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HOLIDAY 2024

MAGAZINE

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HOLIDAY 2024

MAGAZINE

FEATURE STORY



Three generations pose with their gingerbread creations this year. From left are Casey Kearney, Tammy Kearney, Davey Seidel, Addie Seidel, Kelsey Seidel, Emmett Seidel, Ashley Tappendorf, Aaron Mette, Krista Mette, Brian York and Mary York. Children in front are Ariana Strickler, Oliver Mette, Briley Tappendorf, Emery Mette and Charley Tappendorf. Submitted photo.

PUBLISHER

Amy Winter
amy.winter@effinghamdailynews.com

EDITOR

Jeff Long
jeff.long@effinghamdailynews.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Cathy Griffith
cathy.griffith@effinghamdailynews.com

ART DIRECTOR

Natalie Reidford

CONTRIBUTORS

Marie Adamick, Janet VanSant,
Connie Berg, Jewel Brown and
Teresa Walk

SALES SUPERVISOR

Jody Hardiek
jody.hardiek@effinghamdailynews.com

ADVERTISING SALES CONSULTANTS

advertising@effinghamdailynews.com
DeeAnn Bauguss
Julie Harkins

CONTACT US

(217) 347-7151

E-MAIL

news@effinghamdailynews.com

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ON THE COVER: *Emma Haslett, now 8, is one of the namesakes for Emma's Diner in Stewardson, co-owned by Lisa Friese and Ashley Haslett. Emma was 7 when this holiday photo was taken. Photo by Ashley Haslett, Emma's mother.*

PAGE | **Sweet Tradition**
8 | by Cathy Griffith

Effingham Magazine on the web

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FEATURES

- 6 | FROM THE EDITOR
- 8 | SWEET TRADITION
- 12 | MAKE CARTOONS GREAT AGAIN
- 16 | EXCHANGING CULTURES
- 22 | HOLIDAY PETS
- 24 | LOOKING BACK AT 'SHOP WITH A DEPUTY' IN 2023
- 28 | HOMETOWN CHRISTMAS



DEPARTMENTS

- 18 | FOOD & DRINK
- 32 | HEALTH & FITNESS
- 34 | HOME & GARDEN
- 36 | EFFINGHAM & AREA EVENTS



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From the editor

This is always a special time to celebrate faith and family; to reflect on the year behind and the year ahead.

For this edition of Effingham Magazine, Cathy Griffith catches up with one local family and their wonderful tradition of making gingerbread houses.

After Mary York's mother-in-law died in August of 1997, she knew the holidays would be a sad time for her family.

"I thought, 'Let's do something kind of fun at Thanksgiving,' cause I knew we were all going to be missing her," said York.

So, she baked a bunch of gingerbread to make houses her family could decorate. Soon, the whole clan was making them in an annual tradition that continues to this day.

Marie Adamick – a new reporter at the Effingham Daily News – caught up with James Pennington III and Jacob Pennington, 21-year-old identical twins. They've enjoyed cartoons all their lives. Growing up in Flora, their parents showed them 1990s cartoons and classic Saturday morning cartoons. They enjoyed shows such as Powerpuff Girls, Tom and Jerry and Looney Tunes.

One day eight years ago, they asked their father if he could take them to a cartoon museum. When they learned there really wasn't anything like that, they created their own – combining their love for both cartoons and history.

We also visited with Dennis Vahling and the foreign exchange students he's hosting this year at his home near Stewardson – Samuel Crass, 16, of Eltville, Germany, and Franco Finzi, 17, of Varese, Italy. It's been a rewarding experience for all three of them.

"You learn about their cultures and it's well worth it," Dennis said. "I would encourage other people to consider it."

Elsewhere we look back at special holiday moments around our community.

From our family to yours – happy holidays!

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 and current board member of the Illinois Associated Press Media Editors, he lives in Altamont with his wife, Karen.



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 22 years in news and magazine publications. She is a lifelong resident of Effingham, where she resides with her husband, Tim, and daughter, Leah.



Marie Adamick is the newest reporter at the Effingham Daily News. Before deciding to major in journalism, she considered majoring in international business or chemistry. She graduated from 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 recently moved to Effingham to start her job at the paper and has family in Wisconsin, Cincinnati and St. Louis.



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Sweet TRADITION

Family creates gingerbread houses for the holidays

Three generations pose with their gingerbread creations this year. From left are Casey Kearney, Tammy Kearney, Davey Seidel, Addie Seidel, Kelsey Seidel, Emmett Seidel, Ashley Tappendorf, Aaron Mette, Krista Mette, Brian York and Mary York. Children in front are Ariana Strickler, Oliver Mette, Briley Tappendorf, Emery Mette and Charley Tappendorf. Submitted photos.

Cathy Griffith

Effingham Magazine

After Mary York's mother-in-law died in August of 1997, she knew the holidays would be a sad time for her family.

"I thought, 'let's do something kind of fun at Thanksgiving,' cause I knew we were all going to be missing her," said York.

So, she baked a bunch of gingerbread to make houses her family could decorate. She had never made gingerbread houses before.

"I just got a recipe and decided to try it," she said.

The activity has become a source of family enjoyment every year since.

Now, the 81-year-old gets help sometimes from her daughter, Tammy Kearney, making the gingerbread.

"We kind of have a system going – these later years especially – where she rolls it out and

cuts them, and I tend to the oven," said York.

York said mixing the gingerbread and letting it chill takes her over half a day.

"So, I do that usually one day, and then whenever we can, we do the rolling out and baking," she said.

York said the process takes a half day with the two of them.

"If it's just me doing it, all day, sometimes into the next day," she said.

Shown is the log cabin Tammy Kearney created in 2023.



York puts the basic house structures together after she learned the first year that it takes a long time for them to dry.

The decorating commences after the Thanksgiving feast at York's home in Edgewood and lasts the rest of the afternoon.

York admits it takes a lot of ingredients to accommodate her large family; that includes 19 pounds of powdered sugar and almost 2 pounds of meringue powder for the icing, and 25 pounds of flour for the gingerbread. She usually makes at least five batches of the ginger-

bread, enough for between 15 and 20 houses.

York finds the time spent well worth it, as she enjoys watching her family decorate the houses and seeing what they create – a tradition that has continued into the next generation.

“It started out with grandkids doing it, and now I got the great-grandkids doing them too,” she said.

But it’s not just kids doing it.

“Surprisingly, better than half of the adults even make them,” she said.

York makes extra pieces as family members sometimes cut the houses or add to them, adding rooms or making two stories. Sometimes, the finished works don’t resemble houses at all. Last year, the gingerbread creations included a church, a log cabin, a barn with a tractor and elevator with hay going up, and a car wash.

“You never know what they’re going to come up with. They each come up with their own idea,” said York.

