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SUMMER 2023

MAGAZINE

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MAGAZINE

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Shown is a vanilla ice cream cone with sprinkles from Homewood Grill. Submitted photo

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FEATURE STORY



"Steel Magnolias" was performed in October 2018. Submitted photo

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FACE at 50: The Show Must Go On
By Dawn Schabbing

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Effingham Magazine is published quarterly by the Effingham Daily News at 201 N. Banker St., Effingham, IL 62401.

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ON THE COVER: One of Allie Keck's senior photos, 2012. Submitted photo

Effingham Magazine on the web

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Allie Keck's appearance on NBC's "The Voice" in March seems to be just the beginning of a promising music career for the Neoga native. It was certainly exciting for all of us to watch as we cheered her on.

Of course, that career got its start long before a national audience saw her talent.

As Dawn Schabbing writes in this issue of

Effingham Magazine, Allie's experiences at Neoga High School enhanced her dreams to pursue music professionally.

"It helps that there isn't a ton of things to do in Neoga, so I turned to music," Allie told Dawn. "I was in band, and I sang in every Neoga High School Band variety show. But we didn't have chorus at the time when I was in high school."

Speaking of showbiz, congratulations to FACE on its 50 years serving our area. "Fine Arts, County of Effingham" formed in 1973. In 1974, it was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) corporation. The community is better for it today, and hopefully for many years to come.

Meanwhile, summer seems a good time to congratulate the owners of the Homewood Grill on their new, roomier location at 1002

West Fayette Ave. in Effingham. Prior to that it was located for many years at 608 South Willow St. As the summer heat descends upon us, a tasty frozen treat always hits the spot.

Those stories and more make up the Summer 2023 Effingham Magazine.

Jeff Long
Editor



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



Cathy Griffith is news editor of the Effingham Daily News. She is a 1998 graduate of Eastern Illinois University with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism. She has worked at the Daily News for 22 years in news and magazine publications. She is a lifelong resident of Effingham, where she resides with her husband, Tim, and daughter, Leah.



Dawn Schabbing is a former reporter at the Effingham Daily News who now freelances. A graduate of Lake Land College and Eastern Illinois University with degrees in journalism, she worked in the newspaper field for more than two decades. She previously worked in news and features at the Journal Gazette and Times-Courier newspapers in Mattoon and Charleston. She lives in Neoga with her husband, Paul.



Nick Taylor covers Effingham County, Altamont, Teutopolis and Dieterich for the Effingham Daily News. He graduated from Butler University in 2021 with a bachelor's degree in philosophy. As the son of two Indiana attorneys, he worked as a paralegal assistant at Taylor Law Firm in his home state before moving to Effingham in the summer of 2022 to begin a career in journalism.





One of Allie Keck's senior photos, 2012. Submitted photo

Allie Keck's Neoga roots led her to national recognition on 'The Voice'

DAWN SCHABBING
FOR EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

Allie Keck of Neoga got a taste of The Music City at age 15 and never looked back.

"I saw all these performers, and I realized that was something that people did every night," said Keck, fresh from her impressive appearance on NBC's "The Voice."

"It was mind-blowing to me."

Her experiences at Neoga High School enhanced her dreams to pursue music professionally.

She kept that image of singing on stage in Nashville, Tennessee etched in her mind and pushed forward with her dream.

"It helps that there isn't a ton of things to do in Neoga, so I turned to music," said Keck. "I was in band and I sang in every Neoga High School Band variety show. But we didn't have chorus at the time when I was in high school."

With the sparked interest in music and performing, Keck got busy with lessons and writing songs.

EARLY DREAMS

As a pre-teen, Keck watched in awe as Taylor Swift, now 33, rose to stardom at the tender age of 14. At age 16, Swift signed with Big Machine Records, something that is very uncommon for any musician at that age.

"I think, for me, it was more or less seeing someone my age doing something like that, and it just lit a fire in me," said Keck.

Keck, 28, may not have reached Swift's level of stardom yet, but her appearance on "The Voice" has helped her make more contacts in the music world and placed her on the national stage.

That's a far cry from her roots of the Neoga High School gymnasium, where the annual band variety show stage was set up for high school students' acts that included comedy, magic, dance performances, vocals and playing a variety of instruments.

It was on the NHS stage that she started to spread her musical wings – and build confidence to perform before an audience.

Directed by Doug and Joni McClure – now retired Neoga band and music teachers – it was a way to allow small town kids to shine in their own community. Her act that first time was singing “Use Somebody” by Kings of Leon.

At age 16, Keck started writing songs. Her first was titled, “Reasons.”

“It’s like any other sad teenage song – about a boy who missed his chance,” said Keck

She soon started getting gigs at local establishments, including Village Wine in Effingham, Pinky’s at Lake Sara and some open mics in other establishments.

“I took vocal lessons for a year and guitar lessons for about six months,” said Keck. “In school from sixth grade to 12th grade, I played the trumpet in the school band.”

Keck turned to folks such as Marty Gibson, then an English teacher at Neoga High School, who also taught guitar lessons; and Stephanie Kilzer, of Chesnut Family Music in Effingham, who taught vocals. Another Effingham music teacher, Michele Carruthers, taught her piano.

Keck said she quit taking guitar lessons as soon as she learned to play and sing at the same time.

“I wish I wouldn’t have quit so soon, so I’d be more confident,” said Keck.

Keck said her parents have always been supportive.

