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2022 EDITION

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IN THE
HEARTLAND**

Todd Wegman

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THE YEAR

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Charity Ozenkoski

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you may be needing to schedule. The Roy Schmidt Honda Service team is currently rated number one in their district of Honda dealers. This achievement is based on customer satisfaction, fixed right the first time, and customer retention. If you have not visited the service department at Roy Schmidt Honda, please contact them to schedule an appointment today!

Roy Schmidt was born and raised in Teutopolis, Illinois. Roy was involved in sports growing up, particularly baseball! Still today, this is one of Roy's favorite past times....watching St. Louis Cardinals baseball! Roy stays committed to supporting our local community by promoting fundraising activities for numerous local organizations and church families. He remembers his roots!

Roy Schmidt and the Honda team would like to thank the many customers who have patronized the dealership the last 7 years. We thank you for placing your trust in the products and services we offer, and we look forward to traveling ahead with you in the year 2022!



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Scott's Building Center

Scott's Building Center Celebrating 65 Year History

Under several names and a few ownership changes along the way, Scott's Building Center in Greenup has a long and storied history.

The business now known as Scott's Building Center was founded by T.J. Prather in Toledo at some point before 1900. Prather sold the business to Henry Tippet, who in turn sold it to Kelley & Wisely. Armour Grain Co., doing business as the Neola Elevator Company, bought



the business in 1910 and hired young E.B. Cutts to manage the lumberyard. Cutts eventually bought the business in 1923 and operated it for many years, some of those in partnership with young Garnet Grafton of Lerna.

Mr. Cutts eventually bought out Grafton after World War II and continued much as he had for decades until training young Bob Scott to manage the Toledo Builders Supply in 1957.

Prior to working at Toledo Builders Supply, Bob Scott was a motorpool clerk in the Air Force which he served from 1953-1955. After the Air Force, he worked at Shanks driving oil trucks and making culverts.

Bob Scott purchased the business in 1963 and later Bob purchased Greenup Builders Supply when it went up for sale in 1964. He ran both locations until 1974 when he closed Toledo and moved it to Greenup. The name Scott's Building Center came about approximately in 1974, when Bob bought out Bill & Joann Easton (Greenup Builders Supply).

In 1965 Bob started a construction company named CHI Construction Company and changed the name to Ervin, Scott, and Easton Construction Company. Approximately 1971 he sold the construction company to Carroll Ervin.

In 1978 at the current location, Bob started the new lumberyard. He opened for business on January 21st, 1980. At 43,688 square feet, the current location is several times the size of the old Greenup location. After he retired in 1997, he created Scott's Flooring Company.

Scott's Building Center changed hardware suppliers in the past:

- Belknap Hardware Company: Mid 60's-1971
- Bostwick Braun Hardware: 1971-1981
- Ace Hardware: 1981-2007
- Do it Best: 2007- Present

Scott's Building Center also buys from many other vendors.



Scott's Building Center will celebrate its 65th Anniversary this year with a big celebration planned later this summer.

With the passing of Bob Scott in December 2018, Bob's son Kurt Scott and daughter Barb Ozier co-owned the business, until November 2019 when Kurt bought out Barb of full ownership of the lumberyard.

Today Scott's Building Center employs 14, evenly split between full and part-time. The third generation of Scott's: Kurt's son Matthew is Assistant Manager. Kurt's daughter Kristan does General Sales, Bookkeeping, & Advertising.

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Picture was taken October 2018

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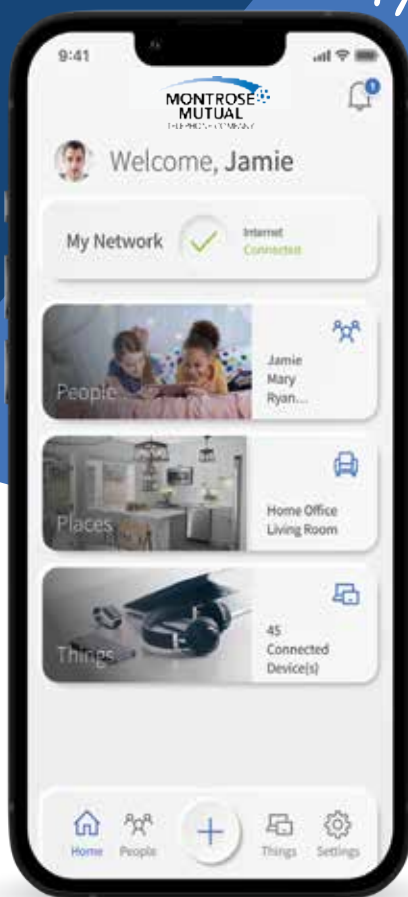
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Progress

AN EFFINGHAM DAILY NEWS PUBLICATION

2022 EDITION

FEATURE STORY

38 Moving closer to home



Photo by Charles Mills

It's family time in the home of Tara Stiles. Stiles, her daughter, Daisy, and husband Mike Taylor are pictured in Tara's family studio.

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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

Peter Hancock

Charles Mills

Zach Roth

Alex Wallner

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:

Stevens Industries CEO Todd Wegman and worker-employees Mitchell and Christiana Friesse with their newborn, Abigail. Next to them is Charity Ozenkoski, director of the Stevens Industries Employee Childcare Center now under construction.

Charles Mills photo

From the Editor

Progress can be defined as finding ways to surmount obstacles.

That's what Stevens Industries in Teutopolis is doing by building a child care center for its owner-employees. Child care has been a growing concern for working parents in this area for some time. Perhaps Stevens will set an example for other employers to consider.

Employees told Stevens CEO Todd Wegman about their problems finding child care. He listened and considered the options.

"We have a lot of younger people who are starting to work here and a lot of people who have been through the process of needing day care," Wegman tells us. "We talked about it quite a bit with our



own people, as well as the day care providers in our own area, to talk about some of the challenges. A lot of different points got us to thinking about this."

Wegman and Stevens Industries

decided to build a child care facility right in their own backyard. The Stevens Industries Employee Childcare Center is going up across the street from the company's main offices along Route 40, slated to open in September.

In the 2022 edition of Progress, we

look at various after-school programs and mentoring programs – amenities and necessities that a thriving workforce needs.

Our reporters also looked at achievements over the past year in our communities, and ahead to even better things to come.

Jeff Long
Editor

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

Staff Bios



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.



Charles Mills is reporter and videographer for the Effingham Daily News. A 1983 graduate of Southern Illinois University Carbondale, he is the son of a south-central Illinois newspaper publisher, worked as master control director for a St. Louis television station, assistant video editor at a video editing facility on Music Row specializing in music videos, served as senior video editor for a Nashville television station and learned the art of computerized video editing while living in Hollywood, California in the mid-1980s. Mills is a native of Vandalia, where he lives with his wife, Zoryana.



Zach Roth covers Effingham city hall and Unit 40 schools for the Effingham Daily News. A 2016 graduate of Bradley University in Peoria, he also was a member of the 2021 class of the Public Affairs Reporting Program at the University of Illinois-Springfield. A native of the capitol city, he has served as a contributor for the Springfield Business Journal in his hometown and as a reporter at The Columbus Telegram in Columbus, Nebraska. He lives in Effingham.



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

Child care options limited across area

STEVENS INDUSTRIES FINDS A SOLUTION

By Zach Roth

Over the course of the past few years, parents in Effingham County have increasingly complained about the scarcity of child care options.

They've voiced their concerns through things such as a survey by Illinois Action for Children – with help from the Effingham

Public Library. Meanwhile, the Effingham County Board has established a child care research committee to address those concerns.

At Stevens Industries in Teutopolis, employees told CEO Todd Wegman about their problems finding child care. He listened and

considered the options.

"We have a lot of younger people who are starting to work here and a lot of people who have been through the process of needing day care," Wegman said. "We talked about it quite a bit with our own people, as well as the day care providers in our own area, to talk about some of the challenges. A lot of different points got us to thinking about this."

Wegman and Stevens Industries decided to build a child care facility right in their own backyard. The Stevens Industries Employee Childcare Center is going up across the street from the company's main offices along Route 40, slated to open in September.

While many within the company and across the area feel that it is a welcome addition to the community, it isn't likely to solve the child care crisis that is seen and felt throughout the area, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the fall, the IAC survey showed that 47.5% of respondents had trouble finding child care, with families of children ages 0-2 particularly struggling to find anything that worked for them.

During his discussions with his employees, Wegman got a glimpse of how they were dealing with the crisis, making the goal of fixing this issue a priority for the company.

"The biggest thing that was consistent was a massive shortage" of facilities, Wegman said. "There was a large group of people who were needing day care providers, so all of those things coming together



Photo by Charles Mills

Charity Ozenkoski, director of the Stevens Industries Employee Childcare Center, and Stevens Industries CEO Todd Wegman.

led us to say, ‘What can we do about that? How can we use our knowledge and our ability to try and help our own people?’”

Wegman got overwhelming support from his employee-owners to go forward with the project, allowing him to bring on some consultants in order to provide him with experienced professionals capable of running a child care facility.

One of them was Charity Ozenkoski, the home-based education specialist for CEFS Head Start in Effingham. She has experience in child care through her 13 years at Head Start and through her time spent as the director of Treehouse Day Care and Preschool.

While her role at CEFS was stable, she wanted to spend time around children again, thus her move back into the day-to-day operations of a child care facility.

“I was getting back into being with the kids and not in the office,” Ozenkoski said. “I know that we are in desperate need of child care.”

She appreciated the fact that Stevens was doing this for their employees, not just those currently working there, but for those who will come into the company in the future.

“That’s what really intrigued me,” Ozenkoski said. “Since it’s already company-based and employee-owned and it’s how they want to retain employees and bring new employees in, this is a great selling point and it is also a great opportunity for day care staff to have the Stevens benefits.”

Her overall goal for the facility is a simple one: to be the very best.

“I want it to be the day care center everyone talks about,” Ozenkoski said. “I want to have healthy, happy children (and) satisfied parents. I want to have parents and teachers collaborate.”

Finding those teachers is another issue identified by those working within the industry, with the specified degrees needed being a hurdle for people interested in working in the field. For Ozenkoski, that will be the biggest challenge as the countdown begins for the facility’s fall opening.

“That is going to be a challenge, to find good, quality people,” Ozenkoski said. “I know they’re out there and it’s just (what)

“While the parents are building cabinets and products, their children will be building educational skills in a creative environment.”

— Charity Ozenkoski, Stevens Industries Employee Childcare Center director



Submitted photo

Matt Dukeman, a maintenance technician at Stevens Industries, and his wife, Hannah, hold their 10-month-old daughter, Harlowe. Also pictured is their daughter, Harper, 11, and son Holden, 5.

we can provide that stands out.”

Stevens employees are enthusiastic.

Matt Dukeman, a maintenance technician and father of three, said the idea was a strong one, given the need for in-person day care facilities in light of the COVID-19

pandemic.

“When COVID hit, it started making it more and more difficult for the day care facilities to function,” Dukeman said. “Our day care facility had to cut down one of our facilities and limit the number of children because they lost a lot of teachers and everything went crazy.

“The idea came up during one of those times and I was like, ‘Yes, there’s a huge need for this right now.’”

Flexibility in hours is another selling point for employees, with Dukeman saying that the facility may allow him to drop his kids off at day care early and not have to worry about them for the rest of the day.

“If I need to get in at 6, then I can do that and drop them off right across the street



Photo by Zach Roth

Construction of the Stevens Industries Employee Childcare Center is underway across the street from the company's main offices along Route 40 in Teutopolis.

from where I work," Dukeman said. "The convenience alone sounded good."

Christiana and Mitchell Friese, Stevens

employees who have a newborn, also praised the convenience of the facility and the fact that costs for the services would be

deducted from paychecks.

"When we talked to HR, they said their plans were to make it cheaper than a normal day care," Mitchell said. "The cost to run a day care is going to be more than what they are going to charge the employees, but they're thinking ahead in terms of, 'If we can actually get our employees to work, we should be able to make that money back.'"

Right now, what sits at the eventual site of the facility is some foundation. But the hope is for there to be a sprawling building in time for the next school year.

The impact on Stevens and the community could very well be immense – and a blueprint for other companies to follow.

"That's something that I came up with – while the parents are building cabinets and products, their children will be building educational skills in a creative environment," Ozenkoski said.

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In partnership of HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital

We are celebrating 5 years of keeping children safe and families strong on March 10, 2022!

Crisis Nursery's mission is to prevent and protect children from trauma, abuse and neglect through the provision of a free, 24/7 emergency childcare program. All of the Nursery's services are free and open to anyone in need, no matter where they reside. **Because of our community's continued support Crisis Nursery of Effingham County has provided care and support to over 900 children and 600 families. The Prevention Care program has provided over 38,000 hours of supportive care to children in need and provided over 40,000 childcare supply items to families in need.**

Crisis Nursery began and has since been sustained through the continued support of our community through tremendous acts of kindness, generosity and dedication to the Nursery's mission. We want to take this opportunity to say **thank you** to our dedicated Crisis Nursery team, volunteers and Board of Directors that put our mission into action each day. We also want to say a big **thank you** to our amazing supporters and sponsors for making our mission possible these past 5 years. The impact Crisis Nursery has made has been more than we ever anticipated and that would not be possible without everyone's continued support. Thank you for investing in our community's children and families!

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DRIVING A SCHOOL BUS OFFERS REWARDS

By Alex Wallner

School districts across the region are having a hard time finding bus drivers.

"We are currently short three drivers, so we don't even run one route because we use our subs for two other routes," said Effingham Unit 40 Transportation Director Kristin Harvey. "Then, with sports going on this year, we also have to use subs to cover those. So when we have extra trips, you have a sub that will drive the regular route. So, I'm already using two daily every single day, and that's not including if I need three tomorrow. That would be five subs in one day, and with driver shortages, it's not an easy task."

