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FEATURE STORY

PAGE 18 | Nurturing a Love for Theater | by Cathy Griffith



Colleen Johnson in "Come From Away" at The Little Theatre on the Square in Sullivan this past August. Submitted photo

PUBLISHER

Beverly Joyce
beverly.joyce@indianamediaingroup.com

EDITOR

Jeff Long
jeff.long@effinghamdailynews.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Cathy Griffith
cathy.griffith@effinghamdailynews.com

ART DIRECTOR

Natalie Reidford

CONTRIBUTORS

Marie Adamick
Herb Meeker
Jessica Damiano
Josh Hoffner

SALES SUPERVISOR

Jody Hardiek
jody.hardiek@effinghamdailynews.com

ADVERTISING SALES CONSULTANT

Julie Harkins
julie.harkins@effinghamdailynews.com

CONTACT US

(217) 347-7151

E-MAIL

news@effinghamdailynews.com

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ON THE COVER:
From left: Madyson Hodge, Zoe Lucy, Sydney Ritz and Rylea Hodge enjoy the Corn Maze at Schaefer Pumpkin Patch. Submitted photo

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From the editor

St. Francis of Assisi Church has been a centerpiece of the Teutopolis community for 175 years. We thought that's a fine reason to have freelance writer Herb Meeker take a look back on those years for the Catholic church.

"We do have a corner on the market," St. Francis Pastor Joe Carlos said with a laugh as he commented on Teutopolis being a one-church town.

"It presents a commonality for people who belong to the parish. When something happens, people reach out to help others. The church is also a historical marker. This year has been a time for people to come together and celebrate the past and look forward to the future," Father Joe said of the celebratory year of the church's founding.

We hope that Herb continues his freelance work for *Effingham Magazine* and the *Effingham Daily News*. He's done good work for us so far. But we're also saddened by the departure of Marie Adamick, an EDN general assignment reporter for the past two years. She's off to a bigger newspaper in Ohio, and we wish her well. She left one final story: A look back at how Effingham County became one of just four counties in Illinois to adopt a "no-kill" animal shelter policy.

In 2022, Heather Mumma was a member of the Effingham County Board. She drafted a resolution for the county to become no-kill — meaning animals could only be put down if they had behavior issues or are significantly suffering from illnesses.

As the weather begins to cool and summer transitions into fall, we get to thinking about pumpkins.

That's why Cathy Griffith headed over to the Schaefer Pumpkin Patch near Beecher City for a chat with Ryan

Schaefer, who told her that he decided in 2016 to grow pumpkins to boost income from his farm. But drawing people out to the country to buy pumpkins proved challenging.

"We quickly realized we were going to have to add a few attractions to get people to come out," he said.

So, he started using things already available on the farm — corn and straw — to create mazes. Schaefer and his family gradually added more attractions in their spare time. Ten years later, the pumpkin side hustle has blossomed into a popular destination. It now has a long list of attractions, food, merch and, of course, pumpkins.

Meanwhile, for most of the year, Colleen Johnson lives in a Chicago suburb. But come summer, her love for acting brings her back to an unexpected place — her hometown of Effingham to perform at The Little Theatre on the Square in Sullivan.

Johnson says her love of musical theater came from her mother, who was a music teacher.

"She always — since I was a little baby and still — instilled the love of music," she said.

She chatted with Cathy about her acting career and roots here in Effingham.

Those stories and more make up the fall 2026 edition of *Effingham Magazine*. Enjoy.



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.



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.



Marie Adamick is a former general assignment reporter for the *Effingham Daily News*. She left the paper in August for a reporting job in Ohio. 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.



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*St. Francis of
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Herb Meeker

For Effingham Magazine

Days before I was married 31 years ago in Teutopolis, my mother asked for directions from my hometown of Robinson to St. Francis of Assisi Church.

I told her she couldn't miss it. I explained the red brick church with its tall steeple and four-sided clock was in the center of town. But she still insisted on specific directions.

"Mom, it's the only church in town," I said.

That has been the story in Teutopolis for 175 years. Standing by the Old National Road, now known as U.S. Route 40, the Catholic church has been a centerpiece of life in the community founded by German immigrants in 1839.

"We do have a corner on the market," St. Francis pastor Joe Carlos said with a laugh as he commented on Teutopolis being a one church town.

"It presents a commonality for people who belong to the parish. When something happens, people reach out to help others. The church is also a historical marker. This year has been a time for people to come together and celebrate the past and look forward to the future," Father Joe said of the celebratory year of the church's founding.

Of course, Teutopolis has a fair measure of faith mixed with fun. Dakota Danielle, a native of Teutopolis and country music artist, summed up life as a "T-townner" in song with "One-Church-3-Bar-Town" eight years ago.

*This ain't your typical small town in the Bible belt
We work all week to make ends meet
Then take the time to relax and drink
We praise the Lord on Sundays
Then throw it down
In this One-Church-3-Bar-Town*

Martin "Sonny" Hutmacher, who served as local fire chief for 30 years, said Teutopolis once had five taverns and each with their own clientele. If that ratio of watering holes seems high then consider the number of grocery stores in Teutopolis during that time.

"There were six grocery stores in town then," he said.

The tall St. Francis church steeple, left, with its clock has been a centerpiece of Teutopolis for many decades. The clock chimed in the hours for village residents and that once served as a late-night reminder to teenagers it was curfew and time to go home. Herb Meeker photo

In a parish where many families had enough children to field a baseball team there had to be enough places in town to buy milk, bread, sauerkraut and sausage. No wonder Weber Brothers Hardware across from the church sold sausage stuffers for many years.

The Weber family has conducted business along Main Street for 134 years in Teutopolis just a short walk to the church. The men's clothing store measures tuxedos for weddings and proms. And many couples purchase their wedding rings in the jewelry store that once served the Knights of Columbus. And many of those couples have been married at St. Francis.

"Renting tuxes kicked in during the seventies. Before then men just wore suits for weddings. We do fittings for all ages. And there are the wedding rings. We are separate businesses, but we have a common entrance between our stores," said Tony Weber, the fourth generation of the family with the clothing store.

After the weddings, couples and their guests celebrated with friends with plenty of food and kegs on hand. Having fun is a Teutopolis tradition with the parish picnics and fundraiser events.

And the town knows how to celebrate the big birthdates of the village in style. The 2014 Terquasquicentennial (a word that proved a tongue twister for many residents that year) recognizing the community's 175 years as a village drew thousands to town for entertainment, games and competitions for the best early settler dresses and best beards. But some claim the 1939 Teutopolis centennial was a real wing dinger.

The late Jim Burford, known as the "ambassador of Teutopolis", once recalled how some out-of-town attendees were stopped by the centennial festivities along Main Street on Route 40, the two-lane highway that connected the east and west of the nation before Interstate 70 was built.

Burford, who was a boy at the time, said a fast-talking Teutopolis volunteer at an intersection pointed to a "detour" for out-of-towners around the celebration. Then some motorists were directed to park and invited to enjoy the centennial. Many shrugged their shoulders and joined in.

Teutopolis was a charitable community even to the hobos who hitched rides on railcars or traveled along the National Road. There was a hobo encampment near the town. Some of the hobos used their vocal chords to seek warmer abodes in town.

"Years ago there were some barns in town. There was one



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hobo who would sing ‘Can I sleep in your barn tonight,’” recalled Martin “Sonny” Hutmacher, who was Teutopolis fire chief for 30 years. “They would ask for some food from people and usually got it even during the Depression. It was about Christian charity for helping people down on their luck.”

The immigrants came to Teutopolis along the National Road looking for land to fulfill a dream. Most were farmers from northwest Germany and sought the freedom that America offered, including the right to worship as they pleased.

In the early years, the German Catholics were not welcomed by many Protestant residents living in Effingham County. The Catholic “Dutchtowners” were criticized for always speaking German, drinking too much beer and wearing those wooden clogs around the farm — that practical effort to save leather shoes from wear and tear would later provide the name for Teutopolis’ athletic teams.

And why did everyone in Teutopolis stop working at their jobs or in gardens to pray up to three times a day when a church bell announced the German “Angelus?” It was a German tradition, but it seemed bizarre to out-of-towners.

Hatred of foreigners in America has been aimed at Irish, Italian, east European, Asian and Latin American immigrants for much of United States history. And the old refrain, “Go back where you came from!” continues in America today.

The tensions between the German Catholics and Protestants came to a head in 1867 when rumors spread of cannons being delivered by wagons to Teutopolis. This caused some Effingham County residents to believe Catholics planned to kill their Protestant adversaries, according to the 175th Celebration Village of Teutopolis history book. Some people to the west and south of Teutopolis were getting armed for an attack but a “scouting expedition” to Teutopolis determined the so-called cannons were pipes for the new organ in St. Francis Church. Thus ended the “Dutchtown War” with no casualties except wounded pride for anyone being so gullible.

Though Teutopolis residents served their country in the military during the Civil War and against Spain in 1898, anti-German hysteria questioned the loyalty of the village during World War I. The federal government eventually learned the “City of Germans,” the translation of the village name, were true patriots. The church helped get that point across to misinformed patriotic zealots.

A baptismal font shows John the Baptist with Jesus, just one of many religious displays in the Monastery Museum at St. Francis of Assisi Church. Photo by Herb Meeker

Religious tradition in Teutopolis would have an impact on education both for the parish youth and young men training to become priests.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) first arrived in Teutopolis, in December 1861. Three sisters traveled from Milwaukee to start the Teutopolis mission and serve the growing community. This humble beginning started a tradition that provided education to generations of elementary and high school students throughout the St. Francis parish.

There were many religious-based schools and colleges in early America. Though it had nuns involved in education, Teutopolis would form a public school district. The nuns first taught in a section of their residence that stood by the future site of the present grade school. Then classes moved to the large brick Society Hall that once stood across the street from the church.

A high school was built on the west end of town a decade after World War I. Then in 1954, the Catholic Diocese of Springfield built a grade school on church-owned ground east of the church. Religious education continues in the

grade school before regular classes start and students attend morning Mass before the opening bell.