“They were always great about encouraging me, but not pushing me,” said Keck. “They are still so supportive to this day. They’ve known I wanted to do this since I was 15.”

She has already written hundreds of songs and many that she’s performed and released, which can be found on Spotify and Apple Music. Titles include “Pour Girl,” “Kiss and Tell,” “Whiskey and Attention,” “Just a Boy,” and “Your Love.”

Since “The Voice,” she has had

people request she sing and release “Barracuda,” and she’s happy to report that this cover is already available for her fans to hear.

“It’s taking me a few years to know where I should be as an artist, and I kind of feel that I have found my voice in ‘Not Your Problem,’” said Keck. “My style has changed and a lot of it depended on what was popular at that time. Power vocals are starting to make a comeback – and I feel like I fit in there.”

While she still has many friends from home, she’s made new friends in other parts of the country as she performs at different venues.

But Nashville, which she has called home for the past six years, has drawn her to others with the same dreams.

One such friend, Danielle Stathas, 29, of Nashville, said the two met in a writing session about five years ago.

“I was writing my first EP and she came in on a writing session with me,” said Stathas. “We’ve been great friends ever since.” (An EP,

or “extended play,” is a musical recording that contains more tracks than a single but fewer than an album or LP record.)

COLLABORATION

Stathas, a singer, songwriter and abstract artist, goes by the stage name of Danielle Williams. And like Allie, she moved to Nashville after college to pursue similar dreams. She has co-written songs with Keck, who has written nine out of 12 songs that Stathas has released.

“Allie has such a great heart,” said Stathas. “She handles whatever life throws at her with grace and is probably one of the funniest people I’ve ever met. Allie is an amazing singer, but she is also an incredible songwriter and she has written many songs with me.”

Stathas described Keck as funny, loyal, relatable – and one who can get along with anyone.

“In Nashville, being a singer is amazing, but it’s the songwriters that are the true talent – and she is both,” said Stathas. “She can write songs that can bring out every

Shown is Allie Keck performing in Effingham at the downtown gazebo, 2015. Submitted photo





Back Row: Taylor Gresens, Hannah Carruthers, Hannah Fritcher, Halie Kastl. Front row: Allie Keck, Sammi James, Michael and Katrina Trummer. A piano recital in 2004. Submitted photo

emotion. Sometimes it feels like I just sat through an hour of therapy, when I listen to three minutes of a song that Allie wrote."

Stathas said Keck "deserves the world – and then some."

"I'm so, so happy that the nation got to see her do her thing on TV," said Stathas. "I hope they get to see a lot more of her."

Keck said her writing sometimes comes from things happening in her own life or from things others have told her. Sometimes ideas for songs come about rather randomly.

Her parents believe living in the Effingham area has given their daughter a start in the music scene.

"Effingham has a better music scene than most area towns," said her dad, Brad Keck. "There are multiple venues and opportunities for a young artist. Wednesday Night Open Mic nights organized by Bill Poss at the Village Wine Shop is a staple and it helps many young people gain their

confidence."

These experiences led to connections and other opportunities. Brad Bennett, a musician from Effingham, has helped her book some gigs over the years.

When Keck was just 16, Russ Howard, another Effingham musician, gave her the first opportunity to perform live before an Effingham audience.

"He allowed her to use his equipment and sing during his breaks at Tuscan Hills Winery," said Brad Keck. "We are also thankful for John Beck, who arranged an open mic at the Toledo American Legion on Thursday nights. Two open mic nights in a row during high school and while at Lake Land College allowed Allie to expand her confidence and proficiency."

THE BIG MOVE

While she was ready to head for Nashville just out of high school, she pursued her college

education first.

In 2016, four days after college graduation, she packed up with \$2,000 to her name and a car that wasn't expected to sustain her long without a job, and made the move.

"It was hard, because she was moving into an empty house with basically no job," said Brad Keck. "She had arranged to rent with Dakota Esker and another girl and they had most of the furniture but had not moved in yet."

Brad Keck recalls her second day living in Nashville, when the alternator went out on her car.

"She had to immediately grow up, because we could no longer solve her problems with a local auto repair shop," he said.

Mom Leah Keck said she handled leaving Allie in Nashville that first day, but was crushed when the car broke down and there was nobody there they knew to call.

Allie turned to real estate, where she became a leasing agent for high-end apartments.

"I ended up leasing luxury apartments in Nashville," said Keck. "I didn't even know the job existed, but I loved it. It also helped me meet other musicians and opened some doors for me."

And it was lucrative enough to pay her bills and pursue her passion for music.

"I did much better at it than I ever expected," said Keck. "I ended up in



A family holiday photo, showing Allie's parents and siblings. Submitted photo

the 'Million Dollar Club.' Rent is not cheap here in Nashville. There's no shame in having a side hustle, so if I need it, I probably will go back to one of those jobs."

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Allie's parents say she was like their other daughters – Katie, Kellie and Lauren – but possibly the most outgoing – and a bit of a comedian. She never pursued any sports, so instead she participated in the high school musicals, variety shows and band.

"She was not afraid to work hard," said Brad Keck. "She had many different jobs, including Rural King, The EPC, RMC Cinemas – all in Effingham – and the

Villa on 45 restaurant in Neoga."

Allie had started writing songs and was ready to perform one at the high school variety show.

"It was probably a variety show when I was telling her to sing a cover and not a song she wrote," said Brad Keck. "She was adamant that she sing her song and it was really good and it went over great."

