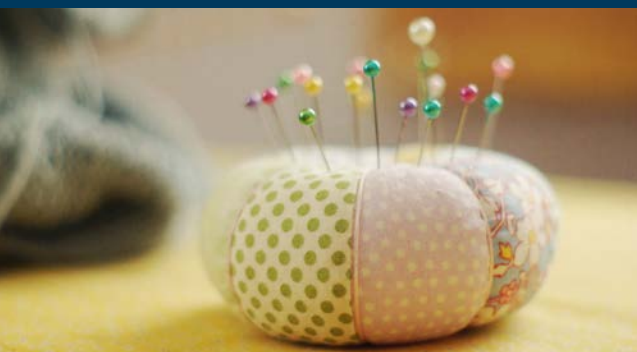




This name has no dates but is featured on another quilt from the same time period. Submitted photo

Following is the list of names on the quilt top. Due to the cursive style, not all the names are clearly legible, therefore, some may be misspelled.

Electa Arnold	Margaret Krueger
Norma Arnold	Hilda Kyle
Mary Barns	Esther Kyle
Roselin Barns	Edith Landreth
Geneva Brandt	Geneva Landreth
Lola Brandt	Mrs. Lester Landreth
Evelyn Case	Elsie Laue
Cora Dammerman	Vera Laue
Annie Dunteman	L.H. Mann
Martha Fulte	Terry Miller
Murytle Fulte	Mildred Milsman
Grandma	Fannie Roedel
Norma Harrington	Virgina Roedel
Marie Johanns	Evelyn M. Sporleder
Madelane Johanns	Dottie Stoldt
Lydia Klepzig	Virda Strus
Eula Klepzig	Marcia Tarrant



Raifsnider said she was invited to join around 1966 or '67.

"I was just a child, and her elderly friends seemed to enjoy having a little kid sit in on the activity," she said.

Raifsnider didn't take up quilting, saying she was more of an "outdoorsy kid." However, she has fond memories of spending time around the quilting frame.

"Grandma and her friends also served wonderful snacks," she added.

Many of the embroidered names on the quilt top are linked by familial ties. A search reveals some of the women were sisters or sisters-in-law. Two undated blocks bear the names of Electa Arnold and Norma Arnold, who were mother and daughter, according to records.

Shelbyville resident Bonnie Crandall was thrilled when she heard about the quilt top. The names of her grandmother, Lola Brandt, and Lola's sister, Geneva Brandt, are both on it.

"I just think it's fascinating to see my grandma's signature in 1933," she said.

Crandall said her grandmother was 14 when her block was made. She also was a member of Trinity Lutheran Church. But after speaking to her aunt, who is Lola's daughter, neither of them knows why the quilt top was made.

Her grandmother became a prolific quilter and made them all by hand.

"She would go to rummage sales and thrift stores and stuff and buy shirts that she liked that had butterflies and flowers and things like that on it. And then she'd cut them out and then embroider around them or applique them onto a sheet, making a pattern up," said Crandall.

Lola made a quilt for each family member.

"She even made one for her cancer doctor," said Crandall. "She was just a very, very loving woman, a hard-working farmer's wife that poured everything into whatever she did."

A quilter herself, Crandall is fascinated by them.

"I love history, and I love quilting," she said.

Crandall learned a lot about quilt-making from her grandmother. She remembers going to her grandmother's and embroidering with her.

Crandall carried on her grandmother's quilting tradition for the family after her brother passed away. She made quilts for the kids, grandkids, nieces and nephews.

"Me and mom, we quilted on her quilting machine. We got a big frame with a quilter. It was our way of making it like grandma did, pass down to remember with ... it was a way of letting junior kids know that they weren't forgotten," she said.

The historical value passed on through tradition in such quilts is why Ward felt compelled to rescue the top.

"This idea of women preserving their stories through the work of their hands is really important," she said. "I feel if we don't capture this stuff now, we will lose all these stories."

### Similar quilt

Effingham resident Kathy Schroeder saw the post and noticed the mystery quilt top looked like one from her grandmother, Alma Amelia Hammer Soltwedel, made in 1936. Her grandmother's quilt is a "friendship" quilt, with signatures from friends all over the neighborhood.

While the mystery quilt top differs in pattern – Schroeder's quilt features blocks with ship designs to reflect its "friendship" theme – both pieces share an embroidered name, Electa Arnold, although the specific connection between the two quilts remains a mystery to Schroeder.

Her grandmother's quilt inspired Schroeder to make one of her own. When her family visited for Easter, she asked if they wanted to take a quilt block and embroider their names on it.