The school district leases the school and property from the Diocese. Residents say the building is a public school from the opening bell in the morning to dismissal in the after-

noon. Older students are offered religious classes in the grade school once a night during the week.

Taking the religious classes and attending Mass has been optional for families. There's the story of one curious grade school student of a Catholic family with a friend whose father was a Protestant preacher, so she was exempt from attending morning Mass. During that time, the friend would shoot baskets.

One night at family dinner, the "Cradle Catholic"

girl asked her father why her friend could play basketball instead of attending morning Mass. After a short pause, her father said, "Look, you haven't eaten your vegetables." That settled the religious question in simple German Catholic fashion.

Sister Christina Frick taught for 55 years through the Sisters of Notre Dame order. She said the religion in the school

"The little ones didn't know a lot about God. I wanted to make God more than just a name to them. And I was teaching them to be good Christians."

**— Sister Christina Frick,
55-year teacher**

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St. Francis Church and Monastery in Teutopolis, IL - 2000 gingerbread creation by Ruben Boyajian

Dr. Ruben and Mrs. Emily Boyajian



arrangement is a blessing for the community because it benefits education and maintains religious tradition for Teutopolis.

She recalled the importance of offering religious education to the younger students in the elementary grades.

"The little ones didn't know a lot about God. I wanted to make God more than just a name to them. And I was teaching them to be good Christians. We didn't use rulers on their knuckles either. I used love to teach them," Sister Christina explained.

Sister Clara Esker, a teacher for several decades, has come back to her hometown of Teutopolis. The former convent on West Main stands across the street where George Esker, her father, built a house. She has bittersweet memories of her education in Teutopolis.

"When I went to school here there were a lot of nuns in my life. I didn't have a lay teacher until I was in seventh grade. You built a closeness to the parish because the nuns were right there in school. I enjoyed the stories on religion," Sister Clara said.

She remembered when the school was ordered to take down the crucifixes from the classroom walls. "It was a sad day for us," she said.

Henry Siemer's family has been involved in business during much of the town's history and is active in the church. Henry and his father, Rick, are members of the church choir, and participate in many community events.

Siemer said the church offers magical moments for parishioners through the year. Those include the annual parish picnic, the midnight Christmas Mass and the blessing by priests of the animals ranging from kittens, puppies, dogs, chickens, horses and even goldfish. Reportedly no one has brought a boa constrictor so far to the blessings.

"There is something about a church picnic that is magical. Who can say they go to a church picnic and not have fun?" he said.

Siemer said so many people have accepted the church connection to the school as how things should be for Teutopolis.

"If I would have been told then that

This stained-glass window at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Teutopolis depicts Francis and his love of peace and nature.

other schools didn't do that, I would have thought it was something almost alien," he said.

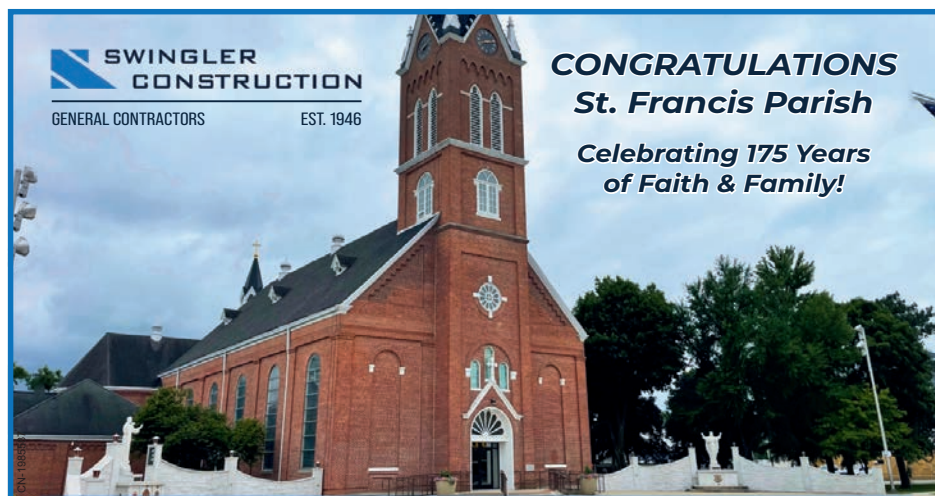
But for many years there was a group of men who were literally walled off from the Teutopolis community and the outside world as they trained to be priests.

The Catholic Monastery inside the church grounds was the home of novices or priests in training. A monastery is a place for religious reflection

separated from the distractions of the outside world. Therefore, a tall brick wall surrounded the church grounds for many years to provide isolation for the novices. Short sections of the wall still stand today behind the church.

The monastery was where they ate, slept, prayed and worked. Their sleeping quarters were narrow rooms with a simple bed and desk. There was an infirmary for treating the sick.

The monastery closed nearly 60 years



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ago and today those sections connected to the church are the Monastery Museum, opened during the 1976 Bicentennial year of the United States. The grounds of the monastery were also repurposed with the oval-shaped brick walking track later used by the grade school for physical education. That walking track was used by novices and priests when they completed their rosary or other dedications. Playground equipment and a basketball court was added and a wooden pavilion now hosts family reunions and special occasions.

The museum has displays on the religious and community history of Teutopo-

A painting of George Deymann making wooden shoes from blocks of wood hangs in the Monastery Museum. Deymann came from Germany to Teutopolis and produced the shoes for 50 years. His shoes inspired Teutopolis High School to name their athletic teams the Wooden Shoes. Herb Meeker photo



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lis. It is open to the public on the first Sunday of the month through much of the year. Volunteers explain the significance of the different items ranging from brown St. Francis-can clothing known as habits to old wicker baby carriages.

"A habit was given the first day to the novices when they arrived here. They made their own sandals and the cords. The knots in the cords represented the virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience," said Joyce Vahling, who works with museum volunteers, during a walk through the facility.

Father Dennis Koopman, senior pastor of St. Francis, was a novice at the monastery more than 60 years ago. He would move on to become a science teacher and later a chaplain for a nun's residence before returning to Teutopolis. He recalled the humble life during that time.

"I feel it a great honor to be here in Teutopolis during the celebration year for this church. I enjoy being here again," he said.

There are displays in the museum showing the artistic skills of the men who served at St. Francis. A confessional box, altar and section of a church pew all have intricate carvings. The impressive Nativity set has figures imported from Germany but the decorative background was made by local Franciscans. A cord making machine reduced the tedium of producing the cords for the Franciscans and that machine still working today was produced by a priest.

"They were very talented and worked with their hands," Vahling said.

The local history displays have furniture, toys, clothing

and, of course, wooden shoes made by a local shoemaker in Teutopolis.

"We've had so many things donated over the years," Vahling said.

Downstairs in the basement are farm equipment from the early days plus pedal-driven toy vehicles as well as the curved arch room known as the wine cellar.

To the east of the church stands the Franciscan mausoleum, where dozens of priests are buried in individual crypts. It was only one of two just burial places for Franciscans in the United States. Vahling said only one crypt is left in the structure.

To the south across the railroad tracks stands the St. Joseph Seminary Tower. The seminary was a Catholic college for advanced learning of clergy. It welcomed clergy from across the country arriving by train at the Teutopolis train depot.

"I had an uncle who attended the seminary. It was a big place that drew in men from different states," said Tom Thoele.

When the seminary closed, the local Knights of Columbus took possession. The Teutopolis Banquet Hall and Knight of Columbus Park hosts many community events and ball games on the nearby playing field.

An effort to clear debris from the old tower in 1975 produced a fire that seriously damaged the structure.

"They were burning debris in the parking lot and the heat caused the tower to catch fire. We had a time putting it out and keeping it from spreading to the Knights of Columbus building," Hutmacher said.

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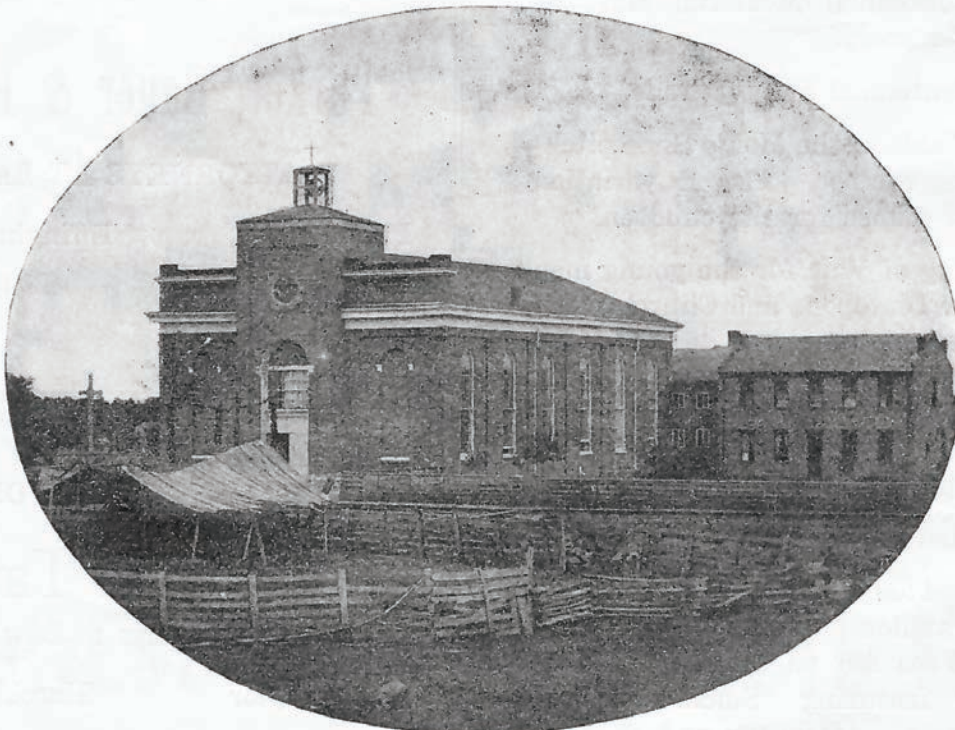
FUNERALS

The undertaker took the body to the funeral home for embalming and then brought it back to the family home for visitation. Neighbors or relatives sat with the body during the night. At the funeral Mass, the priest wore black vestments; the altars were covered with black cloth, and the Mass prayers were in Latin. Neighbors dug the grave by hand.