Harvey said the struggles have loomed large over the past year, putting her in a difficult spot.

"We were at a maximum capacity of 50 (students) per bus, and many of our in-town

routes have an easy 70 kids. So, what we ended up doing was for the five buses in town; they ended up making two loops," Harvey said. "They did their route twice. They would go K-5, take them home, and then go to the junior high and high school and take them home. It ended up being like 10 routes, but only five drivers were doing it. That was our saving grace to stay under the 50 mark. Luckily, this year, they lifted that, and we did not have to keep it under 50, but we still kept the two loops because the number of students riding was even bigger this year.

"Right now, we have 1,773 students we're busing a.m. and p.m., and typically more in the afternoon than in the morning."

She added that numerous drivers were out at different times, leaving her to try and find replacements quickly and forcing her to take different alternatives.

"We were short seven buses; we had seven drivers out at one time, so we had to combine all of those and put them on other routes and go with that and make it work," Harvey said. "It was extremely challenging having that, but our mechanic will also drive when needed. But he's doing the role of several people. He has to disinfect the buses every morning and afternoon and go through and spray all 26 buses, vans and things like that. It's a very time-consuming process."

Why is it so difficult to find individuals for this profession?

Harvey said the training to become a certified bus driver is strenuous.

Additionally, implementing the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, otherwise known as MAP-21, makes the process even more challenging for a profession with enough challenges already.

"The federal government has come out with MAP-21 — President Obama signed it in 2012 — but it was postponed and postponed," said Harvey.

It was scheduled to take effect on Feb. 7.

"It requires more training for CDL drivers and bus drivers, as well," Harvey said. "We already have our drivers in an eight-hour course, and they have to get their CDL through the state. So, they still have to do all of those things, but now, on top of it, do a classroom portion, and the regional office in Vandalia will offer it. That's where we'll send people from now on."

For those who do pass the test, though, there are rewards that come with the job.

In Effingham, Harvey said being a school bus driver may not be a full-time position, but it does offer full-time benefits.

"Even though you work only four hours a day, you can get full-time benefits," Harvey said. "But some districts don't offer those full-time benefits, so it's really hard to ask people to come and work minimum hours."



Photo by Alex Wallner

Effingham Unit 40 Transportation Director Kristin Harvey.

FEATURE

Other factors draw some drivers.

Kim Knierim likes working with young people.

Knierim has been driving for 37 years and takes great pride in what she does. She never imagined doing it this long, saying she doesn't truly believe people understand the benefits you receive from it.

"You talk to people, and you say, 'Come and be a bus driver?' and they say, 'No, I can't handle those kids,'" Knierim said. "They don't want kids behind them, and I think how a large bus can intimidate them sometimes. They don't think they can do that, but I didn't think I could drive a bus, either. The first time I sat in the seat of the bus, behind the wheel, I looked down the side of it, and I thought, 'I don't think I can do this,' but I love it."

Overall, it is no secret that bus drivers are necessary. Harvey hopes to see more people interested in the profession in the coming months.

One way to increase that number is to advertise just as they currently do. Harvey said they reach out to numerous



Photo by Alex Wallner

Effingham Unit 40 Transportation Director Kristin Harvey writes on a whiteboard, which serves as a schedule, in her office.

mediums to get their message across about bus drivers and why they are essential.

"We advertise in the news-

paper, social media platforms, the regional office of education, and the City of Effingham and the chamber came out with a

platform as well that we will look to utilize."

Photo by Alex Wallner

Effingham County, much like the rest of the country, is having difficulty finding bus drivers. Effingham Unit 40 Transportation Director Kristin Harvey hopes the number of drivers increases in 2022.





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Progress Through a Pandemic

Just before the start of the Coronavirus pandemic, Utz + Associates Architects teamed with a St. Louis based architecture firm, BSA Lifestructures, to design a new healthcare destination in Effingham. The new structure was set to replace the aging Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Systems - Bonutti Clinic located at 1303 West Evergreen.

As everyone experienced at the time, the fear and uncertainty of what lie ahead created new challenges for the design team to overcome. Through the use of the industries latest digital collaboration and 3D modeling technology, the team was able to work together to design this state of the art facility on schedule.

With construction nearing completion in the second half of 2022, Utz + Associates Architects is proud to have been part of a team to bring progress to Effingham, even through a pandemic, and we will continue to utilize the technologies and lessons learned during this trying time to our future clients as well.



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At over 64,000 square feet, the newly constructed SBLHS - Bonutti Clinic houses vital medical services including a Walk-In Clinic, Physical Therapy with therapy pool, MRI, CT, and lab services.

(Left: still image of digital 3D model)



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Effingham Veterinary Clinic is a locally owned business that has been serving our community since 1973. It has 9 full time veterinarians, who have a combined experience of over 100 years in the industry, who can perform orthopedic and soft tissue surgery, organ biopsy, bladder surgery and skin procedures.

The clinic is located at 408 N. Keller Dr. Effingham, and offers business hours of 7:30 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday, 7:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, and 7:30 a.m. noon Saturday. They also offer 24-hour emergency service, and are on call 24 hours a day seven days a week.

Effingham Veterinary is your go-to stop for high quality pet diagnostics, among other services offered. Whether your pet is sick, hurt or just needs preventative care, Effingham Veterinary Clinic can offer the service needed in one stop.

Effingham Vet Clinic provides services such as full lab work, digital X-rays, ultrasound, therapeutic laser, blood and urine analysis. From spaying and neutering to extensive surgery and orthopedics as well as farm services, it is all available at Effingham Veterinary Clinic.

If you need a health certificate or health diagnosis on your farm animal, count on the professionals at Effingham Veterinary Clinic to provide it for you.

They offer a host of services like general surgery, immunization, general animal wellness, pet wellness, advanced vet services, animal hospital intensive care, large animal care, farm service, equine care, cow care and pig care. The veterinarians at Effingham Veterinary Clinic are compassionate and always strive to provide the highest quality of care to all their pet patients. Pet wellness is one of

the top priorities for the staff at Effingham Veterinary Clinic, as well as making sure that your expectations are exceeded with the quality service you receive and making sure that every experience has the personal touch and commitment that goes above and beyond.

One of the main reasons Effingham Veterinary Clinic continues to stand out in its field is because of its innovative and sustainable veterinary care for most species. The staff uses the latest methods in veterinary care.

Effingham Veterinary Clinic is proud to have received the Effingham Daily News People's Choice Award for Best Veterinary Clinic and Best Veterinarian, Dr. Chad Ely in 2021. Follow Effingham Veterinary Clinic on Facebook at Effingham Veterinary Clinic or visit the website www.effinghamvetclinic.com

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Chad Markham joined HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital in September 2021 as the new president and CEO, knowing it was a quality organization with compassionate and talented caregivers. Soon after arriving, he realized even more what quality care St. Anthony's offers to the community. In November 2021, St. Anthony's was awarded the 2021 Guardian of Excellence Award® winner by Press Ganey, the national leader in health care consumer and workforce engagement, for being a top-performing health care organization achieving the 95th percentile or above for performance in clinical quality.

Markham shared, "I am incredibly proud of the remarkable efforts and teamwork of our staff to achieve this award as they carry on our Mission. This award and others received this past year demonstrate our colleagues' and medical staff's dedication to achieving excellence and providing top-rated care for patients, even in the midst of very trying circumstances of a pandemic," he said.

To help encourage their staff and patients this past year, St. Anthony's launched a pet therapy program in partnership with the Alliance of Therapy Dogs. Certified therapy dogs and their handlers visit patients and colleagues weekly. The pet therapy aligns with St. Anthony's focus on the emotional and spiritual health of their patients in addition to their physical well-being and brings joy to patients and colleagues alike.

Another way St. Anthony's brought smiles to the faces of its staff was in partnership with area schools. During the

2021 Thanksgiving season, HSHS St. Anthony's partnered with St. Anthony Grade School, Effingham Unit 40 Community Schools, and Sacred Heart Catholic School to invite their students to color and write notes of encouragement and thanks to our staff. Their artwork and notes of gratitude touched the hearts of hospital colleagues.

These and other ways are what make St. Anthony's a great place to work. Want to join our amazing team? Visit <https://careers.hshs.org/> to see open positions and the many incentives offered.



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At HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital, we'll always be right by your side. Day or night, your experience means everything to us. It's because respect guides us, care defines us, competence empowers us and joy inspires us. HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital. **We're here with you.**



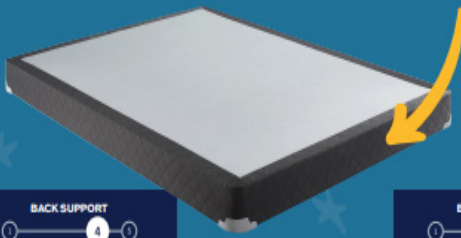
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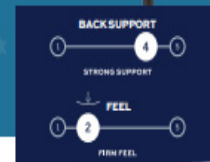
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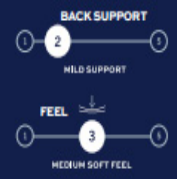
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EC-JOBS: Effingham County Job Opportunities for Business Success

EC-JOBS is a web-based platform that has a three-pronged approach which benefits education, business, and job seekers. The platform is funded by the Effingham Chamber Foundation and is currently exclusive to Effingham County students, teachers, and businesses. EC-JOBS creates a talent pipeline from school to work for students, parents, displaced workers, and incumbent workers. The website is accessible to job seekers from across the region and country seeking excellent employment opportunities along with the exceptional communities in which to reside.

All school districts in the county have agreed to utilize the site as a teaching and learning tool from 5th grade through high school. EC-JOBS allows younger students to explore careers in hundreds of career pathways and earning a “career card”. Older students can develop soft skills and skills training through hundreds of video lessons and earn badges that are submitted directly

to their resume. The site provides access to employment opportunities for students who plan to enter the workforce.

Job seekers, which includes the displaced worker and the incumbent worker, can also explore careers, view local jobs, and learn about local companies. When using the EC-JOBS platform you can benefit from the step-by-step resume builder. This platform also has short-form videos available, and when completed, you can add them to your resume. Utilizing these tools will show potential employers you are serious about a position with them and give them more insight into your capabilities. EC-JOBS also has a preferences section for users to utilize. By taking advantage of this tool, you can let employers know more about yourself, interests/hobbies you enjoy, and applicable skills.

ECJOBS is currently exclusive to businesses that are located within Effingham County. The website is currently the only

online platform that is accessible to local businesses, offering them the opportunity to highlight the opportunities they provide along with access to local and regional job seekers. Businesses can use this tool to grow their business and find new hires. Employers can build a company profile, post their available positions, track, and assign pre-hire training, and promote the company mission. Employers can also assign current employees to participate in the online videos for advancement or address performance needs.

Employers and job seekers can create their free profile at www.ECJOBS.org

EC-JOBS is led by Effingham County Chamber Workforce Development Director, Jeff Fritchtnitch. Jeff can be reached at jfritch@effinghamcountychamber.com, or by calling the Chamber office at 217-347-6248.



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WET Pools & Spas Incorporated

Many things have changed at WET Pools & Spas Incorporated in the past year, including the name, but one thing will never change – top notch customer service and quality products.

The 26 year business, which opened in 1996, was purchased by a new local owner, Aaron Niebrugge in March of 2021. The experienced and caring employees remain the same, with a few new additions.

The company will continue to focus on selling and installing in-ground and above-ground pools, hot tubs and pool and spa chemicals.

“Pools and spas are our specialty,” said Tammy Quast, who has been with the company since 1998. “We have sold pools as far away as Osage Beach, Missouri and Nashville, Tennessee,” she continued.

Thursday Pools is their most popular

fiberglass pool line. Most customers prefer the popular 16x40 foot rectangle size. They have installed a wide variety of other sizes and styles.

WET also sells and installs above-ground pools by Seaspray and Radiant. For a great spa experience they would recommend soaking in a Marquis spa.

WET Pools & Spas Incorporated is a retailer for BioGuard chemicals for maintaining a beautiful pool. Their customers can take advantage of their vast experience to keep their investment looking its best.

Each spring they host a “Pool School” for their customers. The Pool School includes a presentation by their BioGuard representative who teaches a class about the use of their products. He also explains water testing and treatment. Customers appreciate the opportunity to ask questions

and get advice before summer starts. They learn everything they need to know to enjoy their pool all summer long and closing it in the fall.

They will announce their annual pool school and open house soon. Follow WET Pools & Spas Incorporated on Facebook to learn more about upcoming events and classes. Visit their website www.wetpoolsandspas.net to view their selection of pools, spas and products.



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Dieterich Bank: Looking back at 2021

Dieterich Bank was chartered in 1909. It currently has thirteen branch locations and a corporate office located in Effingham, Illinois along with a Loan Production Office in South County St. Louis. The banking facilities are in Dieterich, Teutopolis, Newton, Effingham, Lake Sara, St. Elmo, Red Bud North, Red Bud South, Breese, Chester, Columbia, Waterloo, and Edwardsville, Illinois. Dieterich Bank assets are just over \$1.3 billion with over 175 employees.

Dieterich Bank provides a variety of convenient, high-quality products and services for personal banking, business banking, and wealth management. CEO Chuck Deters noted, "Of course, the key to our success is attributed to our people. I am appreciative of the knowledge and vision of our board of directors, and I am proud of the talent, commitment, and daily effort of the management and staff. I am confident your banking experience with us will be a pleasant one."