Gibson, who taught English at Neoga High School for many years and now teaches the same subject at a Kansas school district, was the owner of Rock University, where he taught guitar, bass and ukulele in Tuscola.

"I gave Allie and many others guitar lessons in



Allie Keck holds her diploma from Illinois State University during graduation, 2016. Submitted photo

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Allie Keck stands with Battle Round partner Cait Martin of Atlanta while competing on "The Voice" in March 2023. Submitted photo

my home, before opening Rock University in Neoga – later moving it to Tuscola," said Gibson. "I first met Allie as a freshman in my English class at Neoga High School. She was very quiet and shy."

He said one of her fellow students, knowing that Gibson taught guitar, told him that she played and sang. He encouraged her to bring in her guitar to class.

"I remember thinking it might help draw her out of her shell, but I wasn't expecting her to follow through, since she was so shy," said Gibson.

The very next day, she brought her guitar to class and performed a solo act.

"By the end of her high school

career, she was one of the funniest and most outgoing students I can remember," said Gibson. "She was a lot of fun to have in class and in guitar lessons."

Another Effingham music teacher taught Allie Keck piano and Clavinova lessons when she was about 10.

"I taught piano in my home, said Michele Russo Carruthers, 69, of rural Sigel. "The Kecks knew I taught piano, through word of mouth. Word just gets around. I don't recall that Allie necessarily wanted a career in music at that young age – but she put her heart and soul into it."

She said Allie came to her lessons prepared and she participated

in piano recitals at the local churches.

'THE VOICE'

The night Keck appeared on national television during the Battle Rounds of the singing competition her father's Facebook page showed a memory video of Allie singing on stage at the Neoga Band Variety Show – some 10 years earlier. She was 15.

"That was very memorable," said Allie Keck. "It was my biggest audience at that point."

Those who know Allie best say her performance of "Paris Ooh La La" by Grace Potter on the television show, broadcast in March, exuded charisma and dazzle.

The process began with submission of recordings before being asked to perform live in Los Angeles during the show's "Blind Auditions," where contestants try to get celebrity judges to turn their chair.

Her time in Los Angeles with try-outs and filming and on-stage performances began in October and concluded in February, with a break in between.

Getting chair turns on the show by singer-songwriters Kelly Clarkson and Blake Shelton was enough to allow her to advance in the contest for a few more weeks.

Keck chose Clarkson to be her coach and said the two clicked.

"She's amazing," said Keck. "We had a lot in common. We loved the same music and are both fun to be around. She's done so much, but is still so humble. Kelly Clarkson has got a great head on her shoulders."

After the Blind Auditions, Clarkson compared the 2012 Neoga High

UPCOMING LOCAL GIGS

Allie Keck will be writing new music and return to her roots with gigs at these area locations:

June 2, House Brothers, Mattoon, 7-10 p.m.

June 3, No Bad Days Farm, Shelbyville, "Rhythm and Blooms." Her time slot is 7:30-8:30 p.m. She's among several performers.

June 4, A-1 Liquors, Effingham, 2-5 p.m.

June 8, Pinky's, Effingham, 6-8 p.m.

June 9, Tuscan Hills Winery, Effingham, 7-10 p.m.

June 10, The Kazbar, Sigel, 8-11 p.m.

School graduate's talents to Janis Joplin and Ann Wilson.

Gibson said he watched Allie perform on "The Voice."

"As an educator, it feels so good to see your students succeed and as a guitar instructor, it's even more special," said Gibson. "The music business is very difficult, and it was incredible to see her living out her dream and knowing that I had a small part in it."

Gibson described her Blind Audition as "mind-blowing" and "flawless."

"Her song choice was perfect, her delivery was perfect and her shiny boots were awesome, too," said Gibson.

"Allie's performances were over the top," said Carruthers. "She rocked it the night of the battle. I felt she deserved it and I was very disappointed that no one else stole her for their team."

Carruthers believes that the



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Allie Keck performs at Winners Bar & Grille in Nashville during the Whiskey Jam event, 2022. Submitted photo.

exposure from being on "The Voice" will broaden Keck's opportunities in the future.

"She can sing country, rock and ballads," said Carruthers. "She's a composer. I look forward to her journey as a musician and can't wait to see where it will take her."

While nerves were high during her experience with the television competition, Keck said she was a bit more calm during the Battles Rounds.

"I had already made it past the hard part of the competition with the Blind Auditions," said Keck. "Once you're up there you have no choice. The nerves normally go away once I start."



Shown is Allie Keck with her first guitar, 2009. Submitted photo

She said after six years doing gigs in Nashville she still gets the nervous jitters to some degree. "It means you care," she said.

Her "Battle Partner," Cait Martin, a voiceover artist from Atlanta, paired by Coach Kelly Clarkson, advanced in the competition, and the two have remained friends through the process of rehearsing together and competing.

Together they sang, "It Must Have Been Love," by Roxette.

"Cait was always taking care of contestants on the show," said Allie. "It was no different when we were performing. She has such a calming presence. Cait and I still talk almost every day."

Keck said she left the show as a better performer and she definitely wants to get busy with writing some new music and performing. She said the show was a learning experience.

She's made new friends. Living in Nashville, many aspiring performers go on to try out for talent shows, hoping to get that much-needed break into the business.

"I made great friends with J.B. Somers," said Keck, referring to another contestant. "And he lives really close to me and we watched the show together."

A new experience for Keck was having makeup artists and hairstylists for her during the show. They also dressed her for the performances that aired on television, and she was able to keep the clothes. However, those boots Gibson liked in the Blind Auditions were her own.