Shown are articles from the 2014 Village of Teutopolis Terquasquicentennial book relaying historical wedding and funeral practices.

WEDDINGS

These were held on Tuesdays or Wednesdays with the Mass around 8:00 in the morning. The early Mass was necessary because people had to fast from food from midnight before receiving Holy Communion. The bridal party went to a studio in Effingham to have their pictures taken. The reception, including a breakfast for the wedding party and a dinner for the invited guests, was held at the home of the bride's parents. The meal was prepared by relatives and neighbors. Often the family raised chickens and butchered and fried them for the wedding dinner. Flowers for the wedding came from the gardens of the families. Gifts were opened at the reception by the bride and groom. Many couples had a wedding dance in the evening at Thoele's pavilion east of Teutopolis.



Shown is the rededicated St. Francis of Assisi Church in 1862.

ST. FRANCIS CHURCH AND FRANCISCAN MONASTERY IN 1862.

The tower was seriously damaged and its future was in doubt. Don "Duck" Weber came forward to help restore the tower. The church also wanted to preserve that piece of local religious history.

"He came to me to design a plan for a new tower. What you see today is what came out of that," Thoele said.

There have been many changes to the church and the village since Father Joe first came to town in 1980.

"I was 33 years old and had never lived in a small town before," he said. "Parishioners were excited to see a young

The St. Joseph Tower stands south of the church property. It is a reminder of the seminary that stood where the Knights of Columbus Banquet Hall and nearby park are today.



priest when I came here. And I fell in love with the people here. I left for a new assignment a few years later. Someone put it on the radio when I was heading out and people were lined up to wave and wish me good luck. I cried."

In 1990, he joined the Navy as a chaplain. He went overseas and then to California. Those were hard times because young Marines veterans of the Gulf and Iraq wars were dying.

He left the Navy and came back to Illinois, serving as pastor in Bishop Creek. Then he was assigned to St. Francis again. He recently retired and Father Carmen Scuderi, who arrived at the St. Francis earlier this year, has taken over as Pastor.

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Nurturing A LOVE FOR THEATER

*Colleen Johnson brings
home her passion for
performance*



Colleen Johnson returns to her hometown of Effingham in the summer to perform at The Little Theatre on the Square in Sullivan. Photo provided

Cathy Griffith
Effingham Magazine



For most of the year, Colleen Johnson lives in a Chicago suburb. But come summer, her love for acting brings her back to an unexpected place — her hometown of Effingham to perform at The Little Theatre on the Square in Sullivan.

Johnson says her love of musical theater came from her mother, who was a music teacher.

“She always — since I was a little baby and still — instilled the love of music,” she said.

Johnson grew up watching “The Wizard of Oz” and “The Sound of Music” and always gravitated toward musicals. She would often sing around the house.

“All of our little home videos from the 1990s, I am just singing at the top of my lungs in pretty much all of the videos,” she said.

Early on, Johnson knew she wanted a career in musicals, recalling the exact moment she realized it.

“I remember seeing ‘The Phantom of the Opera’ at the Fox

Theatre in St. Louis when I was really little and saying to myself, ‘Ooh, I wanna do that. That’s what I wanna do,’ she said. “After, there was never a time where I had any strong desire to do anything except theater.”

Johnson performed in every show in high school, including “The Wizard of Oz” and “The Sound of Music.” She then performed in countless musicals at Western Illinois University, including “Miss Saigon,” “Parade,” and “Little Women,” while pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in musical theater.

After getting her degree, Johnson began auditioning full-time. Her passion for Disney led her to a job in the entertainment department at Disney World, where she performed in a show at Epcot. She then went to “cattle call” auditions, where theater companies come from all over the country to a location to find talent.

“You get a number, and you go on stage, and you audition for hundreds of companies at one time,” she explained.

Johnson booked several jobs from the auditions. She eventually landed a national tour of “Fiddler on the Roof” in which she played Tzeitel. During that time, she got to know the violinist in the pit orchestra and later married him. They both found careers that let them keep their love for music. He teaches orchestra, while she instructs at a performing arts school. They also have two young boys.

Full Circle

In 2015, Johnson joined the Actors' Equity Association. Then, she started working at The Little Theatre in Sullivan, where she first got a taste of theater as a little girl.

On her fifth birthday, Johnson remembered telling her parents she wanted to bring her friends to The Little Theatre to see the show "Cinderella."

"It was really, really cool when I was little. It was like the Little Theatre was Broadway," she said. "The caliber of performers and the productions were outstanding. And it's really cool that people in Effingham have a place like the Little Theatre in their backyard to see these really high-quality performances. And that really is what sparked my love for theater as well. So it's been full circle for me now to get to perform there regularly. It's been cool."

Johnson said she can rehearse and perform at the theater, thanks to her parents, Fred and Kendra Johnson, who help look after her kids in Effingham.

"While I am able to kind of fill my cup and still continue to pursue my art on stage, we're lucky that the Little Theatre is so close to Effingham that I'm able to commute back and forth," she said.

The proximity allows Johnson to spend time with her kids in the morning, then drive to Sullivan for rehearsals and shows in the evening. The arrangement has worked out nicely, she added.

"And I'm very lucky that they continue to hire me," she said.

Her sons have seen her perform. However, her 7-year-old was truly impressed when she played the title role in his favorite movie, "Mary Poppins," at a Little Theatre production a couple of summers ago.

"It was a really magical experience for him to be able to say my mom is Mary Poppins," she said.

For him to see her open her magical umbrella and fly across the stage, she said, was "really special."

Besides Mary Poppins, Johnson has played other dream roles she has, including Jo in "Little Women," Princess Fiona in "Shrek the Musical," and Éponine in "Les Misérables."

"I've been very, very lucky to play some really fantastic roles," she said.

Broadway is often seen as the pinnacle of theater. However,



Colleen Johnson in "Come From Away" at The Little Theatre on the Square in Sullivan this past August. Submitted photo

after 20 years in the business, Johnson has come to accept that it isn't the "end-all, be-all" for her. She recognizes there's more to explore beyond the bright lights.

"Broadway does amazing things, but regional work across the country is absolutely fantastic and needed and just as high caliber as New York City," she said. "I'm very content if I'm able to continue to pursue my passion here in the Chicago area. They call it the Second City because the caliber of performance out here is second to none."

Challenges

Johnson has faced two challenges in her musical theater career: supplementing her income and balancing work with family.

"When I was in my 20s and before I was married and had kids, I was lucky enough to be able to work really consistently and kind of hop from one job to the other across the country. And then, obviously, after having children and deciding that I wanted to put down roots in one place, one of the biggest challenges is just being able to kind of pick and choose what shows I do and what shows fit my lifestyle now that I am a mom."

That is why Johnson has chosen to perform at The Little Theatre over the past several years.

"Because of the unique situation with my parents being able to help out with my kids," she said.

As her kids get older, she said she will have more opportunities to perform in the Chicago area more regularly. For now, she teaches at the Paramount School of the Arts in Aurora, near her home.

"I'm able to still stay in the arts, and do what I love, but on the



Colleen Johnson plays the iconic role of Mary Poppins at The Little Theatre on the Square. Submitted photos

other side of the table, teaching instead of performing in the interim," she said.

Preparing for a Performance

"A big one is preparing my voice, making sure that I take care of my voice so that it is at its peak performance level," said Johnson.

Johnson warms up every day and continues to take voice lessons to make sure she's taking care of her voice.

She ensures she gets enough sleep and exercise to be physically ready for every show.

"We are, you know, vocal athletes, just like a baseball or basketball player. Musical theater is a sport in and of itself," she said.

That's one reason Johnson has taken up running. She's run several half-marathons and is training for her first full marathon. The sport's endurance demands help her maintain stamina on stage.

"It's very important to have performers continue to build our physical strength," she said.

Johnson also makes sure they arrive prepared for the first day of rehearsal.

"I know all of the music and the lyrics before we even get to rehearsal," she said. "That way, once we start rehearsals, it's more of a perfecting everything as opposed to actually learning anything."

Johnson said the cast becomes like a family. She called "Come From Away," her most recent production, an "ensemble piece of theater" this past summer. The inspiring musical is about the many planes from all over the world stranded on 9/11 in the little town of Gander, Newfoundland.

"There were 12 actors on stage, and every single actor really held their own and told a story. And it's amazing how quickly you meet these people, and that's part of why I love theater: it really is a big family, and the theater community in and of itself across the country is a small community. Everybody really does know everybody, and it's a really special community to be a part of," she said.

Mishaps and Superstitions

Johnson feels fortunate that, as a veteran performer, she hasn't faced any "super crazy" mishaps on stage.

However, she does recall a man in the balcony having a heart attack during a performance of "The Sound of Music" in Colorado. They stopped the performance and called an ambulance to assist him. He turned out to be OK, she noted. She was in a show where part of the set collapsed, and colleagues have also called out when they couldn't continue during a performance.

"So one minute you're doing a scene with somebody, and you turn around, and there's somebody else there," she said.

Like many actors, Johnson has a special superstitious gesture she performs before each show to keep unfortunate mishaps at bay.

"If I do something in tech rehearsal, for example, if I am about to go on for a scene and I touch my left hand to a wall, I have to then touch my left hand to the wall every single time before that scene. It's so silly, but things like that in theater are very real and happen," she said.

She also has a ritual after the show.

"I have a specific tea that I like to drink after every show. I drink a tea called 'Throat Coat' to soothe my voice and kind of help decompress after a show," she said.

Inspiring and Aspiring

Johnson has met one of her musical theater idols, Stephanie Block, who won a Tony for her lead performance in "The Cher Show." Block was also nominated for "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" and "Falsettos." In addition, she became the first actress to originate the

role of Elphaba in "Wicked" for the show's first national tour, a role she later reprised on Broadway.