Effingham County Genealogical and Historical Society President Eleanor Bounds poses with the mystery quilt top at the Effingham Public Library. Submitted photo

“And the reason I like to see them do their own name is their signature is their personality,” she said. “You should see all the different signatures on Grandma’s quilt. I mean, from the most precise dainty to the one that’s like, she’s just glad to get this done.”

Schroeder notes her experience with a couple of the women whose signatures are on her grandmother’s quilt proves that.

“One of them was just as carefree as she could be, and the other one was just as stern as she could be, and that’s exactly what their penmanship looks like,” she said.

Schroeder is hoping to get the squares back by fall.

“I think I might have an embroidery party,” she said.

## Theories

As Reisner and Bounds hope publicity about the quilt top will bring closure to its mystery, there’s speculation on why it was made.

Reisner said the quilt top might have been for a young woman graduating from high school or getting married, featuring signatures from family and friends.

However, there’s one problem with that theory. The years on the quilt top span from 1933 to 1936, which she admits is odd for a quilt that would likely be completed in one year for such milestones.

“So, I didn’t understand the span of the years,” she said.

Bounds, who is 97, notes taking three years to complete a quilt was not unusual at the time.

Reisner highlights another mystery of the quilt top. Two blocks are blank, and one just has the name “Grandma.” She has a theory about that name.

“My supposition is that she’s the grandmother of whoever this quilt was made for,” she said.

Another theory is that it could be a nickname everyone used for her, suggesting she was a sort of community grandma.

Bounds and Reisner think the blank squares might be due to two women not returning theirs. It could also be that there weren’t enough names to fill the quilt.

Ward speculates the squares could be in commemoration of a women’s church league or other organizations, signifying the dates they joined.

As to how the quilt top ended up at a Mennonite thrift store in Canada, Reisner offers one possible reason.

One of the signatures on the quilt top belongs to Cora Dammerman, who married Harold Miller. Miller is a common last name in the Mennonite and Amish communities. Still, a local resident who possessed it could have moved to Canada.

“I like the story where the granddaughter got married and went to live in Canada,” chimed Reisner.

A sleuth at heart, Ward finds the experience fun, and intends to follow the quilt’s journey.

“I love doing research,” she said.

The Society has no plans for the quilt and is holding on to it for the time being.

“It’s a mystery, and we’d like to at least be able to get it to someone whose history revolves around a part of it, a little piece of it,” said Reisner.

Reisner realizes they may never find out who “Grandma” was, or for whom or what the quilt was intended.

“But wouldn’t that be nice if we could find that? Other than that, we’re just hoping somebody will say, yeah, my grandmother, my aunt, my mom, somebody did this. I’d like to have it, or I’d like to see it get done and finished,” she said.

Given the opportunity, Crandall said she would like to finish the quilt.


“I thought if I ended up getting to keep it, I would take it around to quilt shows and, you know, show it off. Because, I mean, 93-year-old quilt top, that’s just fantastic,” she said.

Anyone with information on the quilt top can contact Bounds at 816-262-5376 or [eleanorbounds3@gmail.com](mailto:eleanorbounds3@gmail.com), or Reisner at 847-452-1981 or [ecghs.1980@gmail.com](mailto:ecghs.1980@gmail.com). You can also comment on their Facebook page at Effingham County Genealogical & Historical Society, IL ECGHS.

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## Strawberry pots aren't just for the fruit

Story

Jessica Damiano  
Associated Press

### 'Windows' make for striking, efficient displays

**Y**ou've seen them — those odd planters that look like buildings with windows and balconies on their sides. Maybe you've planted strawberries in them. Or maybe you've just never understood them.

Typically made of terracotta, the pots are usually tall and urn-shaped, but shorter, wider options are also available.

They are, in fact, strawberry pots, and those windows are intended to hold soil and strawberries, keeping them off the ground as they grow and, therefore, protecting them from rotting. But think outside the pot, and you'll find they make lovely (and efficient) displays for other plants, too.

### Striking yet practical displays

The fenestrated containers can be planted with succulents like hens and chicks. Consider the orange and yellow 'Gold Nugget' or the silver-haired 'Cobweb' varieties for an eye-catching display. In colder areas, the whole pot can be brought indoors for winter; just ensure the succulents get ample sunlight, and avoid over-watering.

Or create a space-saving culinary herb garden by filling the "balcony" pockets with cooking essentials like parsley, sage, thyme, mint and oregano, placing the smaller species at the bottom of the pot and larger ones higher up. Then plant a tall herb like rosemary or basil in the opening at the top and — voila! — you've created an instant centerpiece. You might even incorporate a few dwarf marigolds for color.