"We would come camera-ready and they would make sure we looked good," said Keck. "There were always people doing touch-ups. It was definitely different for me. All of the makeup artists and hairstylists are talented."

Keck said although she lost in the Battle Round, she's happy and grateful for the experience on "The Voice."

"I won't really know the difference it made in my career until I release new music," she said. "I was really proud of my performance. That's all I could ask for."

FAME

Her social media continues to be flooded with love and support. She has a local following in the Neoga, Effingham and Nashville area and beyond.

Even Ginger Ale's in Effingham named a drink after her, The Allie Keck, according to its Facebook post.

Keck believes her experience on "The Voice" has opened up new opportunities and more name recognition.

Before "The Voice," performing in Bloomington as a college student was her first experience on a stage in a larger town.

"I loved it, but I couldn't wait to get to Nashville," said Keck. "I had auditioned for shows like this before, but they never worked out. So, I can't say I ever really pictured the reality until I got the call that it was happening. I'd do it again if given the chance. It was supposed to happen as it did."

She believes in her future as a musician and songwriter.

"It's made playing music full time more lucrative for me," said Keck. "Having that credit of 'The Voice' under my name will make a huge difference. My dream going forward is to write music and be happy."

Gibson said Allie's dedication and determination will help her succeed in that career.

"I believe she has a very bright future in

music," said Gibson. "Her talent and dedication are obvious. When a female rock singer draws comparisons to Ann Wilson and Janis Joplin – Wow! How can you get a better compliment?"

COLLEGE AND FUTURE WORK

Her parents encouraged her to attend college, even though she wanted to move to Nashville, Tenn., fresh out of high school. They didn't feel she was ready for that jump to The Music City and encouraged her to attend college first – just in case the music dream didn't work out.

So, Keck enrolled at Lake Land College and then Illinois State University in Bloomington-Normal. She earned a degree

in liberal arts at LLC in 2014 and a degree in communications at ISU in 2016.

"I loved college," Keck said. "At Lake Land College, I definitely played more music because I was close to home."

And still today, she's happy to return to her roots to play at local venues.

She's optimistic with the friends she's made and connections since being on "The Voice" that singing and writing more songs will be her long-time career going forward. She has worked two jobs before, but is hopeful that now writing and performing her own music can become a lucrative one-job life.

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Shown is the exterior of Homewood Grill at its new location at 1002 West Fayette Ave., Effingham. Submitted photo

Homewood Grill moves to new location

DAWN SCHABBING
FOR EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

The owners of Homewood Grill have mixed feelings about leaving behind the iconic walk-up ice cream shop's original location, but they are excited to be in a roomier building that also offers a drive-thru window.

The business recently moved to 1002 West Fayette Ave. in Effingham, the location of the former Taqueria Don Pedro Mexican Restaurant. Prior to that it was located for many years at 608 South Willow St.

It opened for the season in March 2023, after several months of renovations in the new location. Plans include landscaping and resurfacing the parking lot.

"We were very sad to leave behind the landmark building on Willow Street," said Beth Stundon, an owner. "It holds a lot of beautiful memories. Everyone loved that building and location. But it just no longer met our growing needs."

Beth Stundon and her husband, Kevin Stundon, are optimistic that the change will bring more fond memories and the support of the customers, just like in the past.

"We truly appreciate all of the love and support the Effingham community has given us," said Beth Stundon. "We hope our amazing customers will grow to love our new location."

Shown is the Cookie Monster ice cream treat. Submitted photo

The couple has owned Homewood Grill since 2017, but it has been in the same family since 1985. Her aunt and uncle, Mindy and Mike Nosbisch, first owned it. Her sister, several cousins, aunts and her mother have all worked at the Homewood Grill over the years.

"We are super excited because Mindy Nosbisch recently rejoined us, due to the daytime staffing shortages," said Stundon. "She is currently helping us make our hand-dipped ice cream."

The Nosbisches purchased Homewood Grill from Pat Brown in 1985. Brown had owned it for eight years prior. Before that, it is believed to have been called, "Eyes." But, the building was initially, "Tasty Treat" in 1952. The current owners are unsure when it took the name Homewood Grill.

It employs 45 people, but they are looking to hire more.

"The majority of our staff are teenagers who are involved in many activities or who end up moving away for college," said Beth Stundon. "We have a difficult time staffing during the weekdays, despite attempts to recruit day staff. We are always in need of cooks and weekday workers."

She said they hire "only amazing, quality staff" and offer a



"very positive work environment" with great workers. Spring is the busiest season for the Homewood Grill.

NEW LOCATION

Beth Stundon said the need for more space was one reason for the move, plus the rent they were paying was almost double market value. The new location, most recently a Mexican food restaurant, at one time served as a bagel shop, she said.

"We wanted to purchase the Willow building and expand there, but the owners were not interested in selling," said Stundon. "We currently have that lease until December 2024, but may work with the owners to reduce that lease length. Their hope is that it will remain an ice cream shop, under new ownership."

While Homewood Grill remains an outdoor seating establishment, the added drive-thru means people don't necessarily have to leave their cars to get tasty treats.

"We had hoped to have enough room for indoor seating, but our equipment filled the building very quickly," Beth Stundon said. "Now we have more space to work and move around without bumping into each other. We can fit more than eight people per shift, therefore, we can serve more customers."

The move to a larger location has people asking if Homewood

Grill will continue to be seasonal – or expand to year-round?