"I've been able to meet her a few times and correspond with her, and she's wished me well. The theater community really is so small, so I feel lucky that I was able to meet her and talk with her," she said.

Johnson advises aspiring theater performers never to stop training and practicing.

"Practice doesn't make perfect. Practice makes better. Even Broadway-caliber performers are still in voice lessons and dance lessons and acting lessons," she said. "If you have the passion and the acting bug, as they say, it doesn't have to really go away. So make sure that you nurture that."



Top, Colleen Johnson, second from left, with her friends outside The Little Theatre on the Square to attend a performance of "Cinderella." Bottom, a 6- or 7-year-old Colleen Johnson is shown dressed as a random princess before seeing a show at The Little Theatre in Sullivan. Submitted photos



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These plants add color to gardens and pots when summer flowers fade

Story and photos

Jessica Damiano
Associated Press

The hanging planter on my porch has seen better days. And by better days, I mean the summer annuals have dried to a brown crisp that likely has the neighbors wondering if the Addams Family has moved in. I like to believe the extreme heat did them in, but I know neglect has also played a role.

I dug up some impatiens from the garden and plopped them in the basket to save face, but with September approaching, it's time to freshen it up for a new season.

Try these for a burst of fall color

Pansies are my usual go-tos for fall. Their smiling faces of orange, purple and yellow brighten even the most faded of gardens. And fall-planted pansies will return in spring, ready to bloom for another season. That's because, unlike most garden annuals, they're done in by the heat of summer, not the cold.

I've bordered most of the front garden bed with Sedum Autumn Joy, a perennial in horticultural zones 3-9 that changes with the seasons. Its green early-season flowers gradually take on a pinkish hue that darkens as summer progresses, landing on a fall-appropriate maroon by mid-September. It's the only flowering plant I can think of that meets the seasons where they are every step of the way.

You might add mums and then let them stay.

As summer annuals fade, consider replacing them with garden chrysanthemums, but don't pull them out at the end of the season. Plant

them at the front of beds, where their orange, rust, bronze, yellow, pink, purple or white flowers will obscure the fading plants behind them. Leave them be, and they'll return year after year for effortless fall flair.

Firecracker plant (*Cuphea*) is an easy-care, heat-tolerant choice with striking, tubular orange flowers that attract hummingbirds. It's hardy in zones 8-11 and used as an annual in cooler regions, where it blooms from spring through frost. But fall plantings work, too, and the plant makes a dramatic addition to containers alongside lantana, fountain grass (*Pennisetum*), coral bells (*Heuchera*), globe amaranth (*Gomphrena*) or calibrachoa.

Croton, a foliage plant with yellow- and orange-veined, large green leaves, is typically treated as a houseplant outside of the tropics, but I wouldn't discount it as a container or bedding plant, especially in fall arrangements.

Don't forget shrubs and vegetables, real or ornamental

Reblooming azaleas like Encore and Perfecto Mundo bloom in spring, like their cousins, but make repeat performances straight through frost. Check specific varieties to ensure they are hardy in your zone.

Firecracker bush (*Russelia equisetiformis*) is unrelated to the firecracker plant above, but boasts similar weeping, arching stems, covered in bright red tubular flowers on 3- to 5-foot-tall (.9- to 1.5-meter) shrubs that hummingbirds and butterflies love. It's hardy in zones 9-11.

Rainbow chard is an edible contender, its orange, red and green leaves perfectly suited to the season. After it has performed its aesthetic role, cut it down and sauté it with salt, pepper and garlic.

Miniature red, orange and purple ornamental peppers make interesting focal points, too, but they should be considered only decorative because of the pesticides used in the ornamental trade. They would taste awful, anyway.

Ornamental cabbages and kales are technically edible, but it's best to limit their use to the garden for the same reasons. They'll add texture and color, with their purple, green or cream leaves remaining fresh until temperatures below freezing collapse their cell walls.

Then it'll be time to start planning your spring garden.

Jessica Damiano writes weekly gardening columns for The Associated Press. She publishes the Weekly Dirt Newsletter.

Shown are ornamental peppers in a fence planter, left and a fall-themed container planted with colorful Croton, yellow garden mums and Gomphrena, right.



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 Sarah Bush Lincoln



Jim Beam's Corner Cattery recently joined the Effingham County Chamber. Submitted photo

'An INSPIRATION for others'

Effingham County
among just 4 counties
in state with no-kill
animal shelter policies

Marie Adamick
Effingham Magazine

"This county should take pride in saying 'Out of 102 counties, we are one of the four counties in Illinois that's no-kill,'" said Heather Mumma, owner of Jim Beam's Corner Cattery.

In 2022, Mumma was a member of the Effingham County Board. She drafted a resolution for the county to become no-kill — meaning animals could only be put down if they had behavior issues or are significantly suffering from illnesses.

Between 400 and 900 cats and dogs in the county's Animal Control and Shelter were being put down annually until January 2019, which comes out to between one and three animals being put down every day.

The resolution passed with the help of several people, including then-chairman of the board Jim Niemann, neighboring rescues and fellow animal lovers.

"It was unbelievable. So many people were just bawling," said Mumma. "Can you imagine killing a thousand animals a year?"

When Mumma joined the Effingham County Board in 2019, the late Jim Beam contacted her because nobody had been in the Effingham County Animal Control and Shelter in three years. This shocked Mumma, so she visited the shelter and found 17 dogs in the freezer, waiting to be picked up for trash.

For two years, 2019 and 2020, Mumma and Beam requested the Effing-



From left: Effingham County Animal Control and Shelter Officer Mikaela Larson holds Sugar, Effingham County Animal Control and Shelter Chief Michelle Shoot holds Teddie, and Effingham County Animal Control and Shelter Officer Cheyenne Willenborg holds Chatter — the office manager. Marie Adamick photo

ham City Council expand the shelter since the city pays for the building's costs. The county pays for utilities and employees. After calculating a \$105,000 estimate for the expansion — and Beam offering to pay anything that was over the estimate — the city approved it.

During this time, Mumma took in 37 cats and kept them in the back of her previous business to save them from being put down.

In 2020, Mumma and Jim Beam opened Jim Beam's Corner Cattery. Prior to this, Beam had helped start the humane societies in St. Louis and Tampa, Fla., with Chuck Berry, Pete Rose and George Steinbrenner; contributed to the funds that were used to purchase the current Effingham County Humane Society; founded E.A.R.S.; and helped push the no-kill resolution.

Beam purchased the building, and Mumma put roughly the same amount into interior construction and design, with the help of her

Jim Beam's Corner Cattery Owner Heather Mumma holds one of the adoptable shelter cats. Marie Adamick photo





One of the adoptable cats at Jim Beam's Corner Cattery walks on the cat wheel inside the lobby. Marie Adamick photo

previous business — B&B Homes. There are now 115 cats at Jim Beam's Corner Cattery.

Initially, the Cattery was going to shelter dogs, too, but couldn't because of utility-related issues. However, they have re-homed about 40 dogs over the years — puppies and dogs from abusive situations.

Mumma hopes to start a program at the Cattery where people can register their pets, get them spayed and neutered, get rabies and wellness shots, and microchipped for \$50 to \$65. Normally, that costs \$300. The Cattery wouldn't turn anyone away, such as if someone came from another county, and one veterinarian is already willing to help. However, the business is looking for more retired veterinarians to help.

"It sounds like a pipe dream, but hey, we never thought we'd be no-kill, either," said Mumma.

Mumma also wants to create a trap-neuter-release program for nearby cat colonies to help prevent more sickness and more birth abnormalities. The Cattery can't take in these cats because they're not friendly, and they also help keep the area's rodent population down.

"We pinch every penny," said Mumma. "That whole wall in there with the climbing and everything, Eric (a long-time, passionate volunteer) made that out of cat trees that people threw away and branches out of the woods."

Salami, one of the cats Jim Beam's Corner Cattery took in, came to them with five bullets in her. The kid from the home she came from kept her alive — without their parents knowing — by feeding her salami. Both her back legs were paralyzed, so an employee built a wooden ramp up to her litter box. Salami lived in the Cattery for three years before a family came in to adopt her.

According to Mumma, the family said since they were a broken family, they wanted a broken cat.

"They love her. They're crazy about her. She hangs out with



Effingham County Animal Control and Shelter Officer Mikaela Larson plays with some of the shelter cats with a wand toy. Marie Adamick photo



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Nov. 14 7:00 pm	Little River Band	\$90	\$70	\$60
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Dec. 12 3:00 pm	The Grinch (Interactive Movie)	\$40	\$20	\$20
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their dog. It's so cute," said Mumma. "Sometimes, you think, 'Oh, they'll never get adopted,' and then the perfect person comes."

Jim Beam's Corner Cattery is at Effingham's weekly farmers market, and is always looking for ways to participate in fundraisers and other community events.

Although Effingham County's no-kill policy was passed in 2022, the Effingham County Animal Control and Shelter has been no-kill since January 2019.

"It's not changed since, and none of us would be here if it did," said Michelle Shoot, Effingham County Animal Control and Shelter chief, who joined the team in 2018. "I told them I would not stay if it was [pro] euthanasia. That's not something that I was OK with."

Shoot says the shelter gets numerous calls from other animal controls asking for help in becoming no-kill.

"It is an inspiration for others, so that's a good thing," said Shoot. "We've helped quite a few counties to kinda guide them to get them there."

Effingham County Animal Control and Shelter works with neighboring counties, E.A.R.S. and the humane society to

help those wanting to adopt find the perfect pet. First, an application is submitted to the shelter, and then a meet-and-greet is scheduled with the family and their pets — if they have any.

"We're all in communication trying to get dogs out because we don't care if you adopt from us. We just care that you adopt," said Mikaela Larson, animal control officer at Effingham County Animal Control and Shelter.

"We always just try to match the animal with the right family. That way, it's a happy ending for everybody," said Shoot.

Currently, they have 60 cats and 25 dogs.

Effingham County Animal Control and Shelter is looking for more volunteers to help with everything from walking dogs to helping with social media to taking pictures of the fur

babies.

To contact the Effingham County Animal Control and Shelter, call 217-347-5695.