The bank ended 2021 on an exciting note with a new car giveaway! All year Dieterich Bank debit card customers were entered to win four great prizes simply by using their Dieterich Bank debit card. The bank also collected mail-in entries. Justine Dolan of St. Elmo, Illinois was the grand prize winner of a 2021 Ford Escape! Other prize winners included Debra Meyer, of Red Bud, Illinois the winner of a TREK bike, Marla Smith, of Breese, Illinois the winner of a new patio furniture set, and Corbin Christensen, of St. Elmo, Illinois the winner of a three-night stay in Nashville, Tennessee. This was a fun and exciting marketing campaign for Dieterich Bank!

Another item to note in 2021 included the official opening of our new branch location on South Route 157 in Edwardsville, Illinois. The bank had been operating out of a temporary facility in Edwardsville since the spring of 2020 and as of July is

excited to offer full-service banking in a new and attractive 4,200-square-foot facility. We welcome the opportunity to be a part of the Edwardsville community and serve the customers of this area.

For the third year in a row Dieterich Bank received the Best Places to Work in Illinois award, another noteworthy item for 2021. Survey results continue to show that our employees say that we have created a culture of opportunity and have a positive work environment. We are pleased to receive this award.

Dieterich Bank is committed to the community banking culture, quality service, and supporting our local businesses and residents. To learn more about Dieterich Bank visit one of our branch locations or check us out at www.dieterichbank.com.

Prepared by: Brenda Kroeger



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The Breast and Surgical Care Clinic



Ruben Boyajian, MD

The Breast and Surgical Care Clinic prides itself on providing a team approach for cancer care, minimally invasive diagnostic and therapeutic procedures and encourages patient involvement in the process. Their primary concern is the care and welfare of each individual patient. The Breast and Surgical Care Clinic maintains dedication and leadership in the areas of cancer education, prevention and treatment.

Joining Ruben on his team at The Breast and Surgical Care Clinic is his wife, Emily Boyajian, NP, who received the degree of Master of Science from Indiana State University. A highly qualified team of surgical nurse specialists and administrative staff work side by side with Ruben and Emily to continue the pursuit of the ideal of service to their patients and to the community they are proud to serve.



Emily Boyajian, NP

Ruben Boyajian, MD, owner, is an active member of the American Society of Breast Surgeons, the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the Society of Surgical Oncology. He is also the Director of the Women's Wellness and Cancer Services at St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital. The Women's Wellness and Cancer Services of St. Anthony's main objective is promoting the early detection of breast cancer as well as other services such as dexameter scanning, lactation services, etc. In addition to all this, Ruben received certification by the MD Anderson Cancer Center in 2018. And, Ruben has been voted as the People's Choice Best Surgeon by Effingham Daily News readers since 2004. He was honored in 2014 with the Effingham County Citizen of the Year Award for his countless hours helping many organizations in Effingham County and beyond. His dedication to his patients and his expertise sets him apart in his field.

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MOVING CLOSER TO HOME

By Charles Mills

Making the decision to move closer to home in most cases is an easy decision.

Who wouldn't want to live closer to family, especially if you're stuck in a larger city hundreds of miles away.

However, the decision to move closer to home could be hampered by the lack of career opportunities.

Tara Stiles moved back to this area from New York City while Luke Thoele made the move from Bloomington. While their journeys back home differ, they both found their way back to live closer to family.

Tara Stiles

Tara is an Illinois native. She grew up in Morris, where her mom and dad made their home.

Stiles said her first exposure to yoga was while in a dance conservatory in Chicago after graduating from high school in 1996. She moved on to New York City in 2000 to perform with some smaller dance companies when she was introduced to different types of yoga.

"I was young and wanted to keep my options open," Stiles said. "The yoga slowly just started to take over."

She asked her friends if they were trying yoga. Stiles said the friends who said no

thought yoga was intimidating. They had many reasons why they didn't want to try yoga.

"What I learned about yoga is it can be intimidating, but you can also do it in a way that feels better," she said. "I got pulled into sharing, but not doing yoga as a job. If I had a friend who was anxious or upset I would take them through a little yoga and they felt better."

Stiles co-founded a new kind of yoga style with her husband, Michael Taylor. It incorporates yoga with tai chi and is called Strala yoga.

"A lot of people think you need to be

Photo by Charles Mills

Tara Stiles moved her video operations from New York City to her home in Effingham.





Photo by Charles Mills

It's family time in the home of Tara Stiles. Stiles, her daughter, Daisy, and husband Mike Taylor are pictured in Tara's family studio.

flexible. You have to change your religion or change your diet," she said. "So, I just started sharing with people you can do this in an easy-going way and feel better and you can still stay true to yourself and keep your beliefs."

Stiles kept introducing others to her style of yoga, and that eventually led to more opportunities.

"It was different enough from the more rigid styles of yoga that say you have to do it this way. I think people thought in the beginning this was so different and unique, but for me it was just normal. Then more and more opportunities started to present themselves, first with studio space in New York, writing for blogs, magazines and books," she said.

She has published several books distributed in the United States and translated into several different languages. She also produced several DVDs.

"That created more media opportunities for me," Stiles said. "Things just started to happen."

Nissan contacted her to be in an ad for a new type of electric car called the Leaf with actor Ryan Reynolds.

Today, the Strala is practiced in several different countries. With books being translated in different languages, another door of

opportunity opened for Stiles.

She was asked to travel overseas to promote her books at book festivals in Germany, France and Japan just to name a few. Stiles said at some stops she would hold Strala Yoga classes.

"It really allowed me the opportunity to go back to those countries to do yoga classes," Stiles said. "I was beginning to feel at home at all of these places around the world."

Stiles is really looking forward to going back to Berlin, Germany in June. Her travels were interrupted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. She said with strict entry requirements to get into Germany she plans to get her daughter, Daisy, vaccinated when she turns 5. Her husband and Daisy regularly travel overseas with her.

Her latest book "Clean Mind, Clean Body: A 28-Day Plan for Physical, Mental and Spiritual Self-Care" is readily available on the internet with a simple search.

With a little help from family, Stiles started making plans to move back to the area. She said Mike contacted local real estate broker Keith Hartman with RE/MAX for help.

"We needed a space that would look decent for yoga videos," Stiles said. "We really didn't have any high expectations or

anything."

Hartman started sending the couple houses that were available, and her cousin, Shelah Bergbower, along with her son and brother would come to Effingham on the weekends to scout houses.

"They made videos of the houses and asked tons of questions along with taking pictures of the neighborhoods and playgrounds nearby," she said.

Hartman learned a home on Lake Sara would soon be for sale. Hartman sent them photos of the house.

"My uncle saw it and said, 'Definitely get that one.' Just because they like the water and this area," Stiles recalled.

Stiles sent her mom and dad to check out the house. Once the parents inspected the house, Tara and Mike bought the Lake Sara home without personally ever setting foot in it.

"We thought it was safe with everyone saying it was a good house," Stiles said.

Tara, Mike and Daisy moved from New York to settle into their new home in March of 2021.

From a wide-open room in their Lake Sara home, she now produces videos for her YouTube channel and other digital assets. She also sometimes teaches a Strala Yoga class at the Lotus Room Yoga in downtown



Photo by Charles Mills

Luke Thoele, engineer for the City of Effingham, came back to the area to live closer to family.

Effingham.

Luke Thoele

Luke Thoele is a Dieterich native who made his journey closer to home in August of 2020 when he was appointed Effingham City Engineer.

Thoele graduated from Dieterich High School in 2004. After high school, Thoele attended Lake Land College for two years, followed by two years at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. He earned his bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering, with a focus on transportation, in 2008.

His first job after graduation from the University of Illinois took him to Indiana with Strand and Associates, a consulting engineering firm. Thoele said his office was located in Columbus, Indiana a community of more than 50,000 residents southeast of Indianapolis. He worked with Strand for two years.

"I had my eye on moving back to this area," Thoele said. "I got a job with the

Farnsworth Group in Bloomington."

He knew the engineering group had an office in Effingham and wanted to eventually move closer to home. Thoele said he was upfront with Farnsworth Group, letting them know he wanted to work into a position in Effingham if anything became available.

However, an opening in Effingham never became available.

He said at that point he and his wife, Julia, who is originally from Clay County, thought they would be making Bloomington their permanent home.

"We started to set roots and decided to stay there," he said.

After six years with the Farnsworth Group, a position became available with the City of Bloomington. He started as a project engineer for two years before becoming the assistant city engineer.

The family came back to the Effingham area when he was working remotely for the City of Bloomington after the COVID-19

pandemic hit.

"Just seeing the kids play with their cousins brought back the idea of moving back to Effingham," he said.

Thoele was aware of an opening as city engineer for Effingham.

"Luckily for me, it was a perfect fit," he said.

After Effingham officially appointed him to the position, the Thoele family finally made their journey closer to home. When the Thoele family moved back to the area in 2020, they had four children and one on the way.

They found a home in the Bishop area.

"We live in the T-town school district, Watson Township, have an Effingham address and live closer to Dieterich," he said. "So, it was a homecoming for both of us."



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VILLAGE SQUARE MALL BOUNCING BACK

By Zach Roth

On the wide expanse of the World Wide Web are a pair of videos regarding Effingham's Village Square Mall. In them, a person is videotaping a walk-thru of the facility, explaining in so many words just why one of the city's most venerable shopping institutions had been left to waste.

One of the videos, uploaded in August, showed a facility that had enough stores to count on one hand. Only three stores were open at the mall — a sign that it had, like so many other shopping centers across the country, essentially died.

However, shopping malls can be revived in some capacity. Such was the mission of Steve Linton, the lead pastor of The Journey, a church located inside the mall, when he took over as property manager in March 2021. With only a select few stores and a deteriorating property, he knew that quick action needed to be taken in order to keep the facility running for the foreseeable future.

"Most everything cosmetically inside needed to be fixed, updated (or) replaced,"

Linton said. "We didn't have any of the soda machines (and) none of the benches were out. It looked deserted."

After almost a full year in charge, Village Square Mall is showing new signs of life, thanks to Linton and with an assist from the state court system. New stores are opening throughout the mall, including Wild Rose Boutique, which moved from its downtown location to a new spot just outside the former JCPenney location, and Reiniger Jewelers, a Metro East-based jewelry chain that placed itself right across from Wild Rose.

In addition, much of the uncertainty surrounding the JCPenney location has subsided. That part of the mall was the key factor in a series of legal proceedings in which the building's owners, Durga Property Holdings based in Cincinnati, had held off on repairing the roof of the storefront due to animosity from local contractors, complications from COVID-19 and the contents of an agreement between the city of Effingham and Durga, which required them to replace old insulation and install a new HVAC system.



Photo by Zach Roth

Crossroads Vendors Market was among the first tenants to open at Village Square Mall after Steve Linton took over as the mall's general manager in March 2021.

The ugly saga came to a head in July when Judge Michael McHaney of the Fourth Judicial Circuit ruled that Durga could not block the city from completing repairs on the storefront. Appeals continue, but as of this moment, the JCPenney roof is now fully repaired and ready for a possible tenant.

"It has been completely remediated at this point," said Michelle Lilley, the city's building official.

All of the new openings and the work being done to spruce up the 50-year-old facility has led to new interest from a variety of different companies. With a more uniform design for the building, Linton has heard from many lessees interested in putting their retail establishments into the mall.

"We went from four renters to 14," Linton said. "We have many conversations going with other people, from local (stores) to a couple of corporate names. (For) our bigger areas — the JCPenney, the Rural King — those conversations are happening."

With new stores comes new traffic, adding a sense of optimism for the facility's future. Linton believes opinions on the mall are beginning to shift back as people hear about the new stores and what's to come, whether that's from word of mouth or from the mall's new Facebook page, started in August.

"We're hearing a lot of positive things,"

Photo by Zach Roth

Steve Linton, the property manager for Village Square Mall, stands in front of Wild Rose Boutique recently. Linton is attempting to revitalize the aging facility, through renovations and attracting new stores.



Photo by Zach Roth

Smith Archery is among the newest stores to open inside Village Square Mall.

Linton said. “People are excited about seeing things come back to life. What’s really neat is people have to share (with) you their stories, ‘When I was a kid, I came here and my parents went this way and we went that way and we went to the arcade, etc.’ That’s been great to hear.”

Linton thinks by the end of 2022 he could have the mall filled with tenants — a remarkable turnaround for a place that many have considered dead. City Administrator Steve Miller is glad people are moving in and providing some new life to the facility.

It’s “a good sign,” Miller said. “Having some new stores and having the space occupied is really important, especially in that area. We do like to see the businesses expand and move into the area. The city has been working with the owner on the building code issues, but we’re glad to see that there is movement. People are moving into the mall and it is a space available for local business.”



Photo by Zach Roth

Reiniger Jewelers, a Metro East-based jewelry chain, has set up shop in Village Square Mall. It’s one of the few chain stores to operate in the mall, a place that has seen a series of openings since Steve Linton became general manager in March 2021.

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Sat. Mar. 12 7:00 pm	Winter Dance Party	\$40	\$30	\$25
Sat. Apr. 2 8:00 pm	Kentucky HH/ Confederate RR	\$39	\$39	\$39
Fri. Apr. 8 7:00 pm	Bill Engvall	\$79	\$69	\$59
Sat. Apr. 9 7:00 pm	Rhonda Vincent	\$42	\$32	\$26
Fri. Apr. 22 7:00 pm	Pure Prairie League	\$37	\$27	\$21
Sat. Apr. 23 7:00 pm	Lonestar	\$51	\$51	\$51
Fri. Apr. 29 7:00 pm	Trace Adkins	\$75	\$75	\$75
Fri. May 6 7:00 pm Sat. May 7 7:00 pm Sun. May 8 2:00 pm	The Waverly Gallery	\$20	\$20	\$20
Sat. May 14 7:00 pm	Scott Wattles & the Blue Suede Crew	\$15	\$15	\$15
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"We feel so grateful to be in a community with so many people that support local business, including Wright's Furniture," said Wright's Furniture & Flooring President John Wright. "Being a family business is different than a corporation. We live here and we're part of the community and we care about building relationships with our customers. We just want to thank everyone for their continued support."