"The No. 1 question we get is, 'Will you stay open year-round now?' And our response to that is 'We don't know.'"

Beth Stundon said a lot will determine if year-round ice cream and sandwich sales is in their future, including how sales go this spring and summer; and the availability of staff and managers to fill 12 months.

"We have three amazing full-time managers that we depend on – Kyle Shanle, John Hollman and Iva Lily," said Beth Stundon. "My husband and I both work other full-time jobs, so Homewood Grill could not function without these three amazing leaders."

History has been that sales tend to drop dramatically in the fall. So after looking at sales for this August, September and October, and with the help of a drive-thru, the owners will decide whether to stay open 12 months.

"Ice cream just isn't a big seller when it is cold outside," said Beth Stundon. "The decision to stay open will also depend on the availability of our full-time managers. We want to see what happens with sales in August, September and October. We are hoping with the addition of a drive-thru, we may be able to make it work."

The owners are fully aware that the future

construction on Fayette Avenue may cause some inconveniences for the customers, staff and crew at Homewood Grill for a while.

"We are not super excited about the looming Fayette Avenue construction, but while that is under construction, our customers can use other access points to get to our building," Beth Stundon said.

NEW PERKS

At the prior location, there were two sheds on-site and three storage sheds off-site. At the new location, there is plenty of space for all of the freezers and the supplies at one site.

"We love all of the space," said Beth Stundon. "The new building is always at a comfortable temperature inside."

They also have a 'grab-n-go' freezer inside.

"We have space to store plenty of pies, half-

gallons and now pints of ice cream," said Beth Stundon.

While the menu will remain the same at this location, pints of hand-dipped ice cream and ready-made ice cream pies have been added.

Beth Stundon said the fried food is not "pre-made" so customers might expect a little longer wait at the drive-thru, compared to some typical fast-food restaurants.

"But, it's worth the wait," she said.

MENU

Beth Stundon said the No. 1 seller at Homewood Grill is Cookie Dough Shake-N-Mores. Another big seller is the Unicorn Sundae, which she created in 2018.

"My husband said it was a bad idea and that it wouldn't sell," said Stundon. "We sold 3,968 of them last season. I love to remind him of this."

Shown is a double cheeseburger meal from Homewood Grill. Submitted photo



Customers come for the hand-dipped specialty flavors, too.

"We make all of our own super premium hand-dipped flavors in house," said Beth Stundon. "We rotate a specialty flavor every month. Right now it is Cookie Butter. This flavor was inspired by an ice cream flavor we tasted at an ice cream convention in Florida. Our manager, Kyle, tasted it and fell in love. She created her own recipe for it."

When it comes to fresh-made food from the grill, Homewood Grill sells a lot of hamburgers, the owner said.

"We make them with beef from McMahon Meats in Teutopolis," said Beth Stundon. "Other



Beth Stundon with daughter Ava and Kevin Stundon in the Homewood Grill Food Truck. Submitted photo

favorites are the beef burger, sloppy joe, and tenderloin sandwiches. We were nominated for Best Hot Dog on the Effingham Daily News' People's Choice Awards this year. And our french

fries are a huge hit, too." Its menu also includes treats such as soft serve ice cream, frozen yogurt and Dole dairy-free serve; milkshakes, malts and sundaes; dipped

cones and twinkle treat cones; corn dogs, Coney dogs, chicken nuggets, chicken and fish sandwiches; soft drinks, slushies, iced tea and lemonade.



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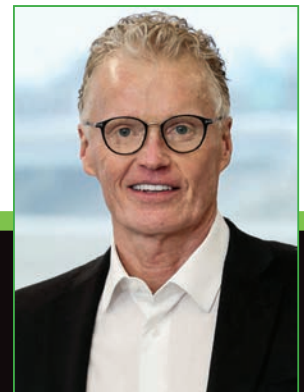
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"Til Beth Us Do Part" was performed in June 2019. Submitted photo

FACE at 50: The Show Must Go On

DAWN SCHABBING
FOR EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

Judy Willenborg was 36 when she was among a group who started brainstorming about bringing something new to the growing community of Effingham.

Now 86, the Effingham woman said the 50 years have flown by. She's proud to have been a part of an organization that has provided entertaining productions at venues such as the Old Courthouse, The Cross, Effingham Park District Recreation Center, and The Effingham Performance Center.

"Fine Arts, County of Effingham" – known around the area as FACE – was formed in 1973. In 1974,

it was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) corporation.

Credited with a solid board of directors, a core group of leaders,

a steady flow of actors, dancers, musicians and singers, for five decades FACE has fostered a thriving arts community in Effingham County.

Today, FACE encompasses three areas: FACE Players (the Theater Group); FACE Orchestra (the Instrumentalist Group); and FACE Community Singers



Picture of 2023-2024 FACE Board of Directors. From Left: Brian Fraser, Chris Fraser, Sara Ruding, Nancy Liss, Les Liss. Not Pictured: Bridgette Skees and Loring Barr.

(the Choral Group.)

The organization has presented 129 different shows and 387 performances on stages in the county, so far, said Les Liss, FACE production chairman.

"We are a group who wants to continue having all of the arts – and we just want to perpetuate it," said Nancy Liss. "We want to make theater, music, dance – all combined – to be a learning and enjoyable experience for everyone."

Before FACE was established, there was a children's musical production, directed by John Latta, music teacher at Teutopolis High School, and Fred Conrad, English and drama teacher at Effingham High School, in 1971, according to Nancy Liss. Held at the old Holiday Inn, this show may have spurred FACE into existence.