Everbearing strawberries grow in a strawberry pot, a vertical pot with side openings, in Bellflower Calif., on April 2, 2026. (Donald Wentz via AP)



Herbs, too, can be brought indoors and grown (and used!) in the kitchen over winter.

### Colorful trailing florals and vines

Trailing flowers and vines make a statement as they spill from the containers' openings. Keep it monochrome, or plant a rainbow of colors for a dazzling display.

Trailing geraniums, petunias, and chartreuse or purple sweet potato vines can be alternated around the sides of the pot. A dramatic grass, like Cordyline 'Festival,' can be planted at the top of larger planters, black mondo grass in smaller ones.

Nasturtiums, million bells, trailing verbena and sweet alyssum also lend themselves nicely to the pots. Green ivies provide a more understated aesthetic.

If you don't have a

lot of sunlight, consider combining different varieties of caladium and coleus for a colorful display.

### Keeping it sufficiently watered

Regardless of what you're planting, ensuring water reaches the roots of every plant in a strawberry pot can pose a bit of a challenge — but there's an easy solution.

Cut a piece of PVC piping slightly longer than the pot's height, then drill holes 2 inches (5 centimeters) apart along its sides.

At planting time, add potting mix up to the pot's bottom openings, then position the pipe vertically in the center. Insert plants through the holes (from the inside out), add more potting mix to reach the next level of openings and add more plants. Repeat until you reach the top of the pot, packing the soil tightly as you go.

Water and fertilize through the pipe, which will be hidden as the centerpiece plant grows.

Strawberry pots are available in various materials, but the traditional versions are made of clay, which can crack in freezing temperatures. If your area experiences cold winters, bring them indoors in autumn, either emptied of their annuals, cleaned and stored, or still housing tropicals, evergreens or herbs, and treat them as houseplants over winter.

*Jessica Damiano writes regular gardening columns for The Associated Press. She publishes the award-winning Weekly Dirt Newsletter.*

A lushly planted strawberry pot serves as a focal point in a succulent garden in Sacramento, Calif., on March 30, 2026. (Luz Yuhas via AP)



## Why many Americans are turning to AI for health advice, according to recent polls

Story  
**Ali Swenson and  
Linley Sanders**  
Associated Press

**W**hen Tiffany Davis has a question about a symptom from the weight-loss injections she's taking, she doesn't call her doctor. She pulls out her phone and consults ChatGPT.

"I'll just basically let ChatGPT know my status, how I'm feeling," said the 42-year-old in Mesquite, Texas. "I use it for anything that I'm experiencing."

Turning to artificial intelligence tools for health advice has become a habit for Davis and many other Americans, according to a West Health-Gallup Center on Healthcare in America poll. The poll, conducted in late 2025 and backed up by at least three other recent surveys with similar findings, found that roughly one-quarter of U.S. adults had used an AI tool for health information or advice in the past 30 days.

Dr. Karandeep Singh, chief health AI officer at the University of California San Diego Health, said AI tools, many of which now incorporate web search, are an upgraded version of Google health searches that Americans have been doing for decades.

"I almost view it like a better entry portal into web search," he said. "Instead of someone having to comb through the top, you know, 10, 20, 30 links in a web search, they can now have an executive summary."

### Most recent AI health users are looking for quick answers

Most Americans using AI tools for health purposes say they want immediate answers. In some cases, it helps them evaluate what kind of medical attention they need.

"It'll let me know if something's serious or not," Davis said of ChatGPT, which she typically consults before scheduling medical appointments.

The Gallup survey found about 7 in 10 U.S. adults who have used AI for health research in the past 30 days say they wanted quick answers, additional information or were simply curious. Majorities used it for research before seeing a doctor or after an appointment.