There was a lot that happened in 2021 and our Wright's team wanted to share what made this year great!

Judy Repking talks about getting ready for her son's big day: "I spent an awesome weekend in Chicago this past August. It was a girls weekend for a bridal shower celebrating my son Justin and his fiancé Jane. They celebrated on Jan 28th in Phoenix for a wedding vacation!"

Alex Wright, our Marketing Director, is thankful that his whole family was able to go to Walt Disney World this year. He said the last time that the entire family went together was almost 20 years ago!

Brian Hardiek shows his appreciation for his family: "My baby girl, Isabella, is a senior at Teutopolis High School this year, and Gail and I are having a great time when Weston comes to visit!"

Karen Brumleve shares what her family had going on this year: "Our family grew this year! We added another little boy in July making it 9 grandkids. Oh, and Cole got a chicken and named him Jeffery, he is entertaining! We kept busy with the kids' basketball, baseball and softball games. Bill retired this year and loves it. Man, this year went by fast..."

And John Wright, President of Wright's Furniture, shares about his ever-growing family: "We had a busy year! We gained a daughter in October, as Devin married Peyton! And we welcomed another addition in January, as our daughter Jessica and her husband John welcomed a baby girl! Taylor remodeled her horse trailer by herself, talented for sure (I helped very little). Lastly, my wife Tammy has decided to retire so she can help with John & Jess's new addition."

Wright's Furniture & Flooring is a locally-owned business which features a large selection of quality living room, bedroom, dining room, home office furniture, and flooring. They currently have a lot of in-stock furniture ready for delivery or pick-up.

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MENTORING PROGRAM MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN STUDENTS' LIVES

By Cathy Griffith



Jesse Barnes had just moved to Effingham from Windsor. His parents were divorced and he struggled

adjusting from a small school to a big one. He ended up getting held back and had to repeat sixth grade.

That's when he started in the Unit 40 Mentoring Program and was paired with a mentor.

"I was able to talk to someone in private about things I didn't really want to talk to with anyone else; build a trust with somebody," he said.

Because of that, he was able to maintain a good relationship with others instead of being mad all the time.

Years later, Barnes decided to give back to the program since someone took time out of their busy work schedule to be there for him and help him figure things out with school.

"I know a lot of kids that don't have an opportunity to have that in their lives," he said.

Barnes is one of many who, after 20-plus years, is proof the program is not only working but working well, according to coordinator Amy Miller.

The program helps between 120 to 130 students a year, from third grade through high school. This year eight seniors are graduating who have been with the program the entire time.

"That shows the longevity has been there and that's what makes a difference in the mentoring program," said Miller.

The students meet with their mentors once a week during their lunch break and do a variety of activities.

"Here (at Central Grade School) a lot of

Submitted photo

Beau Schuette is shown with mentor Racheal Fearday.

them grab board games or go to the gym and throw football, do crafts. At the junior high, a lot of them go to the gym still and play games. In high school, they do more card playing and talking. They don't really have a place to go run and play," said facilitator Rhonda Wines. "Here, we just want them to be their friend and hang out and have fun. We don't want them to dig into their lives or try and change them in any way.

"They are just there to be another supportive adult in their life," said Wines.

"That shows up each week. Someone they can count on seeing," added Miller.

Students are referred to the program by teachers and sometimes parents. Wines noted there are a wide range of reasons a child is recommended for the program.

"It can be anything as small as their social skills – maybe they don't relate well with their peers – or it could be an incarcerated parent or drug abuse at home, even the death of a parent," she said.

Beau Schuette struggled socially as a child with Asperger's Syndrome. The high-functioning autism caused him to be socially inept.

"A lot of the kids need help with just anything. Having someone to talk to is the biggest."
— Jesse Barnes

"When I was a really small kid, my parents couldn't even joke with me. I would take serious offense to the point I would get upset and start crying," he said.

The Unit 40 mentoring program had only been in place a few years when Schuette was paired with a mentor. The program helped him socially.

"I got this one-on-one interaction with this person that's not a part of my family, that I haven't known my entire life, that could teach me different aspects of what's OK and what's not OK to say to people, how to take jokes, how to understand social interactions, which I desperately needed whenever I was growing up," he said.

That taught Schuette a level of social interaction he has needed as an adult.

"It gave me a chance to be a functioning adult. It gave me a chance to understand



Cathy Griffith photo

Facilitator Rhonda Wines and Coordinator Amy Miller help run the Unit 40 Mentoring Program.

people," he said.

Soon after graduating, Schuette knew he wanted to give back to the program. So he became a mentor and was paired with a fourth grade student.

Now that the student will soon be graduating, the experience of being a mentor has given Schuette the benefit of watching the kid grow to a well-understanding adult, an adult who's hard-working, and does everything he can to be the best person he can be.

For Barnes, as an adult the program has

shown him to take responsibility when people are in need of someone to talk to or a friend.

"A lot of the kids need help with just anything. Having someone to talk to is the biggest," he said.

That simple interaction can have an effect in as little as a single meeting.

"The first kid I mentored went through some home stuff. He would always not be in a very good mood whenever I would first meet up with him. By the time we got through the lunch period, he was a lot hap-



Zach Roth photo

The Unit 40 Mentoring Program made an impact on Beau Schuette as a child. Now, the 26-year-old is striving to make that same impact as a mentor with the program.

pier,” said Barnes.

Barnes and Schuette encourage others to become mentors, for which there’s always a need, according Miller and Wines.

“Just because you weren’t a part of the program doesn’t mean you can’t start being a part of the program,” said Schuette.

With the pandemic, Miller said the biggest goal is to keep getting mentors and keep promoting the program that has helped numerous kids.

“We just want to keep expanding on that and do whatever we can to help relationships with kids, with the community and

their families,” she said.

Anyone interested in becoming a mentor, should contact Rhonda Wines at Central Grade School, 217-540-1413 or email winesr@unit40.org.

EDN Citizen of the Year among first mentors

Mark Steppe was surrounded by family and friends when Effingham Daily News Editor Jeff Long made the announcement he had been chosen as Citizen of the Year for 2022 at the Effingham County Chamber Gala.

“I was totally shocked and amazed,” Mark Steppe said. “There were so many icons out there who have gotten Citizen of the Year. I really didn’t work my way through the years even thinking about this.”

He was one of the original mentors for the Effingham Unit 40 Mentoring Program, a program started by Kim Varner in 2000. Steppe worked as a mentor before the mentoring program established a board of directors.

“Over the years, we grew it to 150 kids. The numbers have been down since COVID,” said Steppe. “That also

means 150 adults that are volunteering their time. It’s just not me. It’s a whole community and everybody has the same passion I have.”

The first student he mentored from third through eighth grade. He mentored a second child all the way through high

school after the program was expanded to include high school students.

“The high school program now is very successful,” he said. “The kids seem to enjoy it just as much as the adults do. Sometimes the kids in the program just need a friend and someone to talk to.”



Lake Sara Marina

Lake Sara Marina is pleased to announce the 2022 Boat Show Spectacular! The event will take place at the Village Square Mall, 1910 S. Banker St., Effingham IL. With eleven boat lines and five motor lines, Lake Sara Marina is the place to go for fishing, skiing and pleasure boats. They also carry the accessories for all these activities including skis, wake boards, wake surf boards, tubes, boat covers, life vests, electronics and other equipment. Garmin electronics will be featured as our new product line.

The service center at Lake Sara Marina has recently expanded to six mechanics. They are proud of their experienced staff. Terry Grunloh has recently celebrated 48 years with Lake Sara and

Howard Janis, the general manager and owner, has worked in the industry for 42 years. The shop staff has certifications from five motor manufacturers. This gives their service center a substantial advantage over the other repair shops in central and southern Illinois.

For the fishermen in the area, Lake Sara Marina is a dealer for Ranger, Excel, Alumacraft and most recently Polar Kraft. Crest, Manitou, Sweetwater and Qwest will be on display for the pontoon boat lover. The skiers, wake board and surf enthusiasts will enjoy the Malibu and Axis lines. Crownline Boats complete the lines for pleasure boaters who enjoy the fiberglass bow riders. Representatives from these boat lines, as well as the

motor manufacturers, will be available for any questions at the show.

Lake Sara Forever and Lake Sara Marina have enjoyed a very successful partnership. Due to the patronage of the Lake Sara area, Lake Sara Marina has been able to contribute \$6,200 to this endeavor. They look forward to continuing this relationship.

Lake Sara Marina cordially invites all boating enthusiasts to enjoy the 2022 Lake Sara Marina Boat Show March 3 through March 6 at the Village Square Mall in Effingham.

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AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS HELP PARENTS AND KIDS

By Cathy Griffith

Charity Bohnhoff knows the importance of having a place where her children can go to after school while she and her husband are still working – a place where they can get a snack, get help with their homework, and play and socialize.

That place is Dieterich School District's After-School Program, attended by their three children – ages 11, 9 and 7. It eliminates a lot of worry for Charity.

"It allows you to not worry about where your kids are, about who's taking them what

day. It's a very consistent program that's always there," she said.

Just having a place that is safe is indispensable, and the homework help has especially been beneficial for the busy family.

"My husband coaches high school basketball. Our kids play ball. So, we're always on the go," said Charity. "We really need that homework done after school so we can get in our evening activities."

While Charity likes the homework help, her children like being able to socialize with their friends. And, she values the playtime

they get outside of electronics, after their homework is done.

The school district started the program in 2015 following community MAPPING (Management and Planning Programs Involving Nonmetropolitan Groups) sessions to address day care needs in the community. The program serves students in grades kindergarten through sixth until 6 p.m. on school days.

While attendance varies, on average about 30 students attend daily, according to Superintendent Cary Jackson.

EDN file photo

Tammy Meinhart, owner and founder of The Study Shoppe, turns on a computer at the facility.



"It is a very popular program with the parents and students," said Jackson.

Teutopolis School District Superintendent Matt Sturgeon hopes to mimic Dieterich's program, as well as others.

"The district is in process of setting up an after-school program, however, details of it are still being ironed out," Sturgeon said in January.

The idea for such a program was born out of the village's own MAPPING initiative, Teutopolis for Tomorrow. With limited day care in the village, the Teutopolis for Tomorrow's Education and Child Care subcommittee pursued the idea of an after-school program. The district is partnering with the committee on setting up such a program for school-age children.

Beecher City School District started its after-school program three years ago. But it wasn't until this year the program went from two days a week to four thanks to federal COVID relief funds.

The goal of the program is to provide after-school care and homework help for any student enrolled in the district in grades kindergarten through eighth, according to Beecher City Grade School Principal Karen Hanfland. The program offers snack time, free play, homework time and a themed activity such as an art or science project. About 25 students attend at any given time, according to Hanfland.

The same federal COVID relief funds in the form of ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) grants allowed Effingham Unit 40 to start its own after-school programs for junior high and high school students this school year. Unlike other district programs, Unit 40's was started to help students who strictly need academic skills reinforcement and not as a form of child care.

When told there was funding available to start an after-school program, Effingham High School Principal Kurt Roberts jumped at the chance. The high school program started in late November with 14 students but Roberts anticipates that number will likely expand to 20 in the second semester.

"As we can handle it, we will keep growing as we need to," he said.

The students meet with instructors an hour a day, three days a week. The instructors help in a multitude of ways, from organizational skills to catching up on work they may have missed while out on quarantine or isolation. They also may help with skill gaps.

"We have some programs we use in math to just kind of update and help kids fill in some gaps on some skills," he said.

They also might help in understanding homework and completing it, or just how to

get started.

Roberts already started seeing success a couple of months into the program, particularly around final exam time when students requested dedicating time to just working on studying for finals.

"That's a win because they're taking that ownership," he said.

Roberts said there is one important ingredient they have discovered for student success in the program.

"I've had students communicate with me already that just the stress levels alone – you know the stress of coming in every day maybe not knowing what some of this is or worrying about the grades – is starting to dissipate. And that is increasing their quality of academic life by quite a bit."

– Weston Penno

"What we've found after having done this is our students that were here on a regular basis every day saw success," he said.

Consistency is key, but not just with students.

"We made a commitment very early on

that our instructors were going to be the same people here every time so you develop that consistency," he said. "It really is just that commitment overall over a period of time of being there on a regular basis and building that routine and building that discipline just to be there. That's really where we've seen the success."

One of the instructors in the program, Weston Penno, has noticed strong growth from students who are consistently participating in the program.

"We've noticed a pretty strong uptick in not just grades but keeping track with their work, continuing to be motivated in their classes, even just straight organizational skills, being able to talk to me and say, 'You know what. I have A, B and C due and I've noticed that my note-taking has become stronger,'" he said.

Organization was one of the areas instructors intended to help students with going into the program, but the need for the skill turned out to be greater than Penno initially thought. So, they set up "organizational boot camps."

"We just kind of go in and we go through their binders. We help them kind of audit missing work or we help them determine what's going to work best for them," he explained. "The organizational skills really tie into just being able to first seek out what the assignments are, keep track of what's due, what the due dates are, and then start to organize that. We talked to them a little about breaking up your work, prioritizing things, getting them done in timely manner."

For some students, it might be as simple as filling out their daily schedule and making a checklist. For others, it's organization that's a little more physical. Those students get organized through folders and the use of binders and tabs, so they're not losing work and they don't feel frustrated with not being able to find something that was given to them in class.

Teaching students organizational skills has definitely helped academically, said

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Submitted photo

Students at the Dieterich School District After-School Program have some Halloween fun last year.