York recalls one year her grandson made an outhouse that included a tiny roll of toilet paper and a seat.

There are no rules in creating the structures, except for one: It all has to be edible.

“It all has to be like candy, cookies, graham crackers, cereal, whatever they want to bring,” she said.

“The possibilities are endless with a little imagination, some icing and candy.”

— Ashley Tappendorf

Granddaughter Ashley Tappendorf has been making gingerbread creations since she was 8. Now 35, her gingerbread house making skills have grown right along with her.

“When I was younger, I just did a basic gingerbread house. But as I got older, I made different things,” she said.

She has made a castle, a camper and even a ski lodge.

Tappendorf keeps an eye out year-round for what she will create. Her inspiration comes from Pinterest.

“If I run across one I like, I save it for later,” she said. “The beginning of October is when I start thinking about what I want to do.”

“Sometimes, if my daughter is into something, like the year she was really into ‘Beauty and the Beast,’ I did a castle,” she added.

Her daughter, Briley, 9, and son Charley, 6, both create their own houses now.

“They’ve done it since they were old enough to put candy on icing,” she said.

Tappendorf loves sharing the tradition with her children and said it is a neat memory to pass down.

Tappendorf’s mother, Kearney, has been making the same



Mary York poses with gingerbread houses her family created in 2023.

This tree stand was made by Davey Seidel in 2018. ▼



▲ Davey Seidel is holding the camper he made in 2019.



Krista Mette displays the barn she made in 2022.

Davey Seidel created a car wash in 2023. ▼



▲ Shown is the gingerbread band made by Collin York in 2019.

Kelsey Seidel created an ice cream shack in 2023. ▼



▲ Casey Strickler made this "Frozen" gingerbread house in 2014.



The McDonald's made by Michael Tappendorf in 2014.



Kelsey Seidel made this gingerbread coffee shop in 2018.

structure every year – a log cabin – and uses pretzels for the logs.

"Just because I love log cabins. We usually go to Tennessee and stay in a cabin. So, that just reminds me of those fun times. They would always turn out really pretty," she said.

York provides the basics for the gingerbread creations, including waffle cones to make pine trees, which are made by covering the cones in white icing and then rolling them in green coconut. But if something special is needed, family members bring it themselves.

Tappendorf admits the tradition can get a little competitive.

"It's fun to see what everybody else does, and then sometimes we don't share what we're doing right away just because we want to surprise each other. We have a lot of artistic people in our family. Like my cousin, Kelsey, is an art teacher and she's always the most creative one I think," she said.

A couple of years ago, Kelsey Seidel made a little coffee shop, and last year, she made an ice cream shop.

"She's always got some really good ideas," said Tappendorf. "The possibilities are endless with a little imagination, some icing and candy."

Family members take home their finished gingerbread creations and look forward to doing it again next year, as does York, who plans to continue hosting the tradition for as long as possible.

"I'm sure it's a tradition that will continue for a long time," said Tappendorf.

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A church made by Krista Mette in 2023.

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Make Cartoons Great Again

Left to right: Jacob Pennington, James Pennington II and James Pennington III celebrate the opening of their museum during the mall's Indoor "Whatever" garage sale on Oct. 18.

Local twins create live cartoon show and museum

Marie Adamick
Effingham Magazine

James Pennington III and Jacob Pennington, 21-year-old identical twins, have enjoyed cartoons all their lives. Jacob is also fond of studying historical events, such as World War I and II. James likes looking for Civil War swords.

Growing up in Flora, Illinois, their parents showed them 1990s cartoons and classic Saturday morning cartoons. They enjoyed shows such as Powerpuff Girls, Tom and Jerry and Looney Tunes.

One day eight years ago, they asked their father if he could take them to a cartoon museum. When they learned there really wasn't anything like that, they created their own - combining their love for

both cartoons and history.

A few months prior to their first show in October, the family brought fliers to schools in seven local counties.

During the Village Square Mall's indoor "Whatever" Garage Sale in October, the twins, along with their father, James Pennington II, set up their cartoon museum for the first time.

James and Jacob were born in Vincennes, Indiana, in 2003. But soon after that, the family moved to Flora, Illinois, because their father was offered a job to sing professionally in one of his colleague's bands, Uncle Fester.

Autism

James and Jacob struggled to make friends in school, and school was difficult for them.



The autographed Pink Panther animation cel signed by Sybil Freleng on display at the brothers' museum.

In 2015 and early 2016, they were diagnosed with autism.

Getting tested “wasn’t that bad,” said James. “They just kind of put it in the computer and [found] out, like, based on how we were throwing a fit or having a meltdown.”

However, both graduated from high school in 2021 with honors.

Cartoons

Their parents didn’t let them watch scary movies when they were kids.

“Who would wanna take their kid and go ‘Here, let’s watch Friday the 13th? Here’s Freddie Krueger,’” said their father, who said scary movies can’t plant ideas into people’s heads if they don’t watch them.

“We would have them [the boys] at home, and we would have these VHS tapes of Looney Tunes [and] Bugs Bunny. So from an early age of like 3, 5, 6, 7, they were watching ... They would just be mesmerized. I mean, they loved cartoons, and they’d just laugh.”

About eight years ago, the twins wanted to go to a cartoon museum, somewhere they could see old film collections. Surprised they couldn’t find one, they made their own.

Originally, their family’s two-car garage was the setting for their museum because they had a piece of Warner Brothers memorabilia hanging on the wall and the boys and their father created the wooden cartoon cutouts displayed in their museum there. However, they didn’t start their collection until 2017.

Their collecting began when they and their father messaged people like Jerry Beck, a famous animation researcher, and the daughters of Friz Freleng, whose credits include Looney Tunes, Merrie Melodies and Pink Panther. Friz Freleng died in 1995 at age 89.

Over the years, the father told Beck about James and Jacob’s dream of creating a cartoon museum. Beck mailed them two boxes containing film, autographs from him, cartoons and autographed books. The family also goes antiquing, hunting for pieces to put on display in their museum.

The boys “have their own little fan base ... online that wants to see what they do,” their father said. “People really dig it.”

One of James’ favorite pieces of their collection is a 1936 reel he got in the mail titled, “I Wanna Play House,” directed by Freleng. It’s about two bear cubs roughhousing and playing games in the woods. The film took one month to ship due to it being from another country.

Jacob’s favorite part of their collection is the Pink Panther animation “cel” that they received from one of Freleng’s daughters.

Cel is short for celluloid. It’s a transparent sheet on which images are drawn to make animation by hand.