To contact Jim Beam's Corner Cattery, call 844-687-2287.

**"Sometimes, you think,
'Oh, they'll never get
adopted,' and then the
perfect person comes."**

**— Heather Mumma,
owner of Jim Beam's
Corner Cattery**

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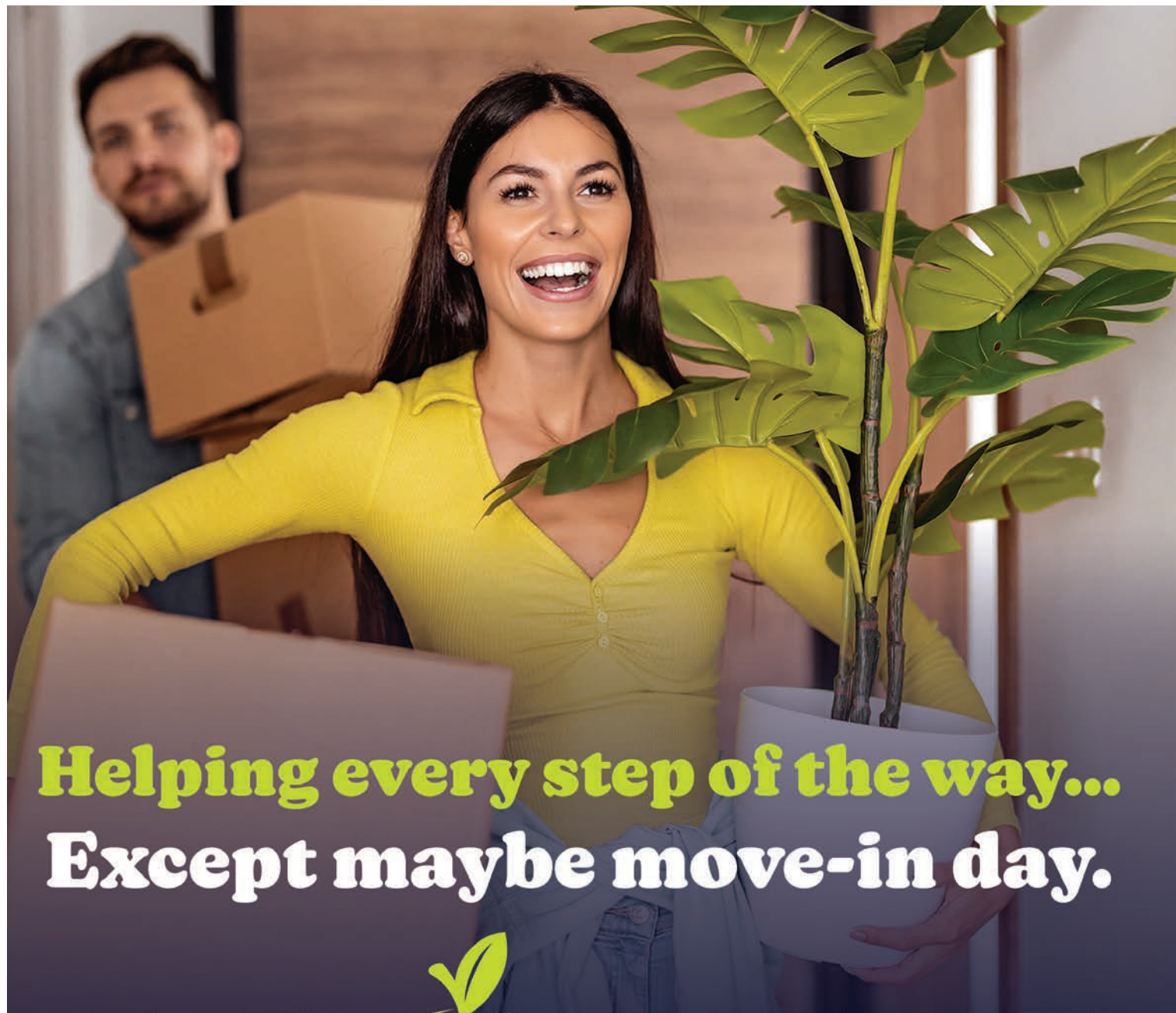
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From left are Sydney Ritz, Zoe Lucy, Rylea Hodge and Madyson Hodge.
Submitted photo



SCHAEFER PUMPKIN PATCH

HAS BLOSSOMED

Cathy Griffith
Effingham Magazine

Ryan Schaefer wanted to boost income from his farm southwest of Beecher City. So, in 2016, he began growing pumpkins.



Visitors to Schaefer Pumpkin Patch have many games to choose from. Submitted photo

But drawing people out to the country to buy pumpkins proved challenging.

"We quickly realized we were going to have to add a few attractions to get people to come out," he said.

So, he started using things already available on the farm – corn and straw – to create mazes. Schaefer and his family gradually added more attractions in their spare time. The farm didn't gain popularity until 2020 when the pandemic hit.

"That was our big year. That's when everyone was looking for some sort of an outdoor activity," he said. "We had tons of people."

As the number of visitors grew, Schaefer began adding staff and barns to host activities during inclement weather.

Ten years later, the pumpkin side hustle has blossomed into a popular destination. It now has a long list of attractions, food, merch and, of course, pumpkins.

Inside the dome shelter, visitors can enjoy games like tic-tac-toe, bowling and bag toss, along with a straw maze, mini golf, corn pits and big slides.

"That's a big, big deal," said Schaefer of the slides.

Outside, vis-

itors can find round bales to jump on, duck races, covered swings, trike track, and wagon basketball that uses a gravity, or grain, wagon with a hoop on the back. They can visit a petting zoo. They can also hop on one of two hayrides that run throughout the day. The hayrides feature wooden animals painted by local artist Jamie Stang Ellis, who also painted all the signs for the pumpkin patch.

"She's kind of taken us from ... the farm to more of a very nice-looking agritourism place," he said.

The pumpkin patch, like many agritourism spots, has a kitchen that serves favorites such as hamburgers, hot dogs and tacos. There's also an ice cream barn that attracts a steady crowd.

"It doesn't matter if it's 20 degrees; the line's still deep. Really can't believe it," said Schaefer.

It also has food vendors, including Macklin Kettle Corn and Witteborg Concessions.

For those who want to take home a pumpkin, the Schaefers still grow about 10 acres.

The pumpkin patch opens on weekends in mid-September. Its popularity led Schaefer to add Fridays in October. The Schaefers also host field trips on Thursdays and Fridays, with school groups coming from Effingham and surrounding counties.

Hannah and Billy Hodge at Schaefer Pumpkin Patch in 2020. Below, one of the many animals at the Petting Zoo last year. Submitted photos





"It's been a really good addition. It works well with our farm," said Schaefer.

The patch has attracted people from out of state, including Indiana and Missouri. Schaefer said families with members from nearby states will gather in Effingham for the day. People driving down the interstate looking for something to do will stop too. And some people will come to the patch multiple times a season.

"It's the cheapest thing they can do on the weekend," said Schaefer.

That's one of the reasons Effingham resident Billy Hodge and his family have been going to the pumpkin patch for the past five years. With four daughters, "it fit our budget," he said. Also, it's local and easier to get to than larger pumpkin patches farther away.

Billy and his wife, Hannah, first went to the patch after coming across a sign while driving one day.

"My wife said, 'Let's go by that.' And then we went. And then we've been going back ever since," he said.

Even though their daughters are now grown, they still make it a family tradition to go every year. They usually visit a couple of times, with the sons-in-law now joining in the fun.

"We try to do at least one big family get-together going out there," he said.

Hodge said his daughters love looking for gourds and picking their own pumpkins. They enjoy the petting zoo and food vendors. Macklin Kettle Corn is a favorite. They also love the spots for photo ops.

"It's just a place where I start looking through my phone and start seeing memories from there as the kids grow up," he said.

There's so much to do, Hodge said. It takes a few hours to do it all, and it's always packed with people.

Left, One of the many animals at the Petting Zoo last year. Below, this Trike Track is among the many activities at Schaefer Pumpkin Patch. Submitted photos



Pumpkins are available for purchase. Submitted photo



The Patch has several buildings for indoor activities. Submitted photo



The Patch has several activities for visitors to choose from. Submitted photo



"They keep growing every year; it feels like," he said. "It's just a really cool atmosphere."

Hodge is looking forward to continuing the tradition with his granddaughter, Estella. This will be her first year joining them.

"I can't wait. I'm excited," he said.

The Schaefer family starts putting everything out for the patch in August. Schaefer and his dad do a lot of work on the patch in between farming. When the patch opens, his wife handles admissions, and his dad's wife runs the kitchen. Schaefer and his wife have four children between the ages of 8 and 15 who help, too.

"They get put to a lot of work," he said.

"It's very stressful, but it's fun. We enjoy it," he said. "The people have fun. It sort of makes all of the work that you've done worth it."

Schaefer Pumpkin Patch is located at 2917 N. 2210 St., Beecher City. Posted signs direct motorists to the patch. The patch is also listed on Google Maps. Admission is \$10. Children ages 2 and under can enter for free. Food and drinks are sold separately. For more information, visit their Facebook page.

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Sippin' (and chuggin') through the years with a party mainstay — the red Solo cup

Story

Josh Hoffner
Associated Press

It's red. It's soft plastic. And it probably contains your favorite beverage.

The red Solo cup belongs on any list of the country's most distinctly American objects, but it's actually more than a single object. It is a symbol of the American psyche — a country that loves a good party, summertime barbecues, kegged beer, tailgating and above all, friendship and community.

The red Solo cup is the receptacle for each of these proud traditions. It also serves as a foundation for beer pong and functions as a vessel for contraband

public drinks. It works as a spittoon and a reusable household cup that survives countless top-rack cycles through the dishwasher. Sharpie name inscriptions are its universal language, along with condensation formed by an ice-cold drink.

Its backdrops include campgrounds, block parties, parks, tailgates, keggers and county fairs.