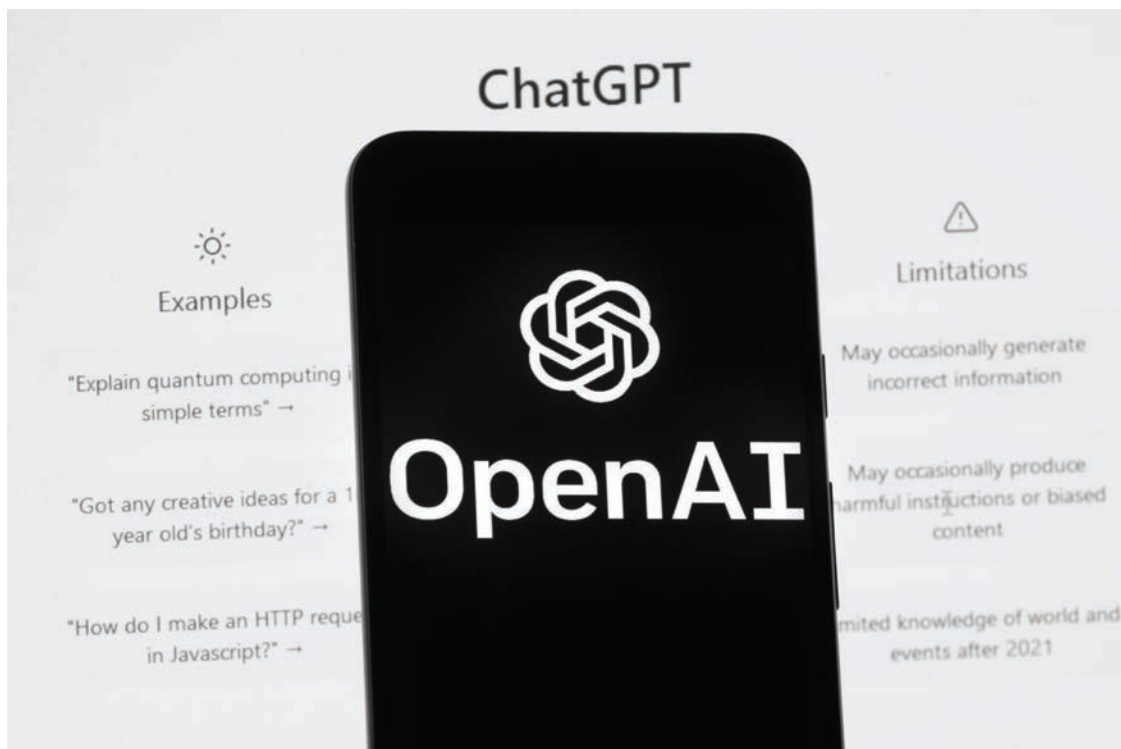
Rakesia Wilson, 39, in Theodore, Alabama, said she recently used AI to better understand her lab results after an endocrinologist visit. She also regularly uses ChatGPT and Microsoft

Copilot to decide whether she needs to take time off for a doctor's appointment or can simply monitor an ailment.

"I just don't necessarily have the time if it's something that I feel is minor," said Wilson, who said she sometimes works up to 70-hour weeks as an assistant principal.

### Younger adults and lower-income users have used AI to bridge care gaps

On the whole, the findings suggest that the rise of AI tools hasn't stopped people from seeking professional medical care.



About 8 in 10 U.S. adults say they have sought out a doctor or other health care professional for health information in the past year, while about 3 in 10 say that about AI tools and chatbots, according to a KFF poll conducted in late February.

Similarly, a Pew Research Center survey conducted in October found that about 2 in 10 U.S. adults say they get health information at least sometimes from AI chatbots, while about 85% said the same about health care providers.

But there are indications that some Americans are using AI for health advice because they are struggling to obtain professional medical care, at a time when federal policy and market factors are worsening health costs and creating obstacles to access around the country.

A small but significant share of respondents in the Gallup study say they used AI because accessing health care was too expensive or inconvenient. About 4 in 10 wanted help outside of normal business hours, while about 3 in 10 did not want to pay for a doctor's visit. Roughly 2 in 10 did not have time to make an appointment, had felt ignored or dismissed by a provider in the past or were too embarrassed to talk to a person.

The KFF survey found that younger adults and lower-income people were more likely to say they used an AI tool or chatbot for health information because they could not afford the cost of seeing a provider or were having trouble accessing health care.

## **Americans are divided on whether AI medical advice can be trusted**

Tech experts often warn that AI chatbots don't think for themselves – and therefore can sometimes spout false information. Those concerns have trickled down even to frequent AI users.

About one-third of adults who had recently used AI for health information said they “strongly” or “somewhat” trust the accuracy of health information and advice generated by AI tools, according to the Gallup poll. About the same share, 34%, distrusted it, and another 33% neither trusted it nor distrusted it.

Dr. Bobby Mukkamala, an ear, nose and throat doctor and the president of the American Med-



ical Association, said he loves when patients come in and have “more evolved questions than they used to have” because they used AI for research. But he said AI should be considered a tool and not a stand-in for medical care.

“It is an assistant but not an expert, and that's why physicians need to be involved in that care,” he said.

There are also concerns about privacy, according to KFF. About three-quarters of U.S. adults said they are “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” about the privacy of personal medical or health information that people provide to AI tools or chatbots.

Singh, of UC San Diego Health, said most AI tools have settings users can toggle to prevent their data from being used to train future models. But that requires user vigilance – and not being careful can have consequences.