“I was friends with Sybil Freleng on Facebook, and I messaged them and told them, ‘I heard about... ‘Let It Be Me,’ [a cartoon] your father did, I was wondering [if] you have the original nitrates,’” said James. “She said



Top, part of James and Jacob’s film collection including the signed Pink Panther animation cel at their museum in Village Square Mall on Oct. 18. Middle, more of the brothers’ collection at their museum in Village Square Mall. Bottom, left to right: Bosko, the Talk-Ink Kid; Tom from Tom and Jerry; Jerry from Tom and Jerry; and another Bosko. The wooden cartoon cutouts displayed in the museum in the mall that were made by the twins and their father.



she doesn't know; she would have to go look. [Instead,] she gave me an animation cel with Pink Panther. That was really nice of her."

The cel is signed by Sybil herself.

Their collection includes, but is not limited to, the Pink Panther cel, a Sears Roebuck projector, a 16 millimeter Bell and Howell 1932 projector, a super 8 millimeter projector from the 1950s, a 1953 projector from Bell and Howell, lots of old 16- and 8-millimeter films and the hand-made cartoon cutouts they made with their father.

Setting up the museum had its challenges, but nothing a little elbow grease couldn't fix. The bouncy house they used instead of their garage, which was their father's idea, was tricky because it required six people to set up, and they only had four. They also hadn't organized the types of cords needed for their museum before, but because their father is a musician and has experience setting up events like this, he taught his sons a lot of what they needed to know. Setting everything up and tearing it all down was their biggest worry, said their father.

Traveling show

Their father called their October show in the Village Square Mall a success.

"All the other vendors that were there, they said that they were gonna also be like, 'Hey, let's get these guys in here. This would be really good. They're really good people,'" said the father. "A lot of kids ended up showing up and having a good time. Their teachers came from [the] high school where they graduated. It was really cool."

They want to make their event a regular thing at the mall, but they're still figuring out the details of it with the mall's manager.

The boys have more shows booked for the future but are holding off on doing them until they can register as an LLC, which is in the works. Along with the hope for regular mall appearances, the boys also put on their show for private parties and offer telegrams.

Right now, the show and museum like they had at the mall will cost interested parties \$1,500-\$2,000 for at least four hours because it takes them a lot of work and time, said their father.

"They really want to keep cartoons alive ... The good stuff that makes you laugh," he said.

Even while fighting anxiety and trauma, Jacob and James are now able to follow their dreams and turn them into reality.

"They're doing very good," said their father. "It's helping them move forward with their lives. It really is."



Top, Jacob presents *The Hound and the Rabbit* film, one of the many films in the brothers' collection. Middle, James describing his and his brother's collection during the Village Square Mall's garage sale. Bottom, the truck driven by the Penningtons to help advertise their business.



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EXCHANGING *Cultures*

Stewardson man welcomes Italian and German exchange students

Jeff Long

Effingham Magazine

Dennis Vahling and his wife, Brenda, were familiar faces for years around Stewardson and across the region as the owners of Vahling Vineyards for more than two decades. She died last year at age 60, leaving five grown children and 13 grandchildren.

Dennis Vahling, 63, continues to operate the business, his children long gone – embarked on careers of their own and raising families.

Over the summer a flier was posted at the vineyard seeking hosts for exchange students.

“The third time I walked by it, it’s like the Lord said, ‘I want you to do this,’” Vahling recalled.

In August, two exchange students arrived at his quiet home outside Stewardson – Samuel Crass, 16, of Eltville, Germany, and Franco Finzi, 17, of Varese, Italy.

“The Spirit does talk to you, if you listen,” Vahling said one recent evening as the trio prepared a spaghetti dinner. “It’s been good for me.”

Franco aspires to be a doctor. Samuel plans to continue in his father’s 30-acre vineyard.

Neither Samuel nor Vahling knew of the coincidence of their family operations before the exchange was arranged. Some

of Germany’s most famous vineyards are found within Eltville’s municipal limits, according to Wikipedia.

Vahling tills five acres on his Shelby County spread.

“Wine is wine,” Vahling said. “We make more sweet wines here, and they have more dry. It’s all good for you.”

“Where I come from, all around you are vineyards,” Samuel said. “And here it’s corn.”

The students are adjusting well to life in America. They serve as members of the student council at Stewardson-Strasburg High School and are also playing basketball.

“One difference is, here girls wear a nice dress and cowboy boots and in Italy girls wear a nice dress and nice shoes,” noted Franco.

They’ve made many friends, while updating friends from home on their experience.

“My best friend is doing the exchange here in the U.S.A.,” said Franco. “I think it’s a good experience, to get to know new people. And it’s a good way to practice my English.”

“My sister was in Tennessee last year,” said Samuel. “I thought, if she can do it, so can I.”

As the holidays approach, Franco and Samuel are looking forward to experiencing American traditions, which they say do not sound too different from home.

“One of the most important holidays is Christmas,” said



Shown sitting down for a meal of spaghetti recently are Samuel Crass, 16, Dennis Vahling and Franco Finzi, 17. Samuel is an exchange student from Germany and Franco is an exchange student from Italy. Vahling, who owns Vahling Vineyards near Stewardson, is hosting the students until the end of May. Photo by Jeff Long

Franco. "The 24th is the day before Christmas. We usually do dinner with all my family. We spend a lot of time together. On Christmas we have a big lunch with all the families and we have gifts."

A favorite holiday food of Franco's is panettone, described on simplyrecipes.com as "a towering round of sweet bread speckled with raisins, citrus, and almonds with a plush, but-tery texture that is popular all over Italy during the winter holidays."

"This is one of the most traditional foods in Italy," Franco said.

"We have three days of Christmas," Samuel said of Germany. "And on Christmas Eve we always celebrate at our house, with mashed potatoes and sausage and red cabbage."

One holiday neither get to experience is Halloween. And by late October, they had already gotten a taste of that particularly American celebration of things spooky and mischievous.

"Their friends took them TP'ing," said Vahling.

The Stewardson host is glad to be taking part. The exchange students still have plenty of time to experience life in rural America. They return to their homes at the end of May.

"It's better than I thought it would be," Vahling said. "You learn about their cultures and it's well worth it. I would encourage other people to consider it."

Top, Brenda Vahling is shown in this 2020 file photo. Bottom, shown are barrels of brandy being aged at Vahling Vineyards near Stewardson. Effingham Daily News file photos.



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Holiday Recipes

Every year the Effingham Daily News asks readers to submit their favorite holiday recipes. Here are some of the submissions from 2023. We look forward to the submissions for 2024.

CHICKEN CRANBERRY PINWHEELS

By Janet VanSant

- 4 oz cream cheese, softened
- 1/3 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 3 cups shredded, cooked chicken
- 1/4 cup finely chopped celery
- 2 green onions, sliced
- 2/3 cup dried cranberries (craisins)
- 1/2 toasted chopped pecans



Janet VanSant with her winning entry, Chicken Cranberry Pinwheels.

- 1/3 cup crumbled feta cheese
 - Salt and Pepper
 - 4 large flour tortillas
- Mix cream cheese, mayonnaise and Dijon mustard until smooth.