Peno. He has also noticed students are happier because of the program.

"I've had students communicate with me already that just the stress levels alone – you know the stress of coming in every day maybe not knowing what some of this is or worrying about the grades – is starting to dissipate. And that is increasing their quality of academic life by quite a bit," he said.

As students become more self-sufficient, Peno finds they still want to continue with the program, especially around mid-term.

"I had students asking for a little extra time or little bit more because they wanted to make sure they were studying correctly or that questions were being answered along the way," he said. "Even though their grades are up, even through their organization is

up, there's still such a strong benefit to just kind of having this community after school and to be able to have one-on-one time with us."

The program has been able to offer more than just homework and organizational help. Students who finish their work early can benefit from extended learning on subjects such as math.

"We have the math teacher with us that goes over deeper knowledge. Myself, I guide them into how to study ahead, how to read things, use independent research. So, we're always trying to help them grow as an individual even once they hit the point of being pretty self-sustainable in school," he said.

Peno is happy with the results of the new

program so far.

"It sort of being so young we definitely couldn't ask for a better outcome," he said. "I'm really excited to see where it's going to take us throughout the semester."

Roberts would like for the program to continue.

"As long as we're achieving success and as long as there's a need and as long as this is the best way we can meet that need, yeah, I want to keep doing that," he said.

Effingham Junior High School is also seeing success with its after-school program – even though it just started in January.

The program, which is one hour three days a week, started with nine students. Principal Charlie Schwerman anticipated that number growing further into the semester.

Schwerman said the idea behind the program is to provide supports for students, whether it's studying for a test or quiz, completing an assignment, or catching up from extended absences due to COVID.

"Just a place where they can go, have internet access, and ask questions if they need help," he said.

He noted students attending the program are realizing success in terms of completing assignments and keeping their grades where they want them.

"It doesn't seem like much but an hour a day with that assistance, with that help and with that structure is a big deal for a lot of our kids," he said.

Not only does the junior high program focus on teaching students organizational skills, but responsibility as well, such as communicating with parents and teachers, understanding when an assignment is due or what they need to do to complete it.

"We have a lot of kids that struggle with it," he said.

Schwerman would like to see the program continue to grow and is ready to open it up to more students or families who want the help or need it.

"Each week we hand out more applications, word of mouth. We try to advertise it as much as we can," he said.

Schwerman said parents interested can call the junior high.

He also would like to see the program expand to four days with little longer sessions.

Schwerman said one inhibitor to expanding the program is transportation.

"The thing that probably hurts us the most right now is that we can't provide transportation because we don't have the drivers available to bring them home after the program," he said. "But I think in the future if that's something that we can offer, the program will grow exponentially if we can provide a way for these kids to go home."

Schwerman said the aim of the program is to offer kids a no-strings-attached place to achieve the goals they set for themselves.

"We just want it to be a place where kids can come, can get help and there's no consequences, there's no judging, just a place where you can go and do your work," he said.

That approach is modeled after another after-school program Schwerman and others turned to when setting up the junior high program.

Located across the street from the junior high, The Study Shoppe has been helping students at the junior high and high school for the past five years.

"We have quite a few kids that walk over there every day. We've seen a lot of success with The Study Shoppe as well," said Schwerman.

Schwerman said the program provided a blueprint on how to be successful.

"We're trying to model it a little bit after what they've done and are doing as well," he said.

Tammy Meinhart, owner and founder of The Study Shoppe, said its success stems from the program's mission in providing a safe place for students to work on homework.

"That's exactly what we strive for: a safe

and loving environment. So, they feel welcomed and feel like they can ask questions and we try and answer and take care of their needs the best we can," she said.

"That's exactly what we strive for: a safe and loving environment. So, they feel welcomed and feel like they can ask questions and we try and answer and take care of their needs the best we can."

— Tammy Meinhart

The Study Shoppe has seen a significant increase in students utilizing their services this school year and has reached the capacity of 22 students on several occasions, according to Meinhart.

"At the end of the quarter, our numbers usually tend to go up because they start falling behind and they've got quarter deadline pushing them, especially for students that have make-up work to do," she said.

The pandemic has also prompted more students who are on isolation or quarantine to seek help. Those are days they lose classroom instruction and usually have to do everything online.

"For some students, that works pretty good. But for others, you know they have this difficulty with the subject and so when they're having to try to basically teach themselves, they don't always understand all the theories behind each lesson," said Meinhart. "We've had students here that have taken two or three weeks of just being in The Study Shoppe just to get caught up."

Another obstacle for students who are quarantined or isolated is access to internet, which Meinhart said many Unit 40 students still don't have — something she saw when she was the director for the Unit 40 Mentoring Program.

"They can't go online to get their homework done, so through the mentoring program, I've learned there's a scope of children that just need some extra safety net, which we try to provide here at The Study Shoppe," she said.

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Siemer Milling Company of Teutopolis is one of several local employers that offers employees participation in company financial success through an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP). Created in 2000, the Siemer ESOP is a part of the company retirement plan. Every year, plan participants receive actual shares as a contribution from the company; these shares increase in value based on company growth and profitability; and employees sell them back to the company when they retire (or otherwise leave). The Siemer ESOP has been very successful, with share value increasing over 1000% since inception. Even better, since there are relatively few employees for the size of the company, each person's results are more lucrative than in many other ESOPs. This has been a terrific benefit for Siemer employees, and since the value of the benefit depends on business success, the ESOP is also a big motivator to company performance.

Siemer Milling Company is a major contributor to the local economies where it operates. It has a substantial payroll for its

185 employees. Beyond that, it buys over 26 million bushels of wheat each year for milling into flour. Recently, that amount of wheat is worth over \$200 million, paid to local farmers and merchandisers. There is a large net inflow of money to our area, since Siemer sells the flour to customers all over the country, with much of the proceeds paid to nearby vendors for their inputs.

In its continuing program of investment to upgrade its facilities, Siemer Milling Company is completing a new coproducts storage and loading tower. Over 20% of

what Siemer sells is "not flour," i.e., parts of the wheat kernel that get removed in the milling process. Those parts have nutritional and functional value, and their sales make an important contribution to Siemer Financials. The new tower will enable more efficient handling of product and minimize handling loss. Facilities that will be consequently removed are among the very few remaining elements of the Teutopolis plant that predate 1978 – even though Siemer has operated on the site since 1882.



Siemer Milling Company corporate headquarters located at 111 W. Main Street in Teutopolis IL.



Teutopolis, IL Mill



Hopkinsville, KY Mill



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Visiting Angels Homecare Services

Visiting Angels, with 650 agencies throughout the world, makes aging in place possible for millions of seniors every year. Instead of moving to an assisted living facility or a nursing home, seniors can continue living where they feel happiest and most comfortable — their home.

Visiting Angels Homecare Services has been in existence since 1998 and is known as America's Choice in Homecare and voted #1 homecare agency to work for across the nation.

Owner Rose Ruholl opened the local office located at 120 E. Section, Effingham, in June 2018. Her management team includes Debbie Myer, Operations Manager; Stephanie Will, Marketing Liaison; and Erica Price, Office Manager.

According to Ruholl, "Our Caregivers is what sets us apart. The background screening system we use is the best in the business. We recruit experienced caregivers who are seasoned in attending to the needs of care recipients. We will only refer a caregiver to you who has the necessary experience to fulfill your individual needs. Most important is our caregivers who provide references to us from trusted sources including other homecare agencies, hospitals, nursing facilities, churches,

hospices, and assisted living communities."

"You are in charge of everything. Visiting Angels will not dictate to you what your schedule is to be (i.e. what time to get up, when to bathe, meal schedules, etc.). It is our job to adjust to your schedule and to see to it that you remain comfortable in your own home."

After the caregiver has been placed in your home, they continue with a unique system of continued personalized contacts through telephone check-in and home visits. Some of the many services they provide include assistance in: Bathing, Hygiene & Grooming and Dressing, Medication Reminders, Light Housekeeping, Laundry, Meal Preparation/Diet Monitoring, Errands, Shopping, Transportation, Joyful Companionship, Wellbeing Observation, Coordination of Care - Mornings, Mid-day, & Evenings, Weekends and Holidays, and Respite for Family Caregivers. They have also implemented the Vet 2 Vet Program.

Because of the demand of the excellent caregiving services offered at Visiting Angels, they have created Visiting Angels Development and Education Center located at 127 E. Jefferson Ave. in Effingham. The center will be utilized to develop the exceptional personal care they offer their clients and also as

a classroom to educate their Care Specialists.

Ruholl, a Certified Dementia Practitioner and Alzheimer's Awareness Community Educator, will soon host Alzheimer's education sessions at the center to area professionals.

Visiting Angels is developing courses to be offered to the public as well including:

- What to look for in homecare services
- Differences in homecare services
- What to look for in a Care Specialist
- Education for area caregivers
 - ◊ Independent Caregivers
 - ◊ Family Caregivers
 - ◊ Caregivers employed with other agencies
- Caregiver Support Group
- Caregiver certified education courses
- Alzheimer and Dementia Education
 - ◊ Signs to look for to determine Dementia and Alzheimer's
 - ◊ Communicating with someone who has Dementia
 - ◊ Understand Dementia and Alzheimer's
 - ◊ Addressing Memory Care issues

To learn more about how Visiting Angels can serve you, contact us by stopping by our office at 120 E Section Ave., Effingham, IL, giving us a call at 217-690-4564 or through our website www.visitingangels.com/effingham.



Rose Ruholl, Owner

Visiting Angels Homecare Agency SENIOR HOMECARE By Angels®

We Care Every Day, In Every Way.



We're America's Choice

At Visiting Angels we know it isn't easy to make the decision to invite a caregiver into your home to provide home care. Visiting Angels home care agencies have served tens of thousands of client families from Visiting Angels locations across the United States (each office independently owned and operated).

- Bathing Assistance
- Dressing Assistance
- Grooming
- Medication Reminders
- Errands
- Shopping
- Meal Preparation
- Light Housekeeping
- Friendly Companionship
- Flexible Hourly Care
- Respite Care for Families
- Personal Hygiene Care

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SURVEY: ILLINOIS SCHOOLS FACE WORSENING EDUCATOR SHORTAGE

Problems made worse by pandemic

By Peter Hancock
Capitol News Illinois

School officials across Illinois say a shortage of teachers and substitutes is forcing them to cancel course offerings, move them online or fill open positions with people who are not fully qualified.

Those are the findings of the latest survey by the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools, the fifth such survey the organization has conducted in as many years.

“Our schools need help, now more than ever,” said Mark Klaisner, IARSS president. “For five years of our study, we have shown how schools are struggling to find qualified teachers and are under tremendous stress to provide the best education possible while understaffed and overwhelmed. COVID-19 has only made those challenges worse.”

The survey included responses from 663 of the state’s 852 school districts, representing 78 percent of public schools in Illinois. It was conducted in the fall of 2021 by Goshen Education Consulting, based in Edwardsville.

Overall, 88 percent of the districts responding said they had a shortage of full-time teachers, while 96 percent said they had a shortage of substitute teachers. Districts responding reported a total of 412 classes were canceled and 385 were converted to online instruction because of teacher shortage issues.

More than 2,000 positions are either not filled or filled by someone not qualified to teach there, more than double the number reported from last year. That includes the increased use of paraprofessionals — people who are not fully licensed as teachers but who are credentialed to work under the direction of a licensed teacher.

The shortage is most acute in the east-central and west-central regions where more than 90 percent of the districts responding said they had a teacher shortage problem. But even in the northeast region where the shortage appeared to be least significant, 79 percent of districts reported

a teacher shortage, while overall 77 percent of districts said the shortage is getting worse.

In an interview, Klaisner said the biggest shortage areas were among special education and English as a Second Language teachers, while science and math teachers were also in short supply.

He also said regions that largely depend on career technical education have had a difficult time with staffing. He also found “interesting” challenges in hiring physical education instructors.

Districts also reported having a harder time hiring administrators. Although the problem was less severe, 35 percent of the districts responding said they had a minor-to-serious problem hiring administrators, while 95 percent said they are receiving fewer applications for open administrator positions.

ISBE data

The survey results paint a different picture than the most recent state report card from the Illinois State Board of Education, which indicated the teacher workforce has been growing, due in large part to the additional funding districts have received from both state and federal sources.

“We are encouraged by a lot of what we can see at the state level in terms of growth overall in the number of full-time teachers,” Jen Kirmes, ISBE’s executive director of teaching and learning, said in an interview. “We’re also encouraged by what we see in terms of educator preparation, programs, enrollment and completion. And so there certainly are reasons to be optimistic.”

“We also know that there are great needs in places still for classroom educators,” she added. “But also, we’re hearing from districts about the need for other really critical support professionals who make school work for students like bus drivers, substitute teachers, paraprofessionals. And of course, especially during a pandemic, school nurses.”

Klaisner said IARSS does not dispute the data from ISBE, but he said 2020-21 findings were skewed by the pandemic and the fact that most districts were operating entirely remotely.

“A lot of folks are scratching their head, like, how do you measure those numbers in a year where some schools were closed all year long,” he said. “And what are you counting? Are you counting contacts? Were you counting the number of kids enrolled? Were you counting attendance? And so we recognize our data, as well as anybody else’s data over the course of (fiscal year) ‘21 was skewed to some degree, no matter what you did, because we weren’t really sure how to count things.”

Kathi Griffin, president of the Illinois Education Association, the state’s largest teachers union, said there is definitely a teacher shortage that is being made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We’ve been struggling with a teacher shortage for a number of years,” she said. “We’ve had fewer and fewer college students choosing the profession of education for their college degree. However, the pandemic has just really brought to light the real, true shortage.” She said shortages have also been fueled by early retirements and by teachers who left the profession.