Last summer, for example, internet sleuths on Google discovered private ChatGPT conversations that had been indexed on a public website without the users realizing it.

Tamara Ruppert, a 47-year-old director in Los Angeles, said she is lucky enough to have doctors in her husband's family that she contacts instead of turning to AI. With her family history of breast cancer, using a chatbot for health advice feels too risky.

“Health care is something that's pretty serious,” she said. “And if it's wrong, you could really hurt yourself.”



## May 28-30

**Neoga Days** with theme Sweet Summertime. 25/8 Xtreme Games and food vendors. Live music by Max Heuerman & The Little Truckers in the beer garden Friday at 7 p.m. Neoga Days Jr. Miss, Little Miss, Miss & Pre-Teen Pageant at 6 p.m. Friday. 5K run/walk starts 7:30 a.m. Saturday at Neoga Community Center in Neoga. Parade at 11 a.m. Saturday. Live music by Tanner Romine at 4:45 p.m. & Whiskey Weekend at 7 p.m. Saturday in the beer garden. Fireworks Saturday at 9 p.m.

## May 29

**Henry Cho — The Empty Nest Tour.** Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 8 p.m.

## May 30

### Greenup City-Wide Garage Sales

**Partners Fur A Goodpaws** 11 a.m.–4 p.m. at Legacy Harley-Davidson in Effingham. Vendors and food, animals & raffles. [kodasgift.com](http://kodasgift.com)

### Shriners Hospitals For Children 5th

**Annual Masonic Lodge Auction** 10 a.m. at Charley Brown Park Fairgrounds in Flora. To make a donation to the auction, call 618-843-3815. For monetary donations, all checks and money orders made out to "Shriners Hospital" and mailed to Don Fry at 323 E. 4th St., Flora, IL 62839.

## May 31

**Music In the Park** Avery Bohnhoff opening for Lady Liberty. 2:30–5:30 p.m. Food trucks. Event at Liberty Park in Dieterich, IL. Bring lawn chairs.

## June 5 & 6

**More 4 Montrose 4B's Rodeo: Bands, Boots, Barrels & Bulls** at Montrose Village Park. Friday's Events: Bucking Bull Futurity, Poles & Barrels. Rodeo 7 p.m. Grounds open 5 p.m. Friday. Saturday's Events: barrel racing, bull riding, bronc's, breakaway & mutton bustin. Rodeo 7 p.m. Grounds open Saturday 3 p.m. Beer tent, concession stands, merchandise, food vendors. Entertainment after the rodeo Friday night will be Max Heuerman & The Little Truckers. Entertainment Saturday night after the rodeo will be Murphy 500. For more info, contact Zach Hilton 217-240-0742 or Trisha Funneman 217-343-3042. [M4mrodeo@gmail.com](mailto:M4mrodeo@gmail.com). Welcome to bring lawn chairs.

**Sigel Town-Wide Garage Sales** 7 a.m.–7 p.m. Friday and 7 a.m.–noon Saturday.

## June 5

**4-H Camp Cloverbud** with Angie Moeller 9 a.m.–3 p.m. at Camp Wassatoga, 15230 N. Blue Point Trail, Effingham. This camp is free and open to all youth ages 5–8! They do not have to be in

4-H to attend! Fun & creative outdoor activities including Aerospace, Arts & Crafts, Entomology, Fishing, Fun Games, Mad Scientist, Nature Trail. Register today at: [go.illinois.edu/26EffClvrCamp](http://go.illinois.edu/26EffClvrCamp)

**Golf Cart Movie Night** featuring movie *Inside Out 2* in Teutopolis. Visit Teutopolis For Tomorrow facebook page for updated information.

## June 6

**SBLHC Races for All Paces** at O'Brien Stadium on the campus of Eastern Illinois University in Charleston.

### Dieterich Village-Wide Garage Sales

7 a.m.–noon.

### EARS (Effingham Animal Rescue

**Sanctuary) Jeepin' For The Paws** Registration at 10 a.m. at Tuscan Hills Winery. Leave 11 a.m. Route is Danny's Bar & Grill, Luke's in Altamont (food available), Barn & Bottle Winery (50/50 Raffle), and The Nest at Cardinal Golf Course by Lake Sara.

### Benefit Fundraiser for Ted Young

at Edgewood Legion Lake, 100 Broad St., Edgewood. Fishing Derby 10 a.m.–1 p.m. Bring a pole. Prizes for heaviest in age category and most caught overall. Run/walk at 10 a.m. (register at 9:45 a.m.), Food & silent auction 11 a.m.–2 p.m. Donations for silent or live auction contact Beth Young 217-240-2780, Lori Sturm 618-780-0220 or Karissa Young 618-320-0486 or drop off anytime before 2 p.m. day of event at the pavilion at Edgewood Legion Lake.