Stir in the chicken, celery, green onion, dried cranberries, pecans and feta cheese. Season with salt and pepper. Warm tortillas in microwave for 20 seconds. Spread 1/4 of the mixture on

each tortilla. Roll them up tightly and wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least an hour. Slice into one inch slices.



SHIRLEY TEMPLE CAKE

By: Connie Berg

Ingredients for Cake

- 1 1/2 cups butter, softened
- 3 cups sugar
- 5 large eggs
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp lemon extract
- 3/4 cup 7-Up or Sprite
- 10 oz maraschino cherries, halved (drain and reserve juice)

Ingredients for Glaze

- 2 cups powdered sugar
- 1 tsp lemon extract
- 3 to 4 tablespoons milk

Instructions

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

In large mixing bowl, mix together butter and sugar until light and fluffy.

Add in eggs and continue to mix until blended.

Add in flour and mix again until smooth.

Pour in lemon extract and 7-Up and beat to combine.

Fold in the cherries.

Grease a bundt pan with shortening, then dust with flour.

Spread the batter into the greased and floured bundt pan and bake for 1 1/2 hours or until center is set.

Allow cake to cool for 10-15 minutes in pan.

Turn the cake onto serving dish and let cool slightly and then using a skewer, poke holes all over the top of the cake and pour the reserved cherry juice slowly over the top making sure the juice gets soaked up. It's OK for it to seep to the bottom and soak as well.

Let cool completely.

Meanwhile mix together the glaze ingredients and drizzle over

the top of your cake.

Top with more cherries if desired.



MINI SAUSAGE QUICHES

By: Jewel Brown

Ingredients

1/2 cup butter, softened
3 oz. cream cheese
1 cup flour
1/2 lb. Italian sausage

1 cup shredded Swiss cheese
1 tablespoon snipped chives
2 eggs
1 cup half-and-half
dash cayenne pepper
salt to taste

Instructions

Beat butter and cream cheese until creamy. Blend in flour to make dough for crust; refrigerate

1 hour. Press dough into muffin pan (I use cupcake size). Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Cook sausage until browned. Drain off any drippings. Sprinkle sausage evenly into muffin pans. Sprinkle with Swiss cheese and chives. Whisk eggs, half-and-half, salt and cayenne; pour over sausage in pastry shells. Bake 20 to 30 minutes until set. Remove from pans. Serve hot or cold.



Connie Berg holding the winning casserole, Chicken Skroodle.

CHICKEN SKROODLE

By Connie Berg

1 box skroodle noodles, cooked and drained
2 cans cream of mushroom soup
1 can mushrooms, drained (optional)
1 small onion, chopped
1 1/2 cups celery, chopped
3 Tbsp butter, melted
1 Tbsp Greek seasoning
1 lb Velveeta cheese, cut in cubes
1 can evaporated milk

1 small can chopped pimentos (optional)
2 cups chicken, cooked and diced

Saute the onion and celery in melted butter. Mix all the ingredients together. Place in a large buttered casserole dish. Bake at 350 degrees for 1/2 hour or until bubbly.



APPLE PUDDING CAKE

By: Teresa Walk

Ingredients:

4 cups apples (peeled and diced into small pieces)
2 cups sugar
2 eggs
3/4 cup oil
1 tsp. vanilla
2 cups flour
1 1/2 tsp. soda
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. cinnamon

Apple Topping:

1/2 cup brown sugar
2 Tbsp. cornstarch
1/2 stick butter
1/2 cup white sugar
1 cup water
1 tsp. vanilla

Instructions:

Place diced apples in bowl and add sugar. Stir often so they make plenty of juice. DO NOT COVER!

Let stand one hour. Beat eggs; add oil and vanilla. Mix and pour over apples. Mix flour, soda, salt and cinnamon and blend well! Add to apple and egg mixture. Bake at 350 degrees in a well-greased 9 x 15 pan for 40 minutes.

Instructions for Topping:

Mix water and cornstarch first. Then add other ingredients except the vanilla. Stir so it does not get lumpy. Boil until thick and clear. Add vanilla. Pour over cake immediately when taken from oven.

Very moist!



Teresa Walk holding her winning dessert, Apple Pudding Cake.



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Holiday Pets



Every year the Effingham Daily News asks readers to submit pictures of their pets in a holiday setting. Here are some of the submissions from 2023. We look forward to the submissions for 2024.



Nancy Ervin's dog Daisy.



Jim and Julie Hecht's dog Gracie.



Jess Andruss' dog Maggie Lou.



Tony and Katie Hildebrand's cow Oliver.



Marie Arebelo's dog Flurry.

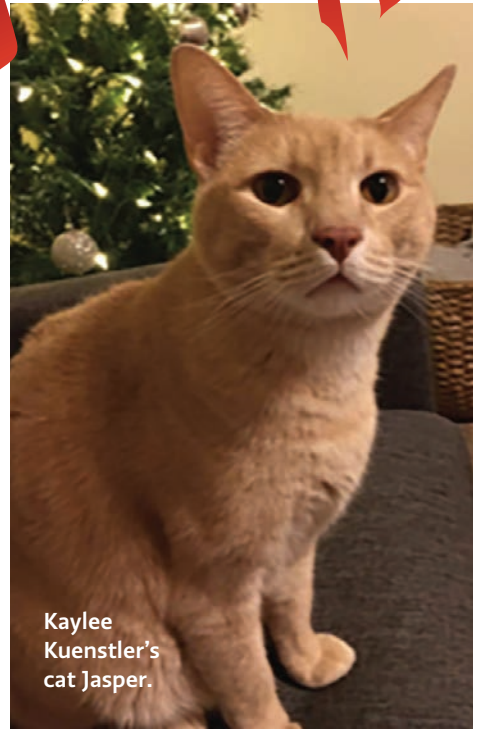




Randy and Cindy Esch's dog Derby.



Sarah Burris' grumpy elf boxer Dolly.



Kaylee Kuenstler's cat Jasper.



Randy and Cindy Esch's dog Andy.

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Looking back at 'Shop with a Deputy' in 2023

The Effingham County Sheriff's Office and the Effingham County Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 300 held their annual "Shop with a Deputy" program at Walmart on Dec. 19, 2023.

"It was a big success," said Effingham County Sheriff Paul F. Kuhns.

The event was organized and administered by School Resource Officers Deputy Alex Ritz and Deputy Dustin Lustig.

"They put a lot of work into this event, but the reason we are able to fund the shopping is our many generous sponsors and donors," Kuhns said. "It is not unusual for individuals to drop off donations to our office, and we receive many donations from area businesses. All donated money is spent on our area children and this is a very popular fundraiser."