“I don’t think that the general public realizes the stress, as well as what is being expected of educators,” she said. “It’s like, OK, we went back in the fall, and the doors opened, and magically everything was supposed to go back to how it was from March of 2020. And that’s just not realistic.”

COVID-19 impact

The IARSS survey also found that the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the teacher shortage. More than 70 percent of the districts responding said the pandemic has created budget or logistical challenges that have increased the need for more hiring, while nearly 60 percent reported increased hiring of teachers and paraprofessionals.

That was in spite of the fact that during the pandemic the state has relaxed some of its licensing requirements and given districts more flexibility in assigning teachers to different grade levels. Klaisner said those measures haven't done enough to increase the supply of teachers.

"More and more people are exiting, and the pipeline just can't keep up," he said. "Flexibility is one thing. But if you've got hundreds and thousands of teachers who are leaving, the pipeline's just not producing enough people to fill the gaps."

Superintendents in 42 percent of the districts surveyed said economic instability and educator burnout caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had increased teacher turnover in their district.

ISBE's Kirmes said the pandemic has definitely impacted the supply of substitute teachers.

"We are hearing a lot from school districts about the need for substitutes," she said. "And so we believe that that is part of some larger labor dynamics in terms of just competition in the labor market, in general, for folks who can do all sorts of positions, including being a substitute. ... And certainly, given conditions with regard to the pandemic, there is an even greater need potentially for subs, especially in certain areas as the conditions change."

Policy options

In recent years, Illinois lawmakers have taken several steps to address teacher shortages, including passing a 2019 law that raises the minimum starting salary for a teacher to \$40,000 in 2023.

Klaisner, however, said that has not had the desired effect, especially in poorly-funded districts.

"We found, particularly the downstate districts that weren't paying \$40,000, in some cases were having to eliminate positions to meet the statutory requirement," he said. "In other words, if you have two people at \$30,000, and you've got to raise it to \$40,000, then maybe you let one of those people go so that you can raise the (other) salary because you just don't have more money in the budget. You can require a higher salary, but if there's no funding behind it, then they have to make some

tough choices."

The regional superintendents are proposing several measures to the General Assembly that they say could help alleviate the shortage, including increased funding of the Evidence Based Funding formula with an additional \$500 million in the upcoming fiscal year. Currently, they argue, more than half of all districts are funded at less than 70 percent of adequacy.

They are also proposing funding the Illinois Teachers Retirement System at 100 percent of the actuarially required level to increase confidence in the system. Under the so-called "Edgar Ramp," named after former Gov. Jim Edgar, the state contributes less than the required amount, but the contribution rate gradually goes up each year until 2045, when the plan is projected to be 90 percent funded.

Klaisner, however, said one of the most effective things the state could do would be to create new pathways to earning a teaching license.

"For instance, one of my favorite strategies is, if you came to me and said you want to be a teacher, what if I handed you a teacher's license that day and assigned to you a mentor, and you had agreed to take classes at night and I'm evaluating you as a teacher?" he said. "So now you are earning a salary, you're in a classroom with kids, you have built-in supports. And you don't have to take two to three years [of college], and student teaching on top of it, where you have to step away from your profession. I think there's a real power in this sort of apprenticeship kind of model."

ISBE is developing something similar to that. Last year, it opened grant applications to develop teacher residency programs in which colleges and universities will partner with local school districts or regional offices of education in rural areas to develop training programs in special education and bilingual education.

In a residency program, a teacher candidate would embed in a school for a full year, shadowing a veteran teacher while also taking classes.

"Residency programs overall tend to prepare a more diverse set of future educators," Kirmes said. "And also, educators who are prepared through a residency model tend to emerge from their preparation more fully prepared and are retained at a higher rate."

Lawmakers have scheduled a shortened session this year due to the revised election calendar they adopted due to the delays in the redistricting process.

But state Sen. Christopher Belt, D-Swansea, who chairs the Senate Education Committee, said he hopes lawmakers can at least pass short-term measures to address the teacher shortage, such as allowing retired teachers to work more than 120 days without being penalized on their pension payments.

The long-term solution, Belt said, is to elevate the profession of teaching as something that is more respected and more valued by society.

"I think we have to do a better job – and not just Illinois, but the country – of really owning and telling the narrative of what the profession of teaching is," he said. "As it is right now, you don't hear much about teaching in the public arena unless it's salacious or something bad or 'a teacher did this,' and then you hear it. And you even have teachers telling their kids, 'Don't get in this profession.' And so we really have to understand that this is one of the most noble professions that there is. No matter what you are in life, a teacher helped get you to that point."

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Photo credit: West 40 Intermediate Service Center No. 2

Mark Klaisner speaks as he is being sworn in as president of the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools in Hillside in 2019. Klaisner said the subject areas for which there is the largest shortage of educators across Illinois are special education and English as a Second Language, while science and math teachers were also in short supply.



EFFINGHAM COUNTY MEMORIAL AIRPORT'S ECONOMIC IMPACT: \$9.6M

By Charles Mills

The Effingham County Memorial Airport has an annual economic impact of \$9.6 million, according to the Illinois Department of Transportation Aeronautics.

That's good news, according to Airport Superintendent and Effingham County Engineer Greg Koester, who recently presented an Aviation Economic Impact Analysis to the Effingham County Airport Commission. It was compiled by the Illinois Department of Transportation Aviation Division specifically for the Effingham County Memorial Airport.

The information is presented as a part of a new brochure IDOT released.

"This is an overall brochure of the economic impact analysis that was done citywide, regionally and statewide," he said. "It's a great write-up. It addresses the businesses using the airport."

The report stated the airport is frequented by recreational and corporate/business aircraft users, including Heartland Dental, J&J Ventures and Gaming, Sherwin Williams, Menards, Siemer Milling, Stevens Industries, Walmart and Hobby Lobby. Local commercial, industrial and agricultural companies rely on the airport to conduct their business operations, it stated.

Koester said a special mention was made in the analysis about the airport's growth, noting that in 2019 the Illinois Department of Transportation honored Effingham County Memorial Airport with the Illinois General Aviation Airport of the Year award.

To allow for further growth, the airport was recently granted money to extend its runways as part of J.B. Pritzker's \$94 million Rebuild Illinois Airport Capital program through the Illinois Department



EDN file photo

A corporate jet gets ready to take off from the Effingham County Memorial Airport.

of Transportation. The commission was awarded two grants — \$3.5 million for the runway extension and \$1.5 million for a taxiway extension. Each grant requires a local match from Effingham County of \$350,000 for the runway extension and \$150,000 for the taxiway extension. Koester expects the runway and taxiway extension project to be ready for bid letting after a series of design meetings in spring of 2023.

However, airport officials are already looking at what lies ahead, beyond the project.

"We are trying to determine what is in the best interest of the airport after the extension," Koester said.

The county airport is allowed \$150,000 a year in entitlement money from the federal government, which airport commissioners want to use for future runway pavement maintenance.

Officials recently inspected the runways.

Koester estimates it will cost about \$600,000 to fix the cracks, joints on the concrete runway 11/29 and asphalt sealer

on runway 1/19 and taxiways, along with repainting runway stripes. He expects the project to be spread out over three years to capture the yearly entitlement funds.

"The pavement is in pretty good shape. The key is to keep it that way," he said.

Meanwhile, High Flight would like to expand its operation by building a hangar at the Effingham airport west of the terminal with direct access to the airport's apron, a concrete area between the hangars and the taxiway. The project has received FAA approval.

"Wes Kistler, which is High Flight's engineer, is wrapping up all of the approvals as far as site planning," Koester said.

Effingham County is leasing the property to High Flight and it would be responsible for building the hangar structure and its maintenance.

"It should be large enough to house two jets," Koester said. "This should help promote increased traffic at the airport and fuel sales."

Commission Chairman Q. Anthony Siemer asked Koester if the city would be looking over the plans for the structure to make sure it's up to building code.

Koester said the hangar has been in the planning for the past three years and was on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic and high cost of construction materials.

"I'm not anticipating any problems with operations with them building on that end," Airport Manager Jerry Tate said. "Usually, the big issue is tracking mud everywhere during construction. The propellers and the jet engines don't particularly like that. That is the thing I'll have to watch for the most is debris."

The Effingham Convention and Visitors Bureau

The Effingham Convention and Visitors Bureau (Effingham Tourism) is gearing up for an exciting and eventful 2022!

Over the last few years, we have taken time to reimagine what travel looks like and to focus on bringing the 'Effingham Experience' to travelers, near and far.

Whether you're residing in the area, vacationing, or simply passing through... we invite you to explore all that Effingham has to offer and to discover what makes our vibrant, Midwestern community so irresistible to passersby.

Located in Central Illinois, where Interstates 57 and 70 meet, Effingham offers the perfect centralized location to connect with others. With 16 hotels to unwind at, more than 65 restaurants to indulge in, and countless things to see

and do... you'll be hard-pressed to find a reason to leave.

Grab a menu at our farm to table restaurant, Firefly Grill... Catch a once-in-a-lifetime show at the Effingham Performance Center... Kick back with your favorite IPA at Effing Brew Company in Downtown Effingham... Devour local culture and sink into a laidback way of life. Stay awhile, and you'll find that 'awhile' is never enough.

However you decide to explore Effingham, we encourage you to soak up the people, the places and the experiences that set us apart. For more information, or to view our Calendar of Events, visit www.visiteffinghamil.com or call 1-800-772-0750 to request a free Visitors Guide.



SAVE THE DATE

Effingham Restaurant Week

APRIL 3 - 9, 2022

Sh... Ever Vigilant

Effingham
Convention & Visitors Bureau

VISITEFFINGHAMIL.COM

The graphic features a collage of food items including a burger, fries, chicken wings, and a drink. A small chalkboard sign with the text 'Sh... Ever Vigilant' is also visible.

Pagel's Silver Dollar Lanes

Your one-stop entertainment for the whole family

Pagel's Silver Dollar Lanes on South Banker in Effingham is a one-stop-shop with entertainment for the whole family. Co-owners Sheree Limes and Larry Pagel are creating an atmosphere of fun with something for everyone.

"Our customers have a lot to choose from when they visit," shared Limes.

A recent addition is their video gaming lounge. "In 2017 we opened the gaming lounge, which has been popular. We have five games in a separate room for customers to enjoy."

Traditional bowling is available on 24 lanes and they also offer Galaxy Bowling. Bowlers can listen to hit music while enjoying bowling in the dark. Each year they host the Silver Dollar Classic tournament. Youth

bowlers can qualify at Pagel's to move onto the Pepsi Youth Tournament.

Avid bowlers will appreciate their Winter, Summer and Youth leagues. Bowling specials are available on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday evenings. Pagel's has a full-service pro shop and sell balls, shoes, bags and other accessories.

The fun doesn't stop with bowling. Pagel's has two pool tables and host frequent pool tournaments for competitive players. Dart boards are always in play, and dart tournaments offer a way to test one's skills.

Limes adds, "We are available for private parties, and have several packages a customer may choose. We have an ideal space to host birthday parties, church gatherings, corporate events and post-prom parties."

Pagel's Silver Dollar Lanes is open seven days a week during the winter, with summer hours in effect May through August.

For more information, follow them on Facebook at Pagel Silver Dollar Lanes, visit www.silverdollarlanes.com, email silverdollar@effingham.net, or call 217-342-3939.



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Located Inside
Our Lounge

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Monday: Open at 3 p.m.
Tuesday: Open at Noon
Wednesday: Open at 3 p.m.
Thursday: Open at 3 p.m.
Friday: Open at 3 p.m.
Saturday: Open at Noon

SUMMER HOURS

Sunday: Open at Noon
Monday - Wednesday: Closed
Thursday: Open at Noon
Friday: Open at 3 p.m.
Saturday: Open at Noon



PAGEL'S SILVER DOLLAR LANES

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Owners Tyler & Summer Smith

Tyler brings 26 years of experience in archery to Smith Archery LLC. The store retails many lines of Archery including Elite Archery, Bear Archery and Athens Archery as well as Easton, Gold Tip, Scott and TruBall, to name a few. They sell bows and all archery related accessories. Tyler specializes in superior precision bow tuning and prides himself in offering customer service that is second to none. His motto is "If it's not good enough for me, then it's not good enough for you." Tyler is also a manufacturer of Patriot Custom Bow Strings and will also be releasing a patented string product in 2022.

An entrepreneur, Tyler is always thinking of ways to expand his business and services. This year, he is looking to expand with multiple bow lines and accessories. By early spring, plans should also be complete for an indoor bow range with expanded hours for indoor bow range access. Come out to the Village Square Mall and visit us today at Smith Archery LLC to experience superior products and services!

ARCHERY IS MY PASSION

Some have a passion for restoring old cars while others such as farmers love to tend to the fields and care for their livestock. For Tyler Smith, a passion he has had most all his life has now turned into a thriving business.

Originally from Colorado Springs, Tyler Smith has always enjoyed the outdoors. At the young age of 5 he accompanied his dad, Virgil Smith, to an archery pro shop, and he recalls how the shop was really inclusive with him and this sparked his passion for youth archery. When kids visit Tyler's shop today, he says nothing is off limits for them. Tyler says, "Youth need to feel comfortable with picking up a bow, feeling it and learning how to shoot a bow". I want them to have that same passion I felt when I first handled a bow.

So what brought Tyler to central Illinois? Tyler was working for Schwan's Home Delivery as a Regional Zone Manager and the hub was located in Effingham, the central location for 14 Schwan Depots and 180 employees. Once he moved here, he discovered that Effingham is a very welcoming town and fell in love with the area. After years of full time management work and part time archery work, Tyler's heart was tugging at him to go into archery full time. Due to massive growth of his archery business in this area, in early December of 2021 he opened a location inside the Village Square Mall in Effingham.