**Poker Run** Hosted by Midwest Biker Relief Foundation. Registration 11 a.m. at Legacy Harley Davidson in Effingham. Ride starts at noon. Cash prizes for Best Hand & Worst Hand. Live music, food & drink. Raffle baskets. Join us at the end at On The Rox, Altamont. Proceeds to Downed Bikers and their families. For more info, call Kris at 217-690-5359.

## June 13

**Farmers Market** Downtown Vandalia 8 a.m.–noon



## June 18-21

**Moccasin Creek Festival** at The Stage at Lake Sara, Effingham, IL featuring Americana musicians and artists. Food, drinks and activities for kids.

## June 19-27

**Jasper County Fair** in Newton, IL.

## June 19

**Downtown Effingham Movie Night** on the old courthouse lawn in downtown Effingham.

### Teutopolis KC Cruise Night & Car Show

Starts 5:30 p.m. at Teutopolis Banquet Hall. All

vehicles welcome! Free spectator parking. Cruise route 5:30–8:30 p.m. Power Wheels derby 5:30–6:30 p.m. National Anthem/Honor Guard & First Responders at 7 p.m. Car show 5:30–9 p.m. Food stands. Beer stand. Bigfoot car crushing immediately following opening ceremonies. Fireworks at dusk — America250. Big raffle, 50/50 drawing. Proceeds go to Teutopolis Banquet Hall, Shriners, Shop with a Cop Effingham City, and Dieterich High School Skeet & Trap. Check us out on Facebook at Teutopolis Cruise Car Show. For more info, contact Brett Higgs at 217-663-2433, Dale Ruholl at 217-259-9656, Cody Willenborg at 217-821-3730 or Jeremy Giles at 217-821-3327.

## June 19 & 20

**Just For Dads Theme: Kids make Gifts for Dad.** Downtown Effingham. Each store hosts small activity and kids walk downtown completing gift pieces.

### Vandalia Statehouse Grand Levee Festival

starting 5 p.m. June 19 and 10 a.m.–4 p.m. June 20. 1800s period arts and crafts demonstrations, live music, petting zoo, vendor fair, food trucks and more!

## June 20 & 21

**Civil War Weekend** at Lincoln Log Cabin State Historic Site in Lerna, IL. This living history event features an encampment, mounted and dismounted drills both days, special presentations, lawn games, 1860s baseball game, and dance Saturday night.

## June 20

**Farmers Market** Downtown Vandalia

### Tower Hill Park Summer Solstice Market

9 a.m.–3 p.m. Live auction, activities for kids, petting zoo, 50/50 raffle, artists, booths and food trucks in Tower Hill, IL in the park.

## June 24

**Zip Code Day Celebration Day** in Edgewood, IL. Softball game, Cornhole tournament, Food trucks, live music, raffles and more, all held at 710 Illinois St., Edgewood, IL 62426 starting at 5 p.m.

## June 27

**Edgewood 50th Anniversary Fest.** Food, games, queen contest, fireworks.

## June 28

**Golf Outing** held by friends & family of Sarah Bush Lincoln Fayette County Hospital at Indian Springs Golf Course in Fillmore. Proceeds to benefit planned renovations at the hospital. Raffle for a week-long stay in the Orlando area, donated by Mike & Jayne Genta of Effingham. Registration and lunch at 11 a.m. Tee time at 1 p.m. For more information, contact Jay Jolliff at 618-531-5278, Theresa Knebel at 618-322-1069 or call 618-283-5401.

## June 29–July 3

**Stars, Stripes & USA 250.** Theme: patriotic shopping, Promote red, white & blue. Downtown Effingham.

## July 3 & 4

**Dieterich 4th of July Celebration.** July 3 live music headliner will be Jake & Mikayla with opener Corey Evitts. Parade Saturday at 11 a.m. Festivities in Dieterich, IL.

## July 4

**Fireworks and Annual Airshow** at Coles County Memorial Airport in Mattoon, IL. Car, truck & motorcycle show 2–5 p.m. Twilight airshow, drone show, Cobra and Huey helicopter rides, Warbird Thunder performance and Precision Exotics car rides.

## July 10 & 11

**Effingham Artisan Fair** at Tuscan Hills Winery in Effingham featuring handmade art, live demos, kids activities, live music, food trucks and more!