In 2023, 57 area children participated and each child could spend up to \$200. The children who are chosen for the event are picked by their school teachers and counselors. Each child is paired with a police officer or school official and they must purchase at least one set of clothing and one item for themselves. A rule to purchase at least one item

for themselves may seem unnecessary, but children are often most excited about buying for their parents and siblings, and have to be reminded.

Officers that act as chaperones often have stories to tell about their experiences with the children that will tug at your heart and remind you of the giving spirit of the season.

"Merry Christmas!"



K9 Deputy Johnathon Torbeck, K9 Dax, SRO Alex Ritz and Deputy Dale.



Bill Hammer of Altamont as Santa Claus.



K9 Deputy Johnathon Schuette. ▲▲

Deputy Andrew Mudgette waits in line with students. ▶▶





Sheriff Paul F Kuhns, who says he is one cop who shouldn't eat cookies, was in charge of the cookies.



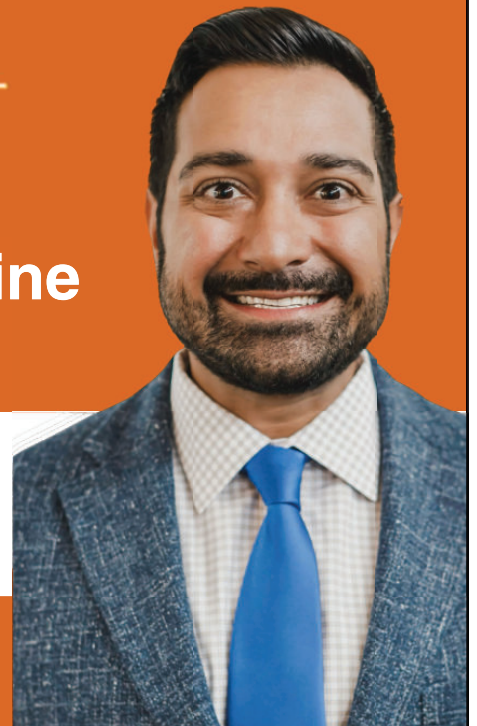
Altamont Superintendent Casey Adam with a student. ▲▲

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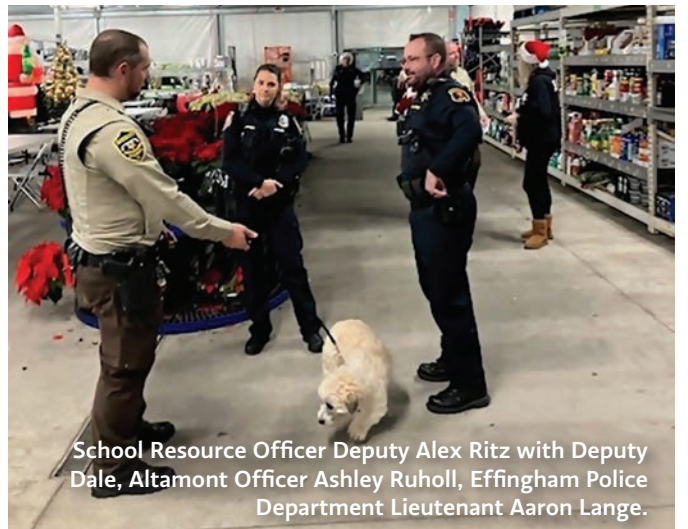


School Resource Officers Alex Ritz and Dustin Lustig.



Beecher City High School Principal Carrie Burks gives instructions.

▲▲ SRO Alex Ritz gives pre-shopping instructions to parents and volunteers.



School Resource Officer Deputy Alex Ritz with Deputy Dale, Altamont Officer Ashley Ruholl, Effingham Police Department Lieutenant Aaron Lange.

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Altamont Counselor Amy Ruckman assists a student.

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

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R. Samuel Postlewait	Hughes Tenney Postlewait Coale LLC	Decatur	217.428.5383	AG; Close/Private Held Bus; Comm Li; RE: Comm; Trust/Will/Estate
Larry A. Apfelbaum	Kanoski Bresney	Decatur	217.429.3509	Workers' Compensation
Todd A. Bresney	Kanoski Bresney	Decatur	217.429.3509	Personal Injury: General
William J. Harrington	Kanoski Bresney	Decatur	217.429.3509	Personal Injury: General
Robert M. Javoronok Jr.	Kanoski Bresney	Decatur	217.429.3509	Personal Injury: General; Workers' Compensation
Kathy A. Olivero	Kanoski Bresney	Decatur	217.429.3509	Workers' Compensation
John J. Waldman	Kanoski Bresney	Decatur	217.429.3509	Personal Injury: General; Workers' Compensation
Jack Kiley	Kiley Klein Ltd	Decatur	217.428.0948	Civil Appell; Comm Lit; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; PI Def: Gen; PI: Gen
Keith W. Casteel	Samuels Miller Schroeder Jackson & Sly	Decatur	217.429.4325	AG; Bank/Financial Instit; Environmental; RE: Comm; Trust/Will/Estate
Joshua J. Dubbelde	Samuels Miller Schroeder Jackson & Sly	Decatur	217.429.4325	Close/Private Held; RE: Commercial; RE: Residential; Trust/Will/Estate
Scott E. Garwood	Samuels Miller Schroeder Jackson & Sly	Decatur	217.429.4325	Close/Private Held; Merger/Acquisition; RE: Comm; Trust/Will/Estate
James T. Jackson	Samuels Miller Schroeder Jackson & Sly	Decatur	217.429.4325	Commercial Litigation; Personal Injury Defense: General; School
Craig W. Runyon	Samuels Miller Schroeder Jackson & Sly	Decatur	217.429.4325	Banking; Creditor Rights; RE: Comm; RE: Residential; Trust/Will/Estate
Darrell A. Woolums	Samuels Miller Schroeder Jackson & Sly	Decatur	217.429.4325	AG; Banking; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; RE: Comm; Trust/Will/Estate
Timothy M. Shay	Shay & Associates Law Firm LLC	Decatur	217.425.5900	Personal Injury: General; PI: Professional Malpractice; Workers' Comp

This **EMERGING LAWYER** has been identified by their peers to be among the **TOP LAWYERS** in Illinois who are age 40 or younger OR who have been admitted to the practice of law for 10 or fewer years.

Kaylee I. Boehm	Dove & Dove	Shelbyville	217.774.2137	Adoption/Reproductive Technology; Family
Gina Couri-Cyphers	Kanoski Bresney	Decatur	217.429.3509	Civil Appellate; Personal Injury: General
Jordan T. Klein	Kiley Klein Ltd	Decatur	217.428.0948	Close/Priv Held; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; PI Def: Gen; Trust/Will/Estate
Kathleen Wrigley Pletsch	Samuels Miller Schroeder Jackson & Sly	Decatur	217.429.4325	Close/Priv Held; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; RE: Comm; RE: Res; TW&E
Stephanie I. Shay-Williams	Shay & Associates Law Firm LLC	Decatur	217.523.5900	Personal Injury: General; Workers' Compensation

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HOLIDAY 2024 • EFFINGHAM | 27

HOMETOWN CHRISTMAS

The 2024 Hometown Christmas is Dec. 7 in downtown Effingham. The festivities start at 3 p.m. and last until 6 p.m.