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Village Square Mall

The Village Square Mall was built in 1971 by local developer Gene Mayhood on 30 acres of farmland. Anchored by G.C. Murphy and Eisner's Grocery Store, the mall was a simple straight line with 40 or so stores. JCPenney added on in 1977 on the south end of the mall and a theater was also opened around this time. The mall was full of stores and hours could be spent shopping not only the stores but the vendors that would set up in the hallways especially during the Christmas shopping season.

Many owners have come and gone over the years and the mall has changed stores in and out through that time. A year ago, it appeared the mall had died as only three stores remained open, until Steve Linton took over as property manager. Steve, who was already busy as lead pastor of The Journey Church, had a vision to bring the

mall back to life. Steve knew it would be a big undertaking since most everything in the mall needed fixed, replaced and updated.

Almost a year later, the Village Square Mall is starting to see a revival of previous times. Adding to The Journey Church that was already in the mall are now new stores that include Reiniger Jewelers, Wild Rose Boutique, Crossroads Vendor Market, and Smith Archery. The archery shop and vendor market are located across the hall from each other close to the north end of the mall while the boutique and jewelry store are across the hall from each other close to the south end of the mall. Lucky Luciano's Smoke Shop has recently joined the growing list of tenants moving into the mall.

Village Square Mall tenants, now totaling 14, is getting the attention of prospective tenants. Steve Linton is getting revived

interest in the mall from a variety of new companies looking to move in. And Smith Archery is already outgrowing his space and plans a move to a bigger area closer to the south end of the mall possibly this spring. Linton's goal is to have all store spaces filled by the end of 2022.

A video of the progress at the mall and information including the list of stores and hours open can be found on the Village Square Mall facebook page.



Village Square Mall

51 village square mall, Effingham, IL 62401

(217) 347-5997

EFFINGHAM

Growth expected to continue in 2022

By Zach Roth

After COVID-19 delayed many Effingham city projects in 2020, the next year promised to be a busy one.

2021 didn't disappoint, with the city opting to move forward on projects delayed because of the pandemic and filling the holes created by having a year's worth of general fund expenditures. Not that the city wasn't doing anything in the previous fiscal year; City Administrator Steve Miller noted that water fund and TIF expenditures remained steady in 2020.

But the following year proved to be a busy one when it came to essential infrastructure work, from street resurfacing on Temple Avenue to concrete, curb and gutter work in the Rollin Hills subdivision.

Sidewalks were repaved, a new water main was added along Outer Belt West and a new ultraviolet wastewater disinfection system was installed at the city's main treatment plant.

The essential work was more than what they normally do in a given year, with projects like pavement preservation and sidewalk construction becoming more prevalent than past years. Miller said the city was more than productive in terms of catching up and getting the city back on the track it was going toward pre-pandemic.

"We did a good job catching up," Miller said. "We didn't fully catch up (but) I'd

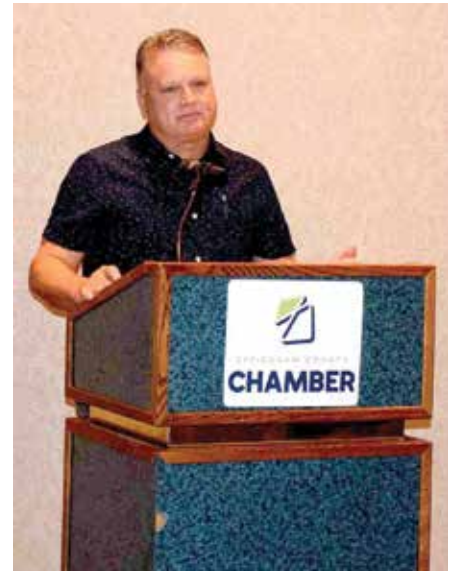
say we made a very large dent in trying to recover. We didn't do what we would fully do over a two-year period in one year, but I felt like we did a very good job."

Now, the city is looking forward to a more normal 2022 – or at least a year that is more normal than during a pandemic. It promises to be a big year on the business side, as John Boos & Co. continues expanding its recently-built site along Route 45, just down the street from where Flex-N-Gate is currently re-configuring a 660,000-square-foot facility for use to create automotive parts.

Work will continue on a proposed strip center that will replace the Paradise Inn along Fayette Avenue, which will also see the first steps toward an IDOT-sponsored expansion project of the road itself, slated for completion in 2023.

The former Hodgson Mill store along Ford Avenue just off of the Avenue of Mid-America will be home to Outlaw Steakhouse and Saloon at some point during the year, with an IHOP coming into the Petro Travel Center along Fayette off Interstate 57. A QuikTrip gas station and convenience store will be headed to North Third Street across from Moto Mart, just off I-57.

Last but not least, the Sarah Bush Lincoln Bonutti Clinic will complete its \$35 million facility to replace an already existing clinic on the same site. Final inspec-



EDN file photo

Effingham City Administrator Steve Miller speaks during an Effingham County Chamber luncheon about the city's continued work to improve quality of life.

tions are underway on the facility, with the first employees moving in this month.

2022 will be another year of growth for Effingham, but there will be plenty of change in how the city finances its growth, with the expiration of TIF 1 at the end of 2021. The end of the 35-year life cycle of the district coincides with the extensions of districts such as the Central and Industrial



Shown is an artist's rendering of the \$35 million Sarah Bush Lincoln Bonutti Clinic in Effingham.

Rendering submitted

TIFs and reallocation of funds into those districts, in addition to the Outer Belt West TIF.

The business growth provides both opportunity and challenge. That challenge comes in trying to find employees for all of these facilities.

Todd Hull, economic development director for the city, said officials are doing what they can to entice people to work in Effingham.

"There's only so many people out there," Hull said. "I think it's just a matter of COVID changing the thinking for some people and I think they just decided to retire or work less."

One way the city is attempting to attract new workers is through a program designed in conjunction with the Effingham Regional Growth Alliance and Effingham Crossroads Center – an arm of Agracel – that would help people relocate to the area for jobs at the new Flex-N-Gate through \$2,000 relocation grants for more than 150 people.

"We've tried to think of some creative programs to (help) do that," Hull said. "There's still things that we can probably do. I know a lot of things have been going on with the (Effingham County) Chamber through some of their programs trying to bring people in. We're looking at that second building in the Kluthe Center for vocational-type training for trades.



EDN file photo

Todd Hull, economic development director for the City of Effingham, speaks during a Effingham County Chamber luncheon about the city's economy and what's to come in 2022.



EDN file photo

For months, a sign advertised the Effingham Crossroads Center. Flex-N-Gate is making it a 660,000-square-foot facility to create automotive jobs.

"A lot of our jobs are for decent pay. Because of COVID and the scarcity of jobs, the minimum wage for a lot of these companies have all gone up. It's helped a little, but it's very tough right now."

Everyone agrees there is plenty of opportunity, and groups around Effingham, such as the chamber, are trying to help in any way they can. Over the course of the past year, the group launched a new job portal, EC-JOBS, which provides people with the opportunity to build a resume, seek out jobs, and explore participating companies. In addition, companies can post jobs and promote their culture, while area students can explore careers and develop skills that they would use when they go into the workforce.

Jeff Fritchtnitch, the chamber's workforce development director, said the new platform was a "one-stop shop" for anyone looking to find a job, place a job or build a career in Effingham and the surrounding area.

"Our board said 'This is something we think is valuable in Effingham County,'" Fritchtnitch said. "We are partners with Lake Land College – all of our schools are in their region – and the businesses are always trying to find ways to recruit employees and this is a platform that provides a one-stop shop to make that happen."

It's too early to tell how many people have gotten a job as a result of EC-JOBS, but Fritchtnitch said hundreds of job-seekers have logged on to the site in the last three months. He's had to push his goals

for what the site wants to accomplish due to slower growth than he had anticipated, but he's made the adjustment and is moving along nicely with the site, going into area schools since the end of winter break and incorporating the site into the classroom setting.

"We have that foundation now of local employers that have a presence on the site," Fritchtnitch said. "I have been visiting the local high schools so we can start to incorporate utilizing the website in classes starting whenever they want to in spring semester, but for certain as they start to prepare for next fall (and) which course they want to incorporate EC-JOBS as a career exploration tool."

Things are looking good for Effingham as 2022 progresses. Miller feels that the strength of the community is helping to move the city in a progressive direction even as the pandemic and other economic issues continue to permeate in the background.

"I believe that we're moving forward," Miller said. "A lot of that is due to the prep – the mayor and the council are very progressive in continuing to move forward on industrial projects, on commercial projects, improving our infrastructure and making it a safe place to live with our police department. The city is not complacent when it comes to putting the effort in and leaning into doing projects and doing things that we need to do to make the community better."

ALTAMONT

New leaders, new businesses

By Charles Mills

Dr. John Opilka moved into his former offices in 2021 at 8 North Third Street in downtown Altamont after entering an ownership agreement with Sarah Bush Lincoln. He moved from his 18,000-square-foot building he built four years ago due to a lease agreement with HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital. He moved into his old North Third Street offices after rehabbing them.

The Altamont City Council voted unanimously to purchase 11 acres of land for \$110,000 from the FCC Limited Partnership of Altamont in March of 2021 for a proposed subdivision. The council followed in August of 2021 by approving an ordinance allowing the city the option to purchase real estate bordering the original 11 acres.

Council members decided to establish a second TIF district. The new TIF district includes the new South Point Subdivision. Mayor Jason Rippetoe said the city is planning the subdivision to be competitive with other communities.

Casey Adam was principal of Pana High School for three years before accepting the superintendent position in Unit 10 schools on July 1, 2021.

Her first job after graduation was just down the road from Altamont, at Treatment and Learning Center (TLC) in Funkhouser. Then she moved to Florida for two years, where she taught science at Sarasota County Junior High. Her husband then took a job on the opposite coast, so they moved cross-country to Madras, Oregon, where she taught sixth grade and eighth grade science.

From Oregon, she and her husband purchased a house in Brownstown, and Adam worked at Hillsboro Junior High School for nine years, teaching science while attending classes at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville.

SAFE (Sexual Assault and Family Emergencies) hosted a concert in July featuring "Broken Roots," which placed second in 2020's "America's Got Talent" competition on NBC. Effingham Native Austin Weinstock, who uses the stage name Austin Edwards for musical performances, brought his band to Altamont.

Altamont turned 150 in 2021 with a celebration over Labor Day weekend. The four-day sesquicentennial featured five bands: Backroad Boogie, Mustang Sally, Josh Holland, Surviving Members and Superbad.



Zach Roth EDN file photo

Garrett Schultz, seated center, poses with his partners, from left, Colton Hardiek, Wil Schultz and Derick Budde following his victory in the recliner races at Altamont's Sesquicentennial Celebration in September. The four won the race with an average time of 15.4 seconds.

There were plenty of activities for the whole family, including inflatables, beer garden, food trucks, cake walk, car show and a recliner race.

A new ambulance provider in Altamont began service at the end of 2021: A1 Emergency Medical Services, co-owned by Adam Huston and Elizabeth Huston, along with several community investors.

A1's new headquarters features a garage to house the ambulances, 24/7 dispatch communications center, overnight living area for ambulance personnel, large training area/conference room and a day room.

Altamont Community High School welcomed a new principal on Jan. 1. Peggy Bueker, who was serving as assistant principal and athletic director, moved into the principal position after the retirement of the former principal, Jerry Tkachuk.

Bueker is a 1989 graduate of ACHS and is the first female principal in the school's history.

She received a bachelor's degree in Physical Education

with a minor in Biology from Pittsburg State University of Pittsburg, Kansas. She continued her education for a year, working as a graduate assistant for the girls basketball team while she was earning her master's degree in Physical Education. She completed her Education Administration Type 75 certification in 2008 from Eastern Illinois University.

Bueker taught and coached at Unit 10 schools for 27 years before becoming principal. Bueker is married to Scott Bueker. They celebrated 23 years of marriage in 2021. The Buekers have five children: twins, Brock and Brant, 22, who both work as electric linemen; Sadie, 21, and Hope, 18, who attend college; and Nora, 11, who is a sixth grader at St. Michael The Archangel School. Sadie and Hope have coached for ACHS.

Bueker was the 11th of 12 children raised on a farm a few miles north of Altamont by her parents, Freddy and Madonna Goeckner.



Charles Mills EDN file photo

Peggy Bueker became the Altamont Community High School principal on the first of this year making her the first ACHS female principal. Bueker moved up from her positions as assistant high school principal and athletic director.

TEUTOPOLIS

David Repking takes the helm as Village Board president

By Zach Roth

In April of 2021, David Repking, a 67-year-old former member of the Teutopolis Village Board, was elected its new president. Maintenance was among his first priorities and it's not surprising to see why.

His predecessor, Greg Hess, oversaw big changes in the city's ability to attract people to work and live in the village. For instance, the village built the Prairie View subdivision in order to provide people with nice places to live, build a family and keep their income in the village. The Wooden Shoe Development equity group evolved and expanded during his tenure, with businesses lining up to join the group and build within the village's first Tax Increment Financing district.

Finally, he proved to be pivotal in helping to rebuild the old firehouse and convert it into a state-of-the-art village hall that opened shortly before he left office. All of these things left big

shoes for Repking to fill.

His goal is to try and build upon that, starting with finding new lots for Prairie View. At the moment, 34 out of the 59 lots have been sold, and Repking is well aware that building either new lots for the existing subdivision or finding new property to build another one could help provide much-needed housing for people in the area.

"I think everyone is aware of the basic housing shortage (in Effingham County)," Repking said. "That's why they're putting up more apartments in Effingham. There's not very many properties for sale. They're looking for people to build a subdivision, so we've got one here ready to go. We've got water and sewer lines. We've got lots for sale. We've just lowered the price trying to get this filled up."