It's also part of the story of capitalism in 20th-century America. The Chicago-based Solo Company originally made coned paper cups for water coolers; in the 1970s, it was modified to plastic and patented in the year of America's 200th birthday. It grew into a massive disposable foodware company and was sold for about \$1 billion to Dart Container Corp. in 2012.

You can trace many plot points of the country's last 80 years with the cup, starting with the advent of a postwar office culture and now-iconic — and cliché — water coolers. The country's advertising and marketing ethos then allowed a mass-produced plastic cup to become an American household and party mainstay.

More recently, it fueled college drinking traditions and a tailgate culture that is practically a business unto itself. And ten-figure sales to larger corporations have become regular occurrences at the corporate level.

The cup achieved a new level of status after country star Toby Keith recorded a rhapsodic paean about it. Keith initially viewed the song as a throwaway but warmed up to it and included it on a 2011 album.

Perhaps he and his producers realized that a song whose first verse includes "barbecues, tailgates, fairs and festivals" contains all the touchstones necessary to connect with American audiences on a deeper level.

"Red Solo cup/I fill you up," the chorus goes. "Let's have a party."

And America loves a good party indeed.



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Snapshots

The 2026 Effingham County Fair is in the books, but the memories will last forever. Here's a look back at this year's fair in photos from the Effingham Daily News.



▲▲ Jacob Bone was up early to clean a group of dairy cows at the Effingham County Fair. Photo by Herb Meeker



▲▲ The Little Miss Pigtail Contest winners lined up for photographs with Effingham County Fair Junior Miss Lydia Wendling and 2025 Little Miss Pigtail Charlotte Mefford. From left, Lillian Palmer, second runner-up Miss Pigtail, Wendling, 2026 Little Miss Pigtail Kinley Jurgens, Mefford, and first runner-up Brooklyn Gephart. Photo by Herb Meeker



▲▲ 2025 Miss Effingham County Fair Queen Krista Phillips, 2026 Miss Effingham County Fair Queen Marah Kirk and 2026 Junior Miss Effingham County Fair Queen Lydia Wendling. Photo by Marie Adamick



◀◀ Kinley Jurgens smiles as she has her hair measured by Little Miss Pigtail judges Korrie Hartke, left, and Ava Hecht. Photo by Herb Meeker

▶▶ From left: Haydn Baker, Korina Hecht, Marah Kirk, Lily Hardiek, Krista Phillips, Alisyn Rae Kollmann, Bekka Bloom, Olivia Wermert and Elle Keller during the 2026 Miss Effingham County Fair Queen Pageant. Photo by Marie Adamick





▲▲ Colten Evans of Beecher City watches one of his rings fly toward rows of bottles in the ring toss game at the Effingham County Fair. Photo by Herb Meeker



▲▲ Amazing colors and a mix of many sounds were present across the Effingham County Fair. Herb Meeker photo



▲▲ Two demolition derby competitors drew cheers when they raised the wheels off the ground on a hard crash at the Effingham County Fair. Photo by Herb Meeker

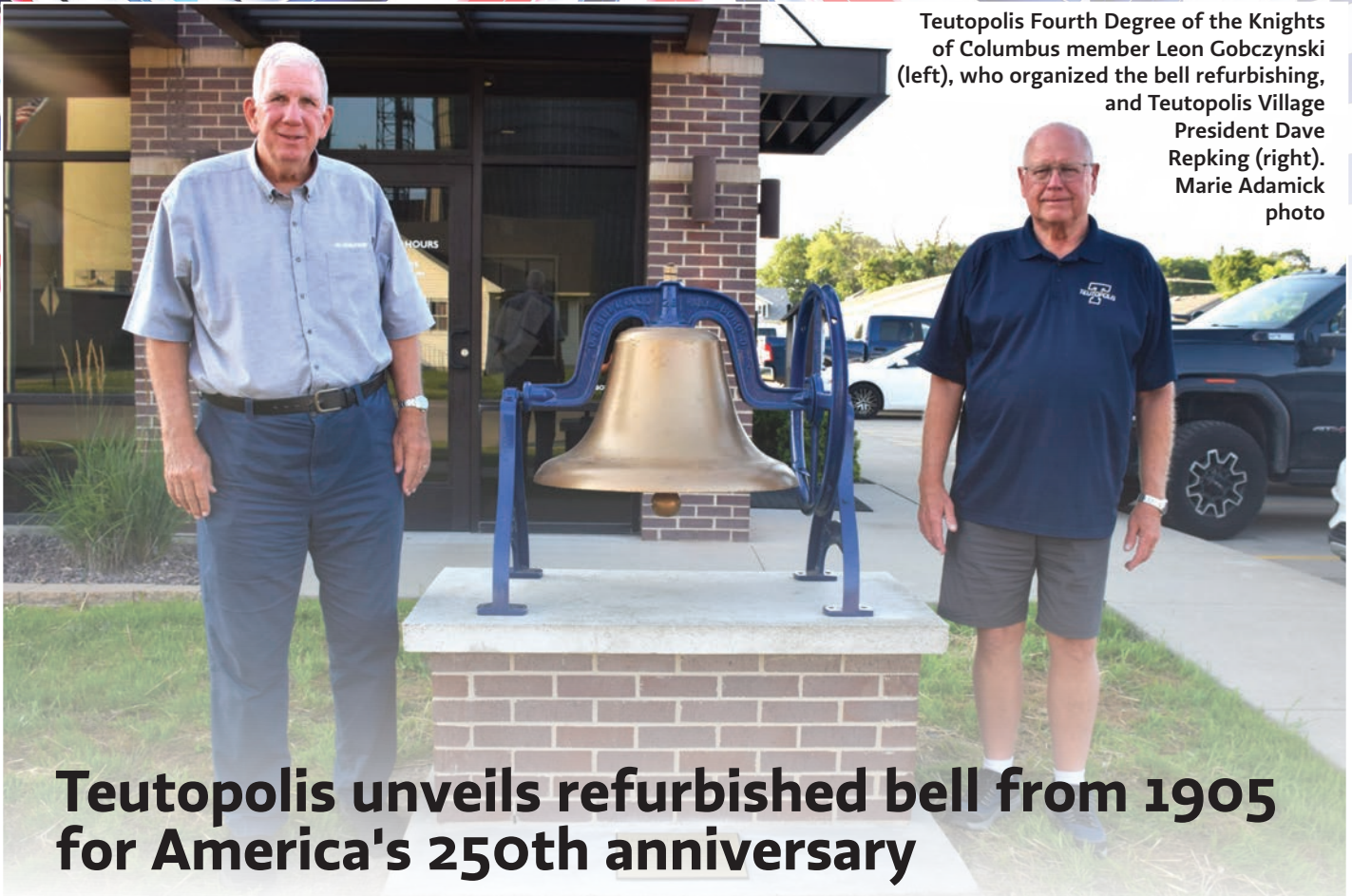
Zoey Boone, left, shows off her soft and cushy loot from one of the game venues at the Effingham County Fair. Helping her hold the prizes is her mother, Jill Brinkopf. They needed a large bag to carry away everything. Photo by Herb Meeker ▼▼



▲▲ Andrew Deichmann, left, and Annabelle Grant were just playing around in the kernel playground at the Effingham County Fairgrounds. Photo by Herb Meeker



Teutopolis Fourth Degree of the Knights of Columbus member Leon Gobczynski (left), who organized the bell refurbishing, and Teutopolis Village President Dave Repking (right). Marie Adamick photo



Teutopolis unveils refurbished bell from 1905 for America's 250th anniversary

Story and photo
Marie Adamick
Effingham Magazine

The Teutopolis Fourth Degree of the Knights of Columbus have unveiled a refurbished bell that the Village of Teutopolis used in the first part of the 20th Century as a way to celebrate the Village's history and the 250th anniversary of the United States.

At the start of 2026, the Fourth Degree was discussing future projects they could do, and the idea came to Leon Gobczynski, the organizer of the project.

"We started talking about what would be a good project, and something that occurred to me was we had the Liberty Bell that cracked when they rang it for the first time, and that's kind of a historical thing," said Gobczynski. "I wondered if we had any bells in Teutopolis, and found out from the Monastery Museum that we actually had two in Teutopolis, which surprised me."

One of the bells is at St. Francis Church, and was rung for seminarian prayer congregation. The other was at Teutopolis Mini Park, and was in rough shape; this is the one the Fourth Degree chose to restore.

The Mini Park bell is estimated to be from 1905, and it was used in the tower of the old village hall for emergencies, such as fires and tornadoes.

After getting enthusiastic approval from the Village, several locals were involved in the restoration process. Fourth Degree of the Knights of Columbus member Dan Dust approved the project and took charge.

The bell was taken to Elite Powder Coating in Dieterich to be sandblasted and powder coated by the business owner, Doug Giles. The bell was colored gold and navy blue to represent Teutopolis' colors.

Brett Higgs, co-owner of Higgs Welding in Dieterich, disassembled the bell and repaired it to properly ring again.

Tony Esker and J.B. Esker & Sons, Inc. helped move the bell with a backhoe to place it in front of Village Hall.

Double D Signs in Teutopolis created a brass plaque and the pedestal's base. Dave Zerrusen and his nephew, Clay Zerrusen, then created the "lid" of the pedestal, but before it was assembled, Gobczynski placed a time capsule in it to be opened in 100 years. Some of the items he included were coins, a news article about the bell, Legos, a pack of Pokemon cards and a pack of tomato seeds to see if they'd sprout after a century.

"We put some money in there, as well, because we figured money would no longer be used in 100 years," said Gobczynski. "It would all be digitized and credit and that kind of thing."

The Fourth Degree of the Knights of Columbus raised all the money for the project through a gun-raffle fundraiser that was held earlier this year, so there was no taxpayer money involved.

"We had some good help, and I have to say, this is one of those projects that everybody supported, and everybody worked unbelievably in unison with one another," said Gobczynski. "There was no dissension, no, like, 'Well, you're not in charge' kind of thing, or 'No, you're doing this wrong.' There was none of that. It was very, very smooth."