Here are some pictures from last year's event, when Christmas music and the smell of kettle corn filled the cool winter air.

A large crowd of residents, many of them families, gathered around the Effingham County Courthouse Museum lawn for the Lighted Christmas Parade organized by the Effingham County Chamber of Commerce.

"It's really good to see all these people here to enjoy everything that we have downtown," said one organizer.



Karli Burley of Effingham holds her son, Kase Burley, 4, beside a reindeer from Dahnke Family Farms during the 2023 Hometown Christmas in downtown Effingham. ▼▼

Residents begin to line up along the street in downtown Effingham in preparation for the lighted parade which took place during the 2023 Hometown Christmas.



Effingham Police Department Detective Justin Quandt, left, and Effingham Police Department Communications Manager Billie Bales, right, stand in front of the Walmart in Effingham in 2023 during a fundraiser for the Salvation Army of Effingham County. ▼▼



... waves to residents as he rides on an
... Fire Department truck during the
... Hometown Christmas Lighted Parade.



▲▲ A snowplow truck owned by the city of Effingham travels through downtown Effingham during the 2023 Hometown Christmas Lighted Parade.



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Residents wait outside of Santa's House with their children in downtown Effingham following Santa's arrival during the 2023 Hometown Christmas.



Effingham Firefighter Kenneth Hayes, left, and Effingham Fire Department Lieutenant John Kronewitter, right, stand in front of the entrance to the Walmart in Effingham in 2023 as they help raise funds for the Salvation Army of Effingham County.

◀◀ A parade participant drives a tractor through downtown Effingham during the 2023 Hometown Christmas Lighted Parade.

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Robotic surgery is evolving. Here's what that means for patients.

Story
Wade Zhou | Stacker Studio
Photo
Stacker files

A medical team made history in September by performing the first fully robotic heart transplant at the King Faisal Specialist Hospital & Research Centre in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Doctors spent two and a half hours controlling machines to replace the heart of a 16-year-old patient. The hospital claims the operation was less invasive than traditional heart surgeries, meaning the patient would feel less pain, be at less risk, and recover more quickly.

Surgical procedures often require a high degree of precision, which can be challenging even for experienced surgeons. The precision of machine-augmented surgery has the potential to greatly reduce the risks of medical procedures, where even small human errors can have serious consequences. More than 250,000 Americans are estimated to die annually due to medical errors, according to a Johns Hopkins study published in 2016. These errors include surgical mishaps, incorrect medications, and wrong diagnoses.

Robots have been used to assist in surgeries since the 1980s, with a growing number of medical practitioners around the world leveraging the technology. Recent advances in artificial intelligence are now accelerating progress in this field, potentially expanding the capabilities and applications of robotic surgical assistants. Medical Technology Schools analyzed news reports and academic research to explore the evolving world of robotic surgeries.

Surgery is gradually becoming more mechanized

In 1985, doctors used the PUMA system to perform neurosurgical biopsies, taking samples of peoples' brains so doc-

Sophisticated advances in medical technology continue.



tors could study tumors—an inherently risky procedure. In 1998, the da Vinci premiered, eventually establishing itself as the most popular robotic surgery platform. That year, it was used in Leipzig, Germany, to perform heart surgery in a much less invasive way than operations done purely by hand.

The 1990s also saw the development of remotely operated robotic surgery systems, which allowed doctors to operate on patients from a distance. One such design was the Medical Forward Area Surgical Team, a robotic surgery system funded by the Department of Defense. MEDFAST could be mounted into an armored vehicle and driven to the front lines to allow for a virtual telesurgical procedure.

Sophisticated advances in this technology continue, from high-definition 3D visualization to improved dexterity and motion scaling. New machines bring even more features, including tables that rotate so doctors can reposition patients during surgery; and fluorescence imaging that uses specialized dyes and lighting to help doctors identify body features such as veins and organs.

Artificial intelligence is coming

Medical technologists today are increasingly integrating AI into robotic surgery systems. These advancements involve real-time processing of data, such as providing surgeons with tactile feedback that simulates the sensation of tissue resistance. Modern AI systems also feature more state-of-the-art camera technology, capable of automatically zooming in and focusing on relevant anatomical structures. AI can also identify critical features like blood vessels and nerves, and even highlight areas where cancer cells are likely to be located.

Researchers are also actively working on developing nanobots, which will allow doctors to operate at the cellular level. These tiny robots are usually less than 1 micrometer across—about a third of the width of a single strand of spiderweb silk—and are designed to navigate through the bloodstream delivering drugs directly to cells. They could, for instance, deliver chemotherapy directly to sick cells without affecting healthy ones, greatly reducing the harm this medication does to people.

Technologies that were once the stuff of science fiction are coming sooner rather than later, even with their high cost and the additional training for surgeons the breakthroughs will require. In the long term, robotic surgeries are likely to actually lower costs by freeing up doctors' time. Despite the growing capacity of these machines, however, they all still require human involvement—at least for now.

Story editing by Nicole Caldwell. Additional editing by Kelly Glass. Copy editing by Tim Bruns. This story originally appeared on Medical Technology Schools and was produced and distributed in partnership with Stacker Studio.



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Consider the 'minor bulbs' — crocuses, snowdrops and more — when planting for spring

Story

Jessica Damiano
Associated Press

Photo

AP Photo/Julia Rubin

As the summer garden winds down, it's time to think about spring flowers, and the best way to ramp them up would be to plant bulbs now.

We're all familiar with tulips, daffodils and hyacinths, the popular, colorful -- and omnipresent -- harbingers of spring. But there's a class of lesser-known beauties called minor bulbs that may not get as much attention, and that's unfortunate because they can provide the earliest splashes of color when our souls need it the most.

Make no mistake: Minor bulbs get their name from their size, not their importance in the garden. Most are less than an inch in diameter, which makes them easy to plant,

but their impact is great.

They also tend to "naturalize," or multiply, each year, and can be planted in large groupings under trees and shrubs or even right in the lawn, where their foliage usually dies down just as mowing season begins. You might even interplant minor bulbs with tulips and daffodils to start the party early.

Which bulbs are 'minor bulbs'?

Perhaps the most well-known of the minor bulbs is the crocus (*Crocus* spp.), which displays white, cream, purple, lavender, orange or yellow flowers above 2- to 5-inch-tall stems and grassy foliage.