## July 10

**Relay for Life of Effingham County** at Teutopolis Community Park. Join for the Survivor Lap, Survivor Ceremony and more!

## July 11

**Farmers Market** Downtown Vandalia 8 a.m.–noon.

## July 13–18

**Mattoon Bagelfest** at Peterson Park in Mattoon featuring live music by Sidewalk Prophets July 16, Scotty McCreery July 17 and Jefferson Starship July 18. Parade, vendors, carnival and more!

## July 17 & 18

**Summer Sales Event** Downtown Effingham

## July 17

**Ham Jam** in Downtown Effingham. A full-on summer celebration of BBQ, sauce, music and community! Hometown Throwdown Amateur BBQ competition, live music, family fun, a kids' foam party, vendors, beer tent and plenty of incredible BBQ. All net proceeds go directly back into our community through scholarships supporting local students and adult learners pursuing their education. For more info, contact Nicole Morrison at 217-347-6282.

**Irwin Farmers Market Day** 11 a.m.–1 p.m. at 610 E. Cumberland Rd, Altamont, IL. Vendors set up in parking lot to the east of Irwin business. Parking available. Craft vendors, food truck, ice cream truck and more!

## Aug. 1–8

**Effingham County Fair** at the fairgrounds at 722 E. Cumberland Road, Altamont IL 62411. Voted year after year as Effingham County People's Choice event of the year! Daily horse racing Sunday through Friday starting at noon, tractor pulls (Aug. 1, 3 and 5), Car show Aug. 1 at 9 a.m., 5K race Aug. 1 at 7:30 a.m., talent show Aug. 2 at 6:30 p.m., parade Aug. 2 at 4:30 p.m., rodeo Aug. 6 at 7:30 p.m., demolition derby Aug. 8 at 6:30 p.m., and so much more!

## Aug. 1

**Jeep Run for Alzheimer's** starting at Unique Suites Hotel, 920 W. Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL at 9 a.m. An opportunity to honor loved ones, uplift caregivers and stand united for a cause that touches so many hearts.

## Aug. 7–9

**Tropic-Van-A** presented by Central Illinois Trucking Association at Spring Creek Campground in Montrose, IL. Live music, vanner shenanigans, shot bar, beer truck and more!

## Aug. 8

**Farmers Market** Downtown Vandalia 8 a.m.–noon

## Aug. 14 & 15

**Harvest & Hope Market** at the McKenna-Yost Convention Center in Mattoon.

## Aug. 15

**Run for the Fallen** at Linder Sports Complex in Charleston 7 a.m.–1 p.m.

## Enchanted Effingham: An Evening of Music and Magic.

Join us for an unforgettable night of Disney Classics at Effingham Performance Center in Effingham, IL featuring a cast of seasoned Disney performers alongside local talent starting at 7 p.m. Family-friendly concert celebrating 4th Walls Productions: a brand new hometown arts organization dedicated to creating high-quality opportunities for local artists.

## Aug. 22

**Family Summer Funday** at Watson Civic Center. All-you-can-eat breakfast 7–10 a.m. includes biscuits & gravy, pancakes, link & pattied sausages, sweet rolls and drinks. Summer Funday 10 a.m.–3 p.m. Free inflatables open at 1 p.m. Truck vendors, concessions, snow cones, music, flea market and more!

## Aug. 23

**Car-Truck Motorcycle-Golf Cart Show** at Windsor American Legion Post 725 on Maine St. in Windsor, IL. Registration noon–2:30 p.m. Awards at 3 p.m. Dash plaques for first 50. Rain or shine. Proceeds to benefit American Legion projects. For more info, call Mike at 217-962-9945 or Jeff at 217-259-5333.

**Shenandoah.** Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. [theepc.org](http://theepc.org)

## Aug. 26

**Happy Together Tour 2026.** Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7:30 p.m. [theepc.org](http://theepc.org)

## Aug. 28

**Irwin Farmer's Market Day** 11 a.m.–1 p.m. at 610 E. Cumberland Rd., Altamont, IL. Vendors set up in parking lot to the east of Irwin business. Parking available. Craft vendors, food truck, ice cream truck and more!

## Sept. 4–7

**Casey Popcorn Fest** at Fairview Park in Casey, IL. Headliner Sat. Sept. 5 is rising country sensation Greylan James with Brandon Wisham opening. Headliner on Sunday, Sept. 6 is superstar Sara Evans with opener Neon Rodeo, the ultimate '90s country tribute act. Headlining on Monday Sept. 7 are Christian music artists Cochren & Company. For details and tickets, visit [popcornfestival.net](http://popcornfestival.net)

## Sept. 5

**The Kramers** 6 p.m. at Mullen Baptist Church, 675 150N, Montrose, IL. For more info: 217-254-0905.

**Firehouse Jeep Fling.** Registration starts 9:30 a.m. at the Firehouse in Cowden, IL. Ride begins 11 a.m. A fun-filled day of off-road vehicles. There won't be any bar stops: family-friendly event. Food, drinks, raffles. All proceeds benefit Cowden and Herrick fire protection districts.