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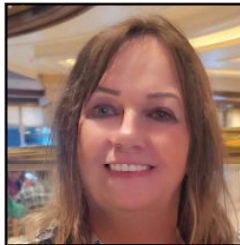
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Effingham & Area Events

Oct. 2–4

Annual Corn Maze with Scavenger Hunt at St. Paul Lutheran Church, 13204 N. 2300th St., Wheeler IL 62479 (north of Dieterich on the blacktop). Friday nights are 6 p.m.–10 p.m., Saturdays 2 p.m.–10 p.m., and Sundays 11 a.m.–5 p.m. Bring a flashlight for evening hours.

Oct. 2

HSHS St. Anthony Foundation Golf Benefit at Effingham Country Club. Visit stanthonyshospital.org/golf for more information.

Oct. 3

Donuts & Devotions at New Beginnings Church in Effingham IL 10–11 a.m. for kids ages 4–12 years.

Effingham Farmers Market on Effingham County Museum lawn 8 a.m.–noon.

Effingham Jeep Fest at The Stage at Lake Sara. Gates open 11 a.m. Proceeds benefit the Effingham County Sheriff's Department 'Shop with a Deputy' program. Highlights include a Show 'N Shine, sound and light show competitions, food trucks, vendors, prizes, giveaways, raffles and live music by the Matt Poss Band starting at 7 p.m.

Neoga Sooeyst and Smokeoff 1–7 p.m. at Jennings Park in Neoga. Live music all day, free ham and beans lunch, kids' activities, local craft and food vendors, Smoke-Off Competition and plenty of small-town fall fun!

Taylorville: An Unofficial Taylor Swift Live Tribute Band. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Aspire event at Scott Avenue Christian Church in Newton starting at 6 p.m. One night — 3 hours just for women. An evening full of laughter, learning, stories and music. Go to aspirewomensevents.com for tickets.

Oct. 8

Witches Night Out 5–9 p.m. on the square in Greenville IL.

Oct. 9–11

Annual Corn Maze with Scavenger Hunt at St. Paul Lutheran Church, 13204 N. 2300th St., Wheeler IL 62479 (north of Dieterich on the blacktop). Friday nights are 6 pm–10 pm, Saturdays 2 pm–10 pm, and Sundays 11 am–5 pm. Bring a flashlight for evening hours.

Touchstone Energy Balloon Fest in Shelbyville IL. Visit shelbyelectric.coop for more information.

Oct. 10

Scarecrow Daze in downtown Shelbyville IL 10 a.m.–3 p.m.

Effingham Farmers Market on Effingham County Museum lawn 8 a.m.–noon.

Hogs & Dogs 11 a.m.–3 p.m. at Legacy Harley-Davidson in Effingham. Music, food, drinks, raffles, bike show and more! Every dollar raised goes to Koda's Gift of Pawsitivity for animals in need.

Miles for Mae 5K Fun Run at Hendelmeyer Park in Effingham. Park at Village Square Mall. Bib pickup & day of registration opens at 7:30 a.m. Running starts 8:30 a.m. Also a Mae's Mini Mile, a mile made for our littlest supporters — little legs,

little wheels, big impact. Bring your cozy coupe, push car, stroller or wagon and join us for a fun lap around the park before the 5K. Register at <https://runsignup.com/Race/IL/Effingham/MilesForMae>.

Pumpkin Festival 10 a.m.–3 p.m. at The Patch in St. Elmo. Car, truck & tractor show; harvest makers market; food trucks; family-friendly activities.

Homesteaders Market 2026 at Greenup Municipal Building, 115 E. Cumberland St, Greenup. 8 a.m.–noon. Homemade goods, homegrown produce, baked items, handmade crafts, and more! Contact Lacey Thoele at 217-508-9572. Hosted by Growing with Greenup.

Greenup Apple Festival and Citywide Garage Sales. Visit the Greenup Apple Festival Facebook page for more information.

Vandalia Picker's Market and A Harvest 250 Years in the Making: Rooted in History. Grown in Community. 8 a.m.–noon. Vandalia Farmers Market selling fresh produce, homemade baked goods, meats and farm products and specialty foods. Also the Vandalia Picker's Market along Gallatin Street 8 a.m.–2 p.m. featuring vintage treasures, antiques, collectibles and one-of-a-kind finds. Downtown Vandalia.

1964: The Beatles Tribute. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Oct. 11

St. Thomas Harvest Picnic. Starts 4:30 p.m. at St. Thomas in Newton IL. Food, games, live music, raffles. Ten percent of proceeds to Newton Family Life Center.

Oct. 15

Women's Health Showcase presented by HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital at Effingham Performance Center starting at 5 p.m. www.theepc.org

Oct. 16

Boo-tique Night. Late shopping hours in downtown Effingham. Celebrate Ladies Night Out and Boss' Day!

Grotto Cookout Fundraiser. Please join us at The Patio at the Teutopolis Banquet Hall in Teutopolis IL. Freewill donation dinner 5–7 p.m. and music by Jake Schumacher 6–8 p.m. Raffle drawing at 9 p.m. All proceeds go toward The Grotto Restoration.

The Price is Right LIVE! Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Oct. 16–18

Annual Corn Maze with Scavenger Hunt at St. Paul Lutheran Church, 13204 N. 2300th St., Wheeler IL 62479 (north of Dieterich on the blacktop). Friday nights are 6 p.m.–10 p.m., Saturdays 2 p.m.–10 p.m., and Sundays 11 a.m.–5 p.m. Bring a flashlight for evening hours.

Oct. 17

Effingham Farmers Market on Effingham County Museum lawn 8 a.m.–noon.

Ham City Fall Fest in downtown Effingham IL. Live music, kids activities, 5K, Bavarian-style brunch, German beers, and so much more! Visit the Ham City Fall Fest Facebook page for more information.

Micah Tyler & Colton Dixon. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Oct. 18

Fall Soup Supper at Altamont First United Methodist Church in Altamont, 4–7 p.m. Come warm your heart and fill your bowl!

Oct. 23

Disney's Hocus Pocus Interactive Movie. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Community Support Systems Art Auction & Community Celebration at Teutopolis Banquet Hall. Grounds open and artist reception 5 p.m. Auction begins 6 p.m. Live music by Jake & Mikayla at 7:30 p.m. Food, bake sale, free kids activities, CSS Vendor Fair and more!

Oct. 23 & 24

Oct. 30 & 31

Haunted Trails & Cabins 7–11 p.m. at Kinmundy Log Cabin Village in Kinmundy IL. Cash-only event. Haunted 1800s trail. Three-quarter mile rough terrain with cabins. All proceeds to upkeep of the cabins + three \$1,000 scholarships to local students.

Oct. 24

Downtown Effingham Trick-or-Treat. Farmers market 8–noon, Costume contest noon–1 p.m., trick-or-treat 1–3 p.m. in Downtown Effingham.

Halloween Bash, Trick-or-Treat and Trunk-or-Treat Night. Halloween Bash starts 5 p.m. and Trick-or-Treat and Trunk-or-Treat start 6 p.m. at the Watson Civic Center. Fun for the whole family. Concessions in the WACO building. The trail from the Civic Center to Chaparral Subdivision will be lit up and signs will be put up on either side.

Effingham Farmers Market on Effingham County Museum lawn, 8 a.m.–noon.

Flannel Fest 10 a.m.–5 p.m. at West Side Park in Champaign IL featuring live lumberjack shows from renowned touring entertainers all day, mustache contest, live bands, free games, hayrack rides, inflatables for the kids and more!

Monster Mission in downtown Shelbyville IL. A downtown adventure! 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

Oct. 25

St. Clare Catholic Church Annual Chili Supper 4–7 p.m. in the basement of the church, 216 N. 9th St., Altamont IL 62411.

Effingham Sunrise Rotary Halloween Parade. Theme: Red, White & Boo...Celebrating America's 250th Birthday. Parade lineup begins at noon along Maple Street between Temple and Evergreen avenues in Effingham. \$20 entry fee required for all entries except veterans, school groups, fair queens and emergency vehicles. A \$100 donation is required for all political-associated entries. Entry fees will go toward supporting local non-profit organizations. Complete entry form and return with payment by Friday, Oct. 16.

Oct. 28

Witches Walk in downtown Shelbyville IL. 5–8 p.m.

Oct. 29

Menopause: The Musical. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Vandalia Lion's Club Halloween Parade. Features floats and marching bands beginning at 7 p.m. in downtown Vandalia.

Oct. 30

Halloween Soup Supper, Parade, Costumes and Cake Walk at the Community Center in Strasburg IL. Soup supper 5 p.m., parade 7 p.m. and cake walk 8 p.m.

Celebrate Mattoon Downtown Trunk-or-Treat 5–8 p.m. in downtown Mattoon.

Oct. 30 & 31

Haunted Trails & Cabins 7–11 p.m. at Kinmundy Log Cabin Village in Kinmundy IL. Cash-only event. Haunted 1800s trail. Three-quarter mile rough terrain with cabins. All proceeds to upkeep of the cabins + three \$1,000 scholarships to local students.

Oct. 31

Effingham Farmers Market on Effingham County Museum lawn, 8 a.m.–noon.

Jeepoween at MVP Happy Holler, Newton IL. Sign-in starts at 11 a.m. Ride leaves at 1 p.m.

2nd Annual Dieterich's Boos and Brews. Noon–8 p.m. at Dieterich's Liberty Park in Dieterich IL.

Flora Chamber Halloween Parade. Floats, bands, masqueraders, antique and emergency vehicles, and much more make up a parade lasting over two hours through Flora's main downtown street, North Avenue. Starting at 7 p.m., the parade each year draws huge crowds the entire length of the parade route, which starts at Flora's historic B&O Railroad Depot and ends about one mile later at Christ's Church in Flora. For more information, contact 618-662-5646.

Nov. 1

Fall Soup Supper and Bake Sale Fundraiser 4–7 p.m., hosted by the Ladies Aid at St. John's Lutheran Church, 17684 E. 1st Ave., Louisville IL 62858 (located 15 miles south of Effingham on the Effingham / Clay County line).