Winter aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*) is another ground-hugger, reaching only 3-6 inches tall. Its shiny, upward-facing, yellow, but-tercup flowers will unleash a carpet of color over bare soil or a dormant lawn as you await the beginning of spring. It's also great in rock gardens.

Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*) is a 3- to 6-inch plant in the Amaryllis family with dainty, white flowers that bloom in late winter.

Glory of the snow (*Chionodoxa*) is a lovely 4- to 6-inch plant with tiny, upward-facing, star-shaped blue flowers with white centers.

Grape hyacinths (*Muscari*) are among the tallest of the minor bulbs. The armeniacum species tops out at roughly 6-8 inches tall with blue or purple, densely packed, urn-shaped flowers reminiscent of tiny grape clusters. The latifolium species, named for its broad foliage, offers similarly shaped but unique color-blocked, blue-and-purple flowers on foot-tall stems.

A bloom of snowdrops appear in winter in Westchester County, N.Y., on Feb. 7, 2017.



Spacing, depth and other bulb-planting tips

Regardless of which bulbs you decide to plant, I'm giving you permission to ignore the spacing recommendations that come with them (you must, however, plant at the recommended depth for each bulb type). This advice applies to major bulbs like tulips, as well.

Never plant any bulbs in single-file rows, which, I promise, will lead to disappointment. Instead, group them together, ideally in drifts of 12, 20, 100 or more. If that sounds expensive, you're right; it can be. Look for bulbs sold in bags for the best value or buy from catalogs that offer bulk pricing (I've also had good results with some I purchased at a warehouse club).

When planting directly into the lawn, don't fret about placement. Just toss a handful of bulbs into the air and plant them where they land. In spring, they'll look like they've been there for years. Trust me on this.

No need to fertilize them now. Those little bulbs contain all they need to survive winter, grow, thrive and bloom. The time to feed them, if necessary, is right after their flowers die down in spring.

To discourage critters from making a winter

meal of your spring garden, add a handful of crushed oyster shells to each hole or cover a bed of bulbs with chicken wire before back-filling with soil. Plants will grow through the buried wire openings, but squirrels and other digging animals won't be able to gain access. If burrowing creatures are a problem, lay the chicken wire both above and below the bulbs before burying, or lay the bulbs in a specially made bulb cage or basket and bury the whole thing.

Jessica Damiano writes weekly gardening columns for the AP and publishes the award-winning Weekly Dirt Newsletter. You can sign up here for weekly gardening tips and advice. For more AP gardening stories, go to <https://apnews.com/hub/gardening>.



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Nov. 22: Hairball: A Tribute to Arena Rock. Homage will be paid to some of the biggest arena acts in the world including Van Halen, KISS, Motley Crue, Queen, Journey, Poison, and Aerosmith. Hairball's show includes lights, sound, video screens, smokebombs, confetti and more! Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 8 p.m. www.theepc.org

Nov. 22: Pink Friday in downtown Effingham from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

November 22: Hamilton Homicide Murder Mystery. Dinner starting at 6:30 pm. Enjoy a three course meal while you witness an hilarious night of comedy with this musical mystery at Tuscan Hills Winery in Effingham. Contact winery for tickets.

Nov. 23: Ozark Jubilee's Branson Country Christmas. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center. Shows at 2 and 7:30 p.m. www.theepc.org

November 27: Walking Through Wonderland 2024. You're invited to an enchanting Visit Effingham experience! Walking Through Wonderland will host its 4th annual walk-thru event Wednesday, November 27th from 5 - 8:00 p.m. For one night only, Wonderland in Lights will close to all vehicles and offer visitors an opportunity to get up close and personal with our larger-than-life light displays. This event is free to the public, but donations are welcome. View the displays at your own leisure, listen and sing along to your favorite Christmas music and wave hello to Santa Claus when you reach the end of the walk. Complimentary refreshments, including hot cocoa and cookies, will be available fireside, while supplies last, courtesy of Dan Hecht Chevrolet-Toyota. Don't forget to stop by Visit Effingham's Holiday Headquarters to pick up your free holiday souvenir, make a Christmas craft + cookie and get your face painted (these activities are free to the public). Parking will be limited at Community Park, so please consider using our free shuttles, courtesy of Wad It Up Transportation. The shuttle will run continuously, from 5 to 8:00 p.m., and will pick up and drop off at the Courthouse Museum parking lot. To extend your festivities, visit Lights on the Lawn in Downtown Effingham to view our larger-than-life, 3-D holiday light displays.

November 28-January 1: The Wonderland in Lights at Community Park in Effingham IL. Open to vehicles seven days a week from 5 to 9 p.m., Sunday through Thursday, and from 5 to 10 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. For more information, call the Effingham Tourism Office at 217.342.5310.

Nov. 29 through Dec. 28: Tinsel & Tails A Holiday Experience at Cardinal Golf Course, 15737 N. Beach Rd., Effingham IL. 4 to 9 p.m. each evening, to benefit EARS (Effingham Animal Rescue Sanctuary). This new holiday event will take patrons on a short golf cart ride to enjoy festive light exhibits, sip on hot chocolate, roast

s'mores and get plenty of snuggles by the fire pit. Engage in family-friendly activities and take memorable photos with festive backdrops. Tickets are available at effinghamanimalrescue.com. For more info contact Beth Clough at Earszurescue@gmail.com

Nov. 30: Small Business Saturday in downtown Effingham from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

November 30: Name that 80's Tune by Amy's Awesome Traveling Trivia at Tuscan Hills Winery. Doors open 6:00 pm. Bonus: Prize for Best-Dressed Team! Contact carrie@effinghamwinery.com for more information.

December 1: Christmas Open House at Effingham County Museum in Effingham IL from 2:00 to 4:00 pm. Light refreshments served. See our displays and our beautiful Christmas decorations plus register for a \$25 gift certificate!

Dec. 1: All I Want For Christmas Craft & Vendor Show. 80+ Crafters & Vendors. Pictures with Santa. Gift Card Giveaways. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Thelma Keller Convention Center in Effingham.

December 5, 6, 7 & 8: "Sorry! Wrong Chimney" Christmas Dinner Theater Show production by FACE at Hendelmeyer Park Ron Diehl Rec Center in Effingham. The show is a fast and funny Christmas tale full of mistaken identities and zany foul-ups with a smattering of slapstick. Dinner theater shows December 6 and 7. Theater only shows December 5 at 7:30 pm and December 7 at 2:00 pm. Call or text 217-246-2903 with any questions.