"It's in a TIF district, so we've got roads, sewer lines and water lines ready. It's already

impacted the school district (Unit 50). There's a good mix of ages out there – we've got some senior citizens as well as some young families and we're looking for more."

Even though his first year was a bit quiet compared to the hustle and bustle of the previous several years under Hess, Repking did oversee the opening of a brand new Canarm distribution facility on National Road. There was also the opening of a new Bobcat store near the Wooden Shoe Development.

The village will always be on the lookout for more business development, as with that comes tax revenue and income for those who work in those areas.

"These are good-paying jobs," Repking said. "They're not minimum-wage jobs."

Plans for expansion are already underway at the new Canarm facility that could take the existing 75,000 square foot facility and add another 20,000 feet of space.

Expansion is a big buzzword at Stevens Industries, the Teutopolis-based manufacturer of wood products, where the foundation has been laid for their new Employee Childcare Center inside a brand new distribution center for the company.

All of this may help bring people to Teutopolis and keep them there.

Repking said the village provides a small-town environment with well-kept yards, good parks and good schools.

"It's a people-driven community," Repking said.

Those people help Repking and the village promote itself and create new opportunity.

Rich Hartke, president of the Teutopolis Community for Progress, said that expansion and businesses investing in

Teutopolis show off the kind of town that can sustain their future.

"T-Town people aren't afraid to roll up their sleeves and work," Hartke said. "I think that says a lot about the growth of Teutopolis. Stevens Industries is expanding as we speak – they continue to bring jobs to the community. Hopefully, the local community and counties can continue to fulfill those jobs for those business owners."

Hartke said the big thing for 2022 will be the continued building of new homes, whether they come in Prairie View or somewhere else. While Teutopolis is in a bit of a holding pattern when it comes to new development, he said the search for new property for new development will be ongoing and a big priority for both the city and for TCFP.

"The village is going to have to continue to figure out where they want to expand," Hartke said. "East of Teutopolis may be where to look."

While the search begins, Repking will continue to try and keep Teutopolis running well. The village is working on acquiring grants for a sidewalk project and a sewer project to come in 2022. Plans are also underway to replace older street lights with new LED lights as part of an effort to save money on electrical costs.

Having not served even a full year as president, Repking still feels like he's learning about his current job.

"I found out that a lot of things have changed due to the growth over what it was 14 years ago (when he joined the village board)," Repking said. "I'd probably give myself a D-minus. I've got some improvements I need to do."



EDN file photo

Village of Teutopolis officials cut the ribbon to celebrate the opening of the new 3,500-square-foot village hall at 106 W. Main in Teutopolis. The previous hall was built in 1888 and demolished in August 2020. From left are Amy Vahling, village clerk; Tony Esker, building official; John Mette, former board member; Sharon Will, retired village clerk; Dan Zerrusen, board member; Steve Will, Effingham County Chamber of Commerce ambassador; Bob Rowe, architect; Jane Summers, village board; Lucinda Hart, chamber president and CEO; Dave Tegeler, board member; Greg Hess, former mayor; David Repking, mayor; Randy Jones, chamber ambassador; Angie Kroeger, board member; Andrew Grunloh, Grunloh Building; Greg Oseland, board member; Brandon Pals, chamber ambassador; Craig Pals, Tick Tock Energy; Jim Apke, Hillside Lawn & Landscape.

DIETERICH

Rapid growth over the past decade

By Zach Roth

When one is looking for the fastest-growing communities in Illinois, they probably don't expect to look in the direction of Dieterich.

And yet, when the population numbers were released for the 2020 United States Census in April 2021, there was Dieterich, with a population of 890, growing at 44% over the past decade.

For Brittny Gipson, economic development coordinator and village clerk for Dieterich, it was another reminder of all the work that went into inviting people into the village and making it a good place for families to grow and nourish themselves. The village has invested in two major housing developments – North Pointe and Hartke subdivisions – providing plenty of benefits to the community that go beyond just a simple house.

"There's so many benefits to our growth,"



EDN file photo

Brittny Gipson, Dieterich's village clerk and economic development coordinator, speaks about the village's growth and progress during an Effingham County Chamber luncheon.

Gipson said. "Not just the growth in our population, but our school system (Unit 30) is seeing increased enrollment, which for a rural community of our size is pretty unheard of. The schools are definitely benefiting from our population growth and the businesses – when there's more residents in our community, there's more residents to patronize those businesses."

Gipson knows that businesses are keeping a watchful eye on Dieterich because the growth and family-friendly atmosphere makes it a good place for development. She gets plenty of phone calls asking about vacant lots available for development.

The industrial park continues to grow, with a new eastern wing being completed in recent weeks. No lots have been sold yet, but the village is working to attract clients, something that is made much easier by the fast growth of the community. By the spring, Gipson believes the extension will be home to new businesses.

"Seeing how the residential growth was booming, we wanted something to go along with that and complement it," Gipson said.

Gipson credits the work of the village's MAPPING initiative – through Western Illinois University's Center for Rural Affairs – with shaping the present and future of the community. Through these discussions, Dieterich has renovated its parks – adding new pavilions and a fishing pier filled with freshwater fish. She noted a silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic was that people realized the joy of walking and getting fresh air in a park or wherever they could find it.

"There's been a shift in focus on the outdoor infrastructure – the accessibility (and) the walkability of it," Gipson said. "We try



EDN file photo

Shown is the Hartke Subdivision in Dieterich.

to be really mindful of getting sidewalks, safe lighting and things like that."

For the future, the MAPPING project pushed the village in the direction of building a new recreation center and day care facility with the assistance of Illinois Department of Natural Resources grants. The hope is for the facility to be opened by October 2023, adding a big piece to a continually growing community.

"For community livability, recreation and day care are such an important piece," Gipson said. "We're going to have both in a few short years."

Wright's Furniture donated \$300,000 in memory of Cedric Wright, who died Dec. 28, 2021, to the community center, which will now be known as the Wright Family Center.

Continued business development will help keep Dieterich's momentum moving in the right direction in the coming years, with the new wing of the industrial park helping out with that. In turn, it may lead to more people living in the community, with the Hartke subdivision potentially benefiting from that.

But sometimes, the simplest things are the biggest thing to look forward to in the coming year. In particular, Gipson is looking forward to the 4th of July this year, when the Champaign-based Feudin Hillbillies will finally get the opportunity to perform – two years after they were initially booked.

"They were supposed to be here in 2020 – that didn't happen," Gipson said. "In 2021, it still didn't happen. Third time's the charm."

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BEECHER CITY

Kluthe Center renovation, Chair of Honor among highlights

By Rita Sue Felty,
Beecher City Village President

We sure have a lot going on in the little Village of Beecher City these days.

At the City Park, we have been working to renovate the Kluthe Center. It is such a great asset to our village.

We have replaced the siding and fixed the windows, painted doors and added hand dryers to the restrooms. It's still a work in progress and we are currently working on the kitchen. New countertops will be installed this year and we will be painting the kitchen and moving a new refrigerator into it.

This is such a great venue for all the things going on here. We have several clubs that use it for their meetings and we even have the Village Board meeting there. It's a great place for parties, family reunions and we are having our music on the fourth Saturday of the month again. Loudon Country plays and people come from quite a ways to enjoy it and the food and drinks that are available.

The park is a hub for many of our activities here. We have two ball diamonds, one of which we are in the process of lighting



Charles Mills EDN file photo

Chris Cripe, owner of The Pit Stop, sits in front of custom artwork designed for her Beecher City business.

so we can have more games later in the day, the Tractor pull /mud drag track that is OMRO sanctioned, Cornfest, Farmers Market on Thursdays from June to September and in 2020 we started building up a Christmas display drive-thru with hopes it will continue to grow and maybe even add Santa and other activities there in the future.

We are working on reforestation

the park as we have lost several trees to age and storms and have planted several sugar maple trees with plans to have the ag class at the high school make maple syrup.

We are getting some new playground equipment this year and are renovating some of the existing items.

We are rewiring to provide 50-amp plug-ins for food trucks

for the Cornfest and Farmers Market and any new events that we develop.

Every year Rhodes Automotive puts on a Hometown Christmas with a tree lighting, activities for the kids, cookies and hot cocoa, caroling and more. It has been pretty successful and seems to get better every year.

We have a new restaurant, The Pit Stop, and it is very nice.

Last July we got a Chair of Honor at our Veterans Memorial. It was donated and installed by the Rolling Thunder group and we are very thankful to have it.

In 2020, we joined the Altamont Enterprise Zone and are looking forward to new things. The Enterprise Zone not only covers businesses but new home construction, remodeling of existing homes and even modular homes. It does not cover manufactured homes.

We are hoping this will encourage new businesses and encourage people thinking about moving here, as well as encouraging homeowners to spruce up their homes.

We are looking forward to bigger and better things in 2022!



Charles Mills EDN file photo

Beecher City Village President Rita Sue Felty listens to a public comment during a public hearing in June of 2021.



Charles Mills EDN file photo

Jeffrey Germer of Effingham, left, looks at a cross carved by Jim Jarnagin of Tower Hill, right, at the Beecher City Farmers Market at Beecher City Community Park.



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Neoga & Sigel

Neoga, Illinois is located on Route 45 and right off Interstate 57 at exit 177. We are nestled between Effingham to the south and Mattoon to the north. Easy access to both of these industry rich cities makes Neoga the perfect place to call home. Neoga is a city in Cumberland County and had a population of 1,636 with the 2010 census. Neoga was incorporated in 1856. Neoga means "deer" in the Kickapoo language.

Neoga hosts a strong banking and finance industry, with the First National Bank of Toledo and First Mid-Illinois Bank and Trust having locations within Neoga. The City of Neoga provides a variety of recreational facilities, with public parks featuring tennis and basketball courts. In addition to several area lakes with swimming, boating and water sports. For the

avid outdoors person, nearby Fox Ridge and Lincoln Trail State Parks offer camping, hiking, snowmobiling, walking paths and horseback riding.

Neoga is home to Neoga Grade and High School. Lake Land Community College, located 12 miles north of the City of Neoga, offers access to higher education and workforce training programs.

Eastern Illinois University in Charleston (25 miles north-east) provides students access to educational programs leading to bachelor's and master's degrees in a variety of academic programs.

Sigel is an incorporated town in Shelby County, Illinois with a population of 373 at the 2010 census.

The town was named after Franz Sigel, (1824–1902), a Union general in the American Civil War. Jack Berch, singer, was



born in Sigel. Sigel is home to St. Michael grade school and Sigel Community Bank, a branch of Teutopolis State Bank. It is also home to several agricultural related businesses as farming is a cornerstone of this community and area.



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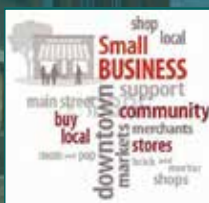
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- * Spring Open Houses - March 18-19 *
- * Summer Sales - July 22-28 * Fall Open Houses - Sept. 9-10
- * Trick or Treat Oct. 29 * Christmas Open Houses - Nov. 4-5
- * Hometown Christmas Dec. 2-4

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Village of Greenup

Greenup, Illinois, is an opportunity to step back in time and see a simpler way of life, while never leaving the amenities to which we have become accustomed. Platted by William C. Greenup in 1834, while he served in a supervisory capacity on the National Road, Greenup has a rich and interesting history. Residents and visitors alike can appreciate Greenup for its numerous elements of charm.

The village of Greenup is a small community of just over 1,500 residents, located along interstate 70 and at the junction of Illinois Route 130 and Illinois Route 121. The National Road, US Route 40, runs through the southern edge of Greenup as well providing another source of tourism and transportation. Greenup is strategically located 23 miles to the east of Effingham, 25 miles to the south east of Mattoon, and 16 miles south of Charleston, providing residents with numerous options for dining, entertainment and employment all within a short commute.

That is not to say that Greenup doesn't have an impressive offering of these services itself, particularly given its size! Greenup boasts a local winery, numerous antique stores, a state of the art Love's Travel Center, several restaurants, and

many small shops to frequent. The locals appreciate that they have their own grocery store and various convenience options should they not want to travel. The school district, located outside of town, prepares students to become productive citizens. People wishing to pursue higher education or learn a trade have access to Eastern Illinois University and Lake Land Community College, both less than an hour's commute from the community. The largest employer in Greenup is by far Evapco, employing over 400 skilled workers, building high end industrial AC and refrigeration units that are utilized around the world!

Within the village proper, Greenup has 9 restaurants to provide a variety of choices. After dinner, residents or visitors can treat themselves to a unique downtown experience with the view of the store fronts which provide Greenup its title, "The Village of Porches". The porches have a style that would be perhaps as much at home in 1880's New Orleans as a rural community in Illinois, and they give visitors an enjoyable look at the beauty of historic architecture in the area. For those interested in seeing beautiful architecture up close, Greenup is also home to a modern covered bridge, built in 2000 and boasting no

weight restriction on its use. The Greenup covered bridge has an observation deck as well as a nature trail along the banks of the Embarrass River. History lovers will enjoy that the original covered bridge that had occupied the site used timbers laid by Abe and Thomas Lincoln. Of course, being the land of Lincoln, the ties to the Lincoln family don't end with the bridge. Greenup is just south of the famed Lincoln Log Cabin, home to the Lincoln's after they moved to Illinois, as well as the Thomas Lincoln Cemetery, the final resting place of Abraham's father and step-mother.

For those looking to make an extended trip of their visit to Greenup, there are options from which to choose. Greenup has two motels as well as a new bed and breakfast in a restored historical building along the National Road. During that extended stay, visitors may want to visit our two local museums or take in one of the two local parks. Whatever your reason for visiting, Greenup has your needs and your comfort covered.