Willenborg has fond memories of the stage productions, choral presentations and the orchestra. She said it is hard to fathom that it has been 50 years since FACE formed.

"We've offered entertainment, scholarships for the arts, and so many different things," said Willenborg. "It's all been good. We brought something new to Effingham that wasn't here 50 years ago. At that time, Effingham was growing and changing, and there was a group of us who wanted to do something like this and try bringing new things to Effingham. And we did it. And it's all been so good."

While these FACE roles and duties have changed across the decades, today the director of the orchestra is Nicholas Tkachuk; director of the singers is Rachelle Cekander; director of the theater is Les Liss.

The group that keeps things moving fiscally is the FACE board of directors: Brian Fraser, Chris Fraser, Sara Ruding, Nancy Liss, Les Liss, Bridgette Skees and Loring Barr. They are responsible for paying the bills, collecting membership fees, and producing shows.

Officers are President Nancy Liss, Vice President Christine Fraser, Secretary Bridgette Skees, and Treasurer Les Liss.

Nancy Liss, along with her husband, Les Liss, are among others who try hard to keep the arts alive in Effingham County during a time where they must compete for people who have multiple interests.

As the "face of FACE" for many years now, the couple said they are happy to carry the torch, just as others have done so before them.

"The first 50 years went pretty well," said Les Liss, who recently directed "Love, Sex and the IRS" and is cooking up another production in October, at the Ron Diehl Center, to be announced later.

His wife is thrilled about the 50-year mark.

"It's so important to me to have that creative outlet," said Nancy Liss. "To look back when we had no idea what we were doing going forward, but we had a few anchor peo-



"A Christmas Carol," 1983. Submitted photo

ple, like John Latta and Fred Conrad, who guided us. This is how we were able to evolve and keep it going for 50 years."

People become members of the organization for different reasons.

"People who usually come in, it's because (performing) is something on their bucket list," said Les Liss. "Our goal is to promote the arts for as long as we can. There are theaters that are going belly-up since the pan-

demie. We compete with every hobby and interest in the area because everyone wants to get their market share."

The Lisses not only want audiences to attend plays, concerts and events, but they too want people with a desire and even moderate talent to join them with whatever their interest and talents can offer at FACE: in theater, in instrumentalists or in choral.

"Our mission is to provide entertainment and to enrich the community with it," said Nancy Liss. "We are lucky we have places to play, including the Effingham Park District and the Effingham Performance Center."

The Arts Connection Central Illinois, or ACCI, which oversees the Effingham Performance Center, invited FACE to use its facility during the 50-year anniversary. Dr. Ruben Boyajian of Effingham, who has also performed in some of FACE's shows, serves as the vice president of ACCI.

Members of the FACE Orchestra perform during Christmas at The Cross Open House in 2019. EDN file photo





Amber Cekander Wendt, Ron Donsbach and Rachelle Cekander in a production of "Sylvia" in 2000. Submitted photo

"The EPC wanted to help us celebrate this milestone," said Les Liss.

THE BUG

Often people who enjoy theater will say they've been "bitten by the theater bug," which means they have an ongoing desire to make

acting or being stagehands a part of their life, often for many years.

These folks truly enjoy the nerves it takes to be in front of an audience, the efforts of memorizing lines or the perfect timing for prop changes or sound effects, during a performance. This is the same

for FACE actors and stage crews, orchestra players or choral singers in Effingham.

Nancy Liss said when she attended Effingham High School she was interested in plays, but she never was on stage.

"In high school, I didn't get on stage. But I helped direct with Fred Conrad," said Nancy Liss. "Since then, I've been in 48 productions with FACE."

It was when she was a college student at Eastern Illinois University that she returned to Effingham after being asked by Fred Conrad in 1973 to audition for FACE's "Plaza Suite," by Neil Simon.

Nancy Liss left the area after college and lived in Chicago for a while. But when she returned to Effingham in 1988 with her husband, they both wanted to be a part of FACE.

"I lured him in," said Nancy about her husband's FACE involvement. "I just love the creativity of this and

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I've been fortunate enough to never be put in a certain category. I love it that I'm not pigeon-holed and that I can play all kinds of characters."

She enjoys it when she can hear the audience's laughter, making the weeks of rehearsals for each show worth it.

"How Green Was My Brownie," was Les Liss' first play, which was held at what is now Effingham Junior High. Les has been involved in 87 FACE plays, directing many.

He said moving to Effingham and joining FACE was a way to make new friends.

"It was a great place for us to meet new people," said Les Liss. "And I already knew a lot of those people, and I was glad to be able to be back with them again," said Nancy Liss.

Dr. Mike Sehy, 84, of Effingham, said he's proud to be a part of FACE. He got the acting bug when he was in "Brigadoon" during his sophomore

year at St. Anthony High School. He played Charlie Dalrymple.

Sehy went on to play in several productions with FACE, starting in 1973.

"FACE provides another outlet for people," said Sehy, who now calls himself a patron and a contributor. "It's a great way for people who want to be on stage. FACE tries to bring out all of the different forms of fine arts."

Jo Thomas, 77, of Shumway, has been involved with FACE for about 19 years. She got her start at Christ's Church in Effingham. When she was in her 40s, the church formed a drama ministry.

"That audience was very forgiving," said Thomas. "We would do a sermon illustration skit and some dinner theaters. I got bit by the bug then. That's when I auditioned for a play called "Harvey" with FACE. I played a nurse in that production."