Dec. 6: Buckets N Boards: Holiday Remix. Celebrate the holiday season with this hilarious, high-energy show chock-full of amazing percussion, ridiculous songs, spectacular tap dancing, inventive instrumentation and an incredible variety of musical talents! Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Dec. 7: Hometown Christmas Festival in downtown Effingham

Dec. 7: Lee Greenwood Christmas. An icon in country music, Lee Greenwood sings his Christmas hits! His hits include "I Don't Mind the Thorns if You're the Rose", "Dixie Road", "Somebody's Gonna Love You", "Mornin' Ride" and "Going, Going, Gone." Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

December 8: Small Town Christmas at Liberty Park in Dieterich IL from 2:00 to 5:00 pm. Reindeer Games, Cookie Kits, Live Nativity, Craft Kits, Hot Chocolate, Santa arrives 2:15 pm, Golf Cart Parade at 5:00 pm.

Dec. 8: Christmas In The Air. Christmas In The Air is a first class, Broadway-style song and dance review, wrapped up within a feel-good holiday storyline told by Santa's favorite elves. Starring Rand Productions' dazzling precision dancers, known as the Tinseltoes,

the show delivers the perfect mix of classic holiday melodies with modern favorites and original music. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 4 p.m. www.theepc.org

December 13: Santa Claus in his house at Liberty Park in Dieterich 6:00 to 8:00 pm.

Dec. 14: The Polar Express: An Interactive Movie Experience. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 3 p.m. www.theepc.org

2025

Jan. 5: Colin Mochrie & Brad Sherwood: Asking for Trouble. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Jan. 18: Aladdin: An Interactive Movie Experience. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 3 p.m. www.theepc.org

Jan. 24: One Night in Memphis: Presley, Perkins, Lewis & Cash. One Night in Memphis is a rocking concert tribute to legendary Sun Records recording artists Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis Presley. Be a witness to a rock and roll royalty jam session that pays tribute to the famous night of Dec. 4, 1956 when the four legendary artists played together at the Sun Records studio in Memphis, featuring the hits including "Blue Suede Shoes", "Folsom Prison Blues", "Great Balls of Fire", "Whole Lotta Shaking Going On", "Shake, Rattle and Roll", "Don't Be Cruel", "Hound Dog" and many more! Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Jan. 25: Serial Killers with Dr. Scott Bonn. Renowned criminologist and serial killer expert Dr. Scott Bonn takes you inside the minds of the world's most savage and prolific murderers. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Feb. 1: Bored Teachers: The Struggle Is Real. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Feb. 6: DRUMLine Live! DRUMLine Live is an international tour based on the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) marching band tradition, incorporating original compositions and soul-infused interpretations of Top 40 hits, group performances range from colorful, choreographed routines to heavy doses of drum riffs and cadences. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Feb. 7: Puppy Pals Live! Action-Packed, Comedic Stunt Dog Show as seen on America's Got Talent! Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Feb. 8: The Marshall Tucker Band. Hits include "Heard It in a Love Song", "Can't You See", "Fire on the Mountain", "Long Hard Ride",

"Ramblin" and many more! Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Feb. 15: EagleMania. EagleMania is the World's Greatest Eagles Tribute Band! EagleMania has been thrilling audiences all over the country with its stunning five part harmony and its uncanny ability to emulate the unmistakable sound of the Eagles. The show includes some of the Eagles' greatest hits, as well as some of the solo work of Don Henley, Glenn Frey and Joe Walsh. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Feb. 22: Six String Summit. This show features six of the area's best guitar players backed up by the amazing Summit Band. The 2025 line-up features: Marty Williamson of Effingham, Flight 50; Terry Smith of Fairfield, Edgewood Opry; John Sawyer of Lerna, Sawyer Brothers Band; Isaac Biver of Freeburg, Isaac Biver Music; John Spicer of Patoka, The John and Dave Duo; and Jon Clarkson of Mattoon, The Brat Pack. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

March 8: Mike Super: Magic & Illusion. Mind-blowing illusions combined with the hilarity of a headline comedian! Mike Super is the winner of NBC's hit TV show Phenomenon and is the only magician in history to win a LIVE magic competition on primetime network television and voted America's Favorite Mystifier! Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

March 14: Starship featuring Mickey Thomas. Mickey Thomas is the owner of the soaring voice that propelled Starship through the decade of the 80s. Hits include "We Built This City", "Sara", "Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now" and "It's Not Over Til It's Over". Starship's live performances include its hits, as well as a few selections from Jefferson Airplane. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

March 21: Hank & My Honky Tonk Heroes with Jason Petty. Celebrate Hank Williams 100th birthday with this tribute! Over the years, Jason Petty has had the chance to meet and become friends with those who know and played with Hank Williams. Jason has translated the stories he learned from them into a beautiful mosaic of live music and storytelling, taking the audience down memory lane. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

March 22: Here Come The Mummies. The Mummies is an eight-piece, funk-rock band of 5,000-year-old Egyptian mummies with a one-track mind who have been direct support for P-Funk, Al Green, Mavis Staples, KC and the Sunshine Band and Cheap Trick and have rocked Super Bowl Village as well as being regulars on "The Bob and Tom Show" and appeared on "That's My Jam" with Jimmy Fallon. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

March 28: The Drifters, The Platters, & Cornell Gunter's Coasters. It's not a concert...it's a party! Enjoy the Rock N Roll/Doo wop sound with hits including "Charlie Brown", "Yakety Yak", "Poison Ivy", "Only You", "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes", "The Great Pretender", "Under the Boardwalk", "Up on the Roof", "This Magic Moment" and "On Broadway". Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 5: BlackHawk. BlackHawk produced hit songs including "Goodbye Says It All" and "Every Once in a While". Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 11: Randy Travis: The More Life Tour and the Original Randy Travis Band with Guest Vocalist James Dupre. Randy Travis' longtime touring band, consisting of Steve Hinson, David Johnson, Lance Dary, Bill Cook, Joe Van Dyke and Herb Shucher along with longtime tour manager Jeff Davis will rejoin "Hoss," as they affectionately call Travis, on the road for the first time since right before his stroke in 2013. The show will consist of Dupre and the band performing all 16 of his iconic number ones including "On the Other Hand", "Forever and Ever, Amen" and "Three Wooden Crosses". Randy Travis will make a special appearance and VIP passes are available that include a meet and greet with the country icon himself. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7:00 pm www.theepc.org

April 12: Great White & Slaughter. Great White & Slaughter are two esteemed acts who will share the stage for a night of rock! Great White has hits including "Once Bitten, Twice Shy" and "Rock Me". Slaughter's hits include "Up All Night" and "Fly to the Angels". Two of the 80's biggest acts together in one night! Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 25: EPC Idol Finals. Singers from across the region are invited to participate in a singing competition to determine who will be the next EPC Idol and the winner of a \$1,000 cash prize! Preliminary contests will be held at sponsoring locations with winners of each preliminary contest to take the stage for a night of performances to determine who will be voted the EPC Idol, voted by audience members via electronic voting. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

May 31: Scott Wattles & The Blue Suede Crew. Songs include Elvis hits and Gospel music. Tickets Online Now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

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