## Sept. 11 & 12

**Downtown Effingham Cruise Night** with Show & Shine Car Show, wine and beer garden, live music, giveaways, food vendors and more!

## Fall into Downtown Effingham Fall

**Open Houses** at downtown stores. New fall merchandise, treats and drinks, and downtown photo spots.

## Sept. 12

**Farmers Market** Downtown Vandalia 8 a.m.–noon.



Photo courtesy  
Kinmundy Log Cabin Village

## Sept. 19 & 20

**Fall Festival at Log Cabin Village,** 6260 Gesell Road, Kinmundy, IL. Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 10 a.m.–4 p.m. 1800s Log Cabins, 150+ craft & food vendors, and live demonstrations. [kinmundylogcabinvillage.com](http://kinmundylogcabinvillage.com)

## Sept. 19

**Special Olympics Family Festival** at Lake Land College in Mattoon, IL.

**Jamey Johnson.** Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. [theepc.org](http://theepc.org)

**The Big Baldridge & Bonfire** featuring Drew Baldridge with Adam Sanders at Patoka, IL.

## Sept. 26 & 27

**Lincoln Log Cabin Fall Harvest Frolic** at Lincoln Log Cabin State Historic Site in Lerna, IL. Children's crafts, food preservation and artisan demonstrations, live music, food trucks and more!

**Fall Festival at Log Cabin Village,** 6260 Gesell Road, Kinmundy, IL. Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 10 a.m.–4 p.m. 1800s Log Cabins, 150+ craft & food vendors, and live demonstrations. [kinmundylogcabinvillage.com](http://kinmundylogcabinvillage.com)

## Sept. 26

**Camp New Hope Family Fall Fest.** Train rides, games and inflatables. Wheels of Hope Car Show, food trucks and vendors. Event at 1364 CR 100E, Neoga, IL 62447.

**Altamont Schuetzenfest.** A FUN-draiser for a Purpose! Downtown Altamont.

The Effingham Daily News captures in words and pictures the life of our community in print three days per week and every day online at [effinghamdailynews.com](http://effinghamdailynews.com). Here are some snapshots of those stories from the past couple months.



## FEBRUARY

◀◀ Jamie Pearson dressed as The Grinch for the Feb. 28 Polar Plunge at Lake Sara Beach. She later won the award for best individual costume at the post-plunge party. Marie Adamick photo

## MARCH

Effingham County Board member Sandi Rich reads a prepared statement regarding the resolution opposing medical aid in dying prior to the board voting to approve it, as member Jeremy Deters, left, and Chairman Joshua Douthit listen. Rich voted against the resolution. Cathy Griffith photo ▶▶



▲▲ Teutopolis junior Kendal "Kenny" Mette, left, and senior Joey Probst, right, trap Tolono (Unity) senior Tyler Henry during the sectional championship game of the Class 2A Monticello Sectional at Monticello High School. Alex Wallner photo

St. Anthony senior Nancy Ruholl was named the Associated Press Class 2A Steve Tappa Illinois Media Girls Basketball Player of the Year on March 23. Alex Wallner photo ▼▼





▲▲ Siegfried's Supper Club Front-of-House Manager Alysia Kennedy poses next to the wine rack co-owner Ryan Spencer industrially sculpted. The supper club opened in early April in Teutopolis. Cathy Griffith photo

## APRIL

Lesley Cooley (left) and Mikaela Houston (right) holding Chatter and Belle inside the Effingham County Animal Control and Shelter's new "catio," a patio for cats. Marie Adamick photo ▼▼



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## 2 Heart Heart

— The **BASIC screening** is \$95 and offers the following screens:

- Blood sugar
- Coronary risk profile (cholesterol)
- Electrocardiogram (EKG)
- Kidney function
- Cardiac CT-calcium scoring
- C-reactive protein high sensitivity

— The **COMPLETE screening** is \$190 and includes:

- Basic and Vascular screenings
- Abdominal aortic ultrasound
- Carotid ultrasound

— The **VASCULAR screening** is \$95 and offers the following screens to detect Peripheral Vascular Disease:

- Electrocardiogram (EKG)
- Ultrasound vascular screening



To schedule a screening,  
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care provider.

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