Thomas has been both on stage and back stage with FACE.

"Even the small, minor roles are

very essential," said Thomas. "I have always envied people who were on stage, but I was too shy and too terrified until my experience at my church helped."

Dona Temple, 86, of Effingham, has served as an usher and meal server during dinner theaters, but she's never been cast in a play.

"I've been going to FACE productions almost since it started," said Temple. "It's great that we can show our local talent. We have a lot of local talent in Effingham and the surrounding towns."

Temple said during the summer months she attends the Gazebo concerts (FACE Orchestra) in downtown Effingham and tries to never miss the Christmas concert (FACE Orchestra and Community Singers) each year.

Les Liss said people come from all around the area – Effingham, Altamont, Beecher City, Brownstown, Neoga, Watson, and Charleston. An audition call is published when they are searching for talent.

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"Drinking Habits 2" was performed in March 2022. Submitted photo

"But, you have to be committed to do this," said Les Liss. "It takes time to be in a show."

Actors must expect to rehearse for eight to 10 weeks before a show. Les said when he's not directing, backstage is his favorite place.

"I enjoy the crew – if I'm not directing – I like to be in the crew," said Les Liss. "You have all the pressures and the fun, but without the memorization."

While some people might take time to get bit, for others it happens

quickly, said Nancy Liss.

"And then there are people who we need a hook to get them off the stage – like me," said Nancy Liss. "I love it and I don't want to leave it."

THE START

The amateur group worked with what they had or could afford in the beginning. They admit it was a learning experience and said they've come a long way since the black plastic backdrop and cans that helped shine the lighting on stage.

"We didn't have anything like this before FACE was formed," said Willenborg. "With each production we would start out as strangers and we became a family. We all stuck together. I'm just so delighted that we are still running (after the pandemic) and doing well. It's been wonderful."

Willenborg served 25 years as the board of directors' secretary. She's thrilled with the new relationship with the EPC and the most recent performance of "Love, Sex and The IRS," on the Rosebud Stage.

Les Liss said the EPC wanted to help FACE celebrate its milestone 50 years as an organization. They most often hold their productions at the Ron Diehl Center with the Effingham Park District these days, but now hope to keep both venues on their calendars.

It was in July 1973, when that first show, "Plaza Suite," was held at the old Holiday Inn and was directed by John Latta, who was then a music teacher at Effingham High School.

Willenborg said FACE has had excellent directors who have steered the organization in the right way.

Willenborg said although the



The cast of "Arsenic and Old Lace" is pictured in May 1999. Seated, from left, are Barb Kelley, Nancy Liss, Penny Meyer; back row, from left, Barry Schaefer, Dave Parker, Gordon Zuber, Dr. Ruben Boyajian, Mark Vail, Bob Mette, Bill Griffith, Dan Kruger, Dr. James Graham, Russ Kelley and Bob Cox. Submitted photo

participants who first began with FACE were all amateurs, it was the help of the directors that made it a success each time.

"We had some things that didn't work when we got on stage," said Willenborg. "We had people who would forget their lines, but we had people backstage giving us cues to help us. We always worked it out."

Sehy also got his start in 1973 with FACE and joined the cast on the sets of "Plaza Suite," "Charlie's Aunt," and "Arsenic and Old Lace" performances. It was a significant move for FACE when it was approved to use the park district. They would set up more of a permanent stage and rigging that could be left up.

"In the beginning, there was just black plastic for the background," said Sehy, a retired optometrist. "We performed some shows at the old Elks Club, the Knights of Columbus Hall and the park district early on."

Sehy said in those days they would build a set just days before the first

curtain pull. Afterwards, they would store the materials up on a balcony and at the next production, do it all over again. Nothing was permanent at that time.

"We were pretty frugal," said Sehy. "Our lights were made with the bigger soup cans, and we'd run wires and operate the lights that way. This was done by Russ Kelley. His wife, Barbara Kelley, would help and would have small parts in different plays."

Even today, pretty much anything goes as to how they come up with the proper attire for a cast member: rentals, resale shops, borrowing, and scrounging up. Part of the director's job is to set a budget for costumes, building the set and props.

When they needed a prop to make a person look more scholarly, the optometrist would come up with a perfect pair of eyeglasses.

"I performed in several shows – including "A Christmas Carol" at the Effingham Performance Center,