Nov. 5

Trace Adkins. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Nov. 6

How to Solve a Murder. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Nov. 6 & 7

Sparkle & Spruce Shopping Soiree at the McKenna-Yost Convention Center, Mattoon IL. Friday 4–8 p.m. and Saturday 9 a.m.–3 p.m.

Downtown Effingham Holiday Shop Hop. Shopping passport. Stamp at each store. Downtown gift basket prize.

Nov. 7

Santa Brigade Breakfast & Christmas Market. Breakfast 6 a.m. & Christmas Market starting 7 a.m. at St. Paul's Social Hall & Gym in Strasburg IL.

Crash for Mae Demolition Derby at Beecher City Park. Join us for a night of smashes, family fun, and community support for a little girl with a big fight. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to Mae's One Shot To Live.

Turkey Bingo in Herrick IL. Doors open at 5 p.m. Bingo at 6 p.m.

BJ's Annual Jeepsaving Run. Sign in 11 a.m. Leave at noon. Money raised for coats and Christmas gifts for local children in need. Music by Jake & Mikayla after the ride starting at 6 p.m. Event at BJ's Saloon, Newton IL.

Benefit for Tracy Hoene 4–10 p.m. at the Toledo American Legion. Spaghetti supper starting 4 p.m. until gone. Shirt sales, gun raffle, baked goods auction at 7 p.m., silent auction 4–7 p.m., 50/50 raffle, live music by Absent Ground 8–10 p.m. For more info, contact Felicia Huddleston 217-273-2981, Cherode Hooks 217-273-3464 or Diana Doss 217-994-6535.

Nov. 8

Annual Church Breakfast at St. John Lutheran Church, 22775 E. 700th Ave., Dieterich IL 62424, serving 7:30 a.m.–12 noon. Free-will donation.

Nov. 12

Mitchell Tenpenny. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Nov. 13 & 14

Olde Tyme Christmas. A free, community holiday celebration that attracts surrounding communities, encourages the shop local movement and showcases Vandalia and local Vandalia businesses. A kickoff to the holiday season! This year's theme: Stars, Stripes & Holiday Lights. Nov. 13, 5 p.m.–9 p.m. & Nov. 14, 10 a.m.–2 p.m. in downtown Vandalia.

Nov. 14

Little River Band. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Nov. 15

Annual Hog Roast and Silent Auction at Trinity Lutheran Church and School, 113 S. Walnut St., Stewardson IL 62463. Call (217) 682-5722 for more information.

Turkey Bingo at Teutopolis Banquet Hall. Doors open 5 p.m. Bingo starts 6 p.m. Concessions & raffle items will be available. Event by St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Teutopolis.

Nov. 19

Mattoon Lightworks Walk Through. Check the City of Mattoon Illinois Lightworks page for exact time.

Home Free Christmas: Coming Home for the Holidays. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Nov. 20

Shelbyville Festival of Lights and Festival of Trees opens in Forest Park in Shelbyville IL. Drive-thru lights display is open every night through New Year's night. Festival of Trees features

decorated trees in the Chautauqua building at Forest Park in Shelbyville IL.

Pink Friday in Downtown Effingham. Small business version of Black Friday.

Hairball: A Tribute to Arena Rock. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 8 p.m. www.theepc.org

Guess Who's Dying for Dinner? Murder Myster Dinner at Tuscan Hills Winery. The world's best celebrity chefs are locked in a life-or-death reality TV cooking contest! Doors open 6 p.m. Show at 7 p.m.

Nov. 20–Dec. 27

Mattoon Lightworks open

Nov. 21

Holiday in Herrick 8:30 a.m.–1 p.m. at the Herrick Community Building in Herrick IL.

Dailey & Vincent Candy Canes & Coal

Tour. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Nov. 27

Black Friday in downtown Effingham

Nov. 28

Small Business Saturday in downtown Effingham

Downtown Effingham Hometown

Christmas. Step into the glow of the season and enjoy an evening filled with lights, laughter and hometown holiday magic. Hop aboard a festive tractor train ride, visit Santa, snap photos with favorite Christmas and Disney characters and get creative inside Santa's Workshop with hands-on holiday crafts. Stroll through the twinkle-lit streets with hot chocolate in hand, grab a bag of warm kettle corn, and soak in the joy that only a small-town Christmas can bring. Additional activities include Wild Foam Adventures and story time with Mrs. Claus. Enjoy the sparkling style of the lighted Christmas parade at 5 p.m. beginning at Baseball Card Connection, heading down Jefferson Avenue to The Heart Theatre and ending at 3rd Street. Santa's house will be open 5:45–8 p.m. Live music at the Old Courthouse at 6:15 p.m. with the FACE Christmas Concert and 6:45 p.m. with the FACE Community Orchestra.

Come Home For Christmas 4–8 p.m. on the square in Greenville IL.

Whoville Christmas Celebration in Sainte Marie IL. 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

Small Business Saturday & Downtown

Ornament Walk in downtown Shelbyville IL. 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

Bosses Birthday Bash 7 p.m. at West End Reception and Events, Newton IL. Theresa is turning 60 and Doug is turning 50. Free admission. Live music by Flight Fifty band. Doors open 6 p.m. Finger foods and snacks.

Nov. 29

Coffee & Donuts: Bring your Nativity Set to be blessed. 10:15–11 a.m. at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Effingham.

Dec. 4

Celebrate Mattoon Downtown Christmas 5–8 p.m. in downtown Mattoon.

Dec. 5

Christmas in a One-Cow Town on Main Street in Stewardson. Starts 4 p.m. and culminates with a 7 p.m. lighted parade.

Christmas in the 'Burg noon–8 p.m. at Strasburg IL.

Christmas on Main in downtown Shelbyville IL. Holiday characters downtown 11:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m. Shopping until 3 p.m. or later.

The Wizards of Winter: Music of Trans-Siberian Orchestra. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Dec. 11 & 12

Christmas Store / Cookie Walk at the Community Center in Strasburg IL. Santa arrives Saturday 9:30–11 a.m.

Dec. 12

Dr. Seuss' The Grinch Interactive Movie. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 3 p.m. www.theepc.org

Dec. 13

Annual Lutheran Churches Christmas Cantata. Visit St. Paul's Lutheran Church / Strasburg IL for more information on location and time of event.

National Trail Farm Toy Show at Effingham Event Center 9 a.m.–3 p.m. For more info, contact Robert Spencer at 217-254-6178 or Greg Warner at 217-821-7124.

Dec. 18

Chris Young: "Holiday & The Hits." Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Dec. 19

Stocking Stuffer Saturday in downtown Effingham. Shop local for those last-minute stocking stuffers!

Christmas with Elvis Featuring Scott Wattles & The Blue Suede Crew. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Dec. 19 & 20

Christmas Cantata at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Altamont. Visit immanuelaltamont.org/calendar for more information.

Dec. 20

Jingle Bell Jam. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 2 p.m. www.theepc.org

Dec. 21–23

Late-Night Shopping in downtown Effingham.

Dec. 31

I'll Be Homicidal for Christmas Murder Mystery Dinner at Tuscan Hills Winery. Doors open 6 p.m. Show at 7 p.m.

New Year's Party. Live music by Decade of Decadence band at The Foxmore in downtown Shelbyville IL. Rock in the new year with an 80's rock party! Doors open at 8 p.m. Music 9 p.m.–12:30 a.m.

2027

Jan. 16

Beauty & The Beast Interactive Movie. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 3 p.m. www.theepc.org

Jan. 21

Ty Pennington. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Jan. 23

Howl at the Moon Dueling Pianos 6 p.m. at West End Reception and Events, Newton.

Jan. 30

Sebastian Bach – Original Voice of Skid Row. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Feb. 5

The Bellamy Brothers. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Feb. 13

Toast: The Best of Bread. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Feb. 19

Who Whacked Willy Wonka? Murder Mystery Dinner at Tuscan Hills Winery. Doors open 6 p.m. Show at 7 p.m.

Vicki Lawrence & Mama. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Feb. 21

Annual Sausage Supper at St. Peter Lutheran Church in St. Peter IL starting at 5 p.m.

Feb. 27

Six String Summit. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Comedy Night with Copenhagen Bandit and Friends 7 p.m. at West End Reception and Events, Newton.

March 4

Josh Turner. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

March 5

Ultimate Johnny Cash. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

March 6

Dirty Deeds: The AC/DC Experience. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

March 7

Annual Pork Loin Dinner at lunchtime at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Altamont IL. Visit immanuelaltamont.org/calendar for more information.

March 9

Bachman Turner Overdrive: No Speed Limit Tour 2027. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

March 12

Artrageous. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

March 13

St. Pat's Bash beginning at 5 p.m. at Effingham Event Center. Event by Sacred Heart Catholic Church of Effingham.

March 14

Dr. Seuss' The Cat in the Hat LIVE on Stage! Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 3 p.m. www.theepc.org

March 19

Glenn Miller Orchestra. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

Ain't Nothin' But A Homicide Murder Mystery Dinner at Tuscan Hills Winery. Doors open 6 p.m. Show at 7 p.m.

April 2

Lee Rocker of the Stray Cats. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 9

The Kentucky Headhunters & Confederate Railroad. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 10

Under the Streetlamp: Music of Frankie Valli & The Jersey Boys. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 18

Puppy Pals Live! Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 3 p.m. www.theepc.org

April 23

SCOOPY DOOM Murder Mystery Dinner at Tuscan Hills Winery. Doors open 6 p.m. Show at 7 p.m.

April 24

GenX Comedy Tour. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

May 16

Carrot Top. Tickets online now! Effingham Performance Center 7 p.m. www.theepc.org

June 18

Teutopolis Cruise Car Show starting at 5 p.m. in Teutopolis IL.

June 26 & 27

Sacred Heart Picnic at Sacred Heart Catholic Church grounds in Effingham. Saturday 5–11 p.m. and Sunday noon–10 p.m.

August 7 & 8

Parish Picnic at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Effingham. Saturday, August 7, 5 p.m.–midnight with 4:30 p.m. Mass on the soccer field at St. Anthony High School and Sunday, August 8, noon–midnight

Have an event you want to promote? Send to jody.hardiek@effinghamdailynews.com

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