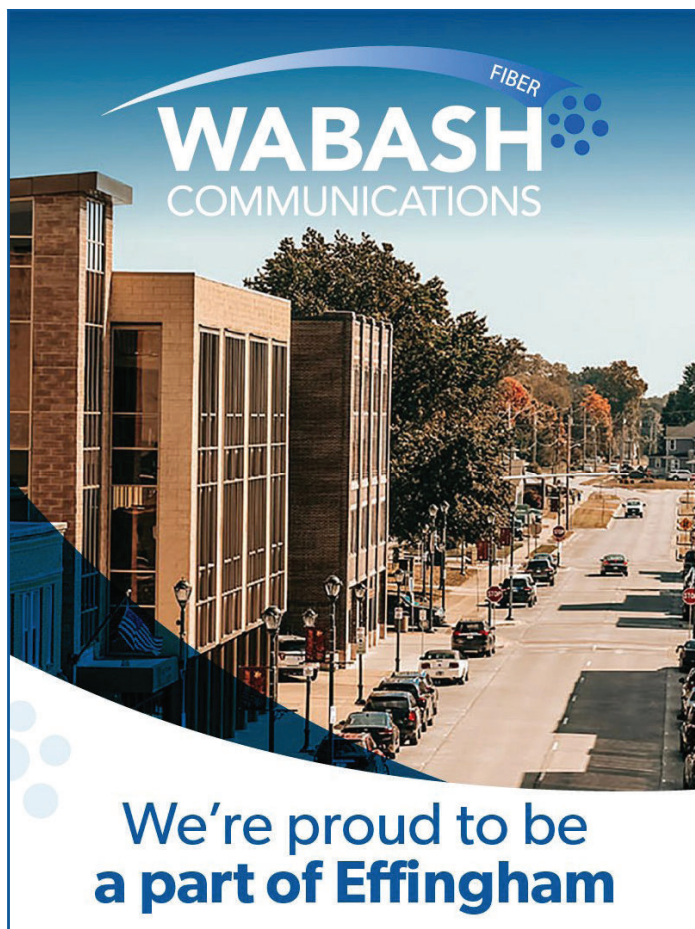
where I played Marley. I was also Scrooge two different times before that when we played at the park district."

He said Father Time caught up and he's now aged out of most roles he might have played in the past, such as for "The Odd Couple" and "Night Watch."

Thomas said her favorite show was "On Golden Pond." She was cast as Ethel Thayer, the wife of Norman. In contrast to the movie, Norman is a more lovable character – "Superbly played by the late Bill Griffith," said Thomas. "He was a wonderful asset to the FACE players."

Without any formal training, Thomas took to FACE fairly quickly.

"I think it was my second show, and I thought 'Wow, I could do this.' The neat thing is that learning lines is a great brain exercise," said Thomas. "And I use a lot of line triggers. Everyone has their way of learning their own lines."



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\$10	\$8	PER ITEM	PER ITEM	PER ITEM	PER ITEM	CLOSED FOR RESTOCK
10AM - 6PM	10AM - 6PM	NOON - 6PM	10AM - 6PM	10AM - 6PM	10AM - 6PM	CLOSED

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"The Nerd," September 1989. Submitted photo

Besides the camaraderie, being a part of a group like FACE is a learning experience, she said.

"You learn all sorts of techniques, get lots of advice and it really is a great growing experience," said Thomas. All four of her granddaughters have been or are still with FACE.

ORCHESTRA

The first FACE Orchestra was added in the mid-1970s. While the number of members vary from year to year, it runs between 15 and 30 people. They play such instruments as the violin, clarinet, trumpet and percussion. Likewise, the FACE Community Singers usually involves between 15-30 people each season.

The first concert with the orchestra and singers combined was in 1983.

Similar to the FACE Players, the orchestra and singers also have a commitment to the community organization with rehearsals usually weekly.

Performances for the instrument players and singers often include events at the gazebo in downtown Effingham during the summer months. These two groups also hold

a Christmas concert together, free to the community, on the first Sunday in December.

THE FUNNIES

"We start out playing the kids and love interests – but as we get older the parts available to us change," said Les Liss. "A few years later we are the parents and then a few

years more we play the grandparents with white hair and a white beard.

"But now I actually look like that," the director quipped.

Things happen on a set – sometimes pranks are planned – sometimes goofs happen.

"We never talk about what goes right, because we expect things to go right," said Les Liss. "But, for years, we talk about things that go wrong. We work hard and we play hard. We take our roles seriously, but we don't always take ourselves too seriously."

Les Liss said being pranked on a set is a way of being initiated in the world of theater. Examples include an empty suitcase during rehearsals suddenly weighted down with encyclopedias during the actual show.

"I about left my arm there," Nancy Liss said with a laugh, recalling the prank fellow actors pulled on her during the show "Jake's Women."

Nancy Liss fondly recalled Dave Ruff and James Graham filling her suitcase with the heavy books while she did a quick costume change.

And Les Liss had his laughs when in "Luxury Cruise," performed in 1994,



Dave Parker, left, and Bill Griffith in a scene from "On Golden Pond" in 2006. Submitted photo

he was to give a fellow female actress a warm foot bath – but instead he provided ice water for her tired feet in that show.

“She never broke character,” he said.

Sometimes timing isn’t perfect.

“Nancy (Liss) once got caught on stage when the curtain opened too soon,” said Les Liss. “She dove to the floor, hidden nicely behind a sofa. The actors on stage continued walking around that sofa with her there. They orchestrated a time to break for a curtain close – just momentarily to get her off stage – so she could reappear in that same scene.”

And how about some peanut butter with your lines?

“It was in the ‘Odd Couple’ that Dr. Ruben Boyajian had to eat a peanut butter sandwich – but we made it with about a half-inch thick peanut butter middle – and he still had to manage to say his lines,” said Les Liss.

“The main thing is the actors continue – and did not break character,” said Nancy Liss.

THE CHALLENGES

Because of the pandemic, FACE Theater had to cancel its second weekend of shows in 2020, but due to careful record keeping, nearly every person was called in advance and was refunded their money. Those that weren’t reached learned about the cancellation upon reaching the door of the Ron Diehl Center, where many plays are held.

“There have been challenges,” said Nancy Liss. “During the pandemic, we didn’t do a show for at least a year and a half to two years. In 2020, we had to cancel the second weekend. But, in all of these years, except for the pandemic, we only had to cancel one time – because our leading lady was sick and in the emergency room,” said Nancy Liss.

There were some close calls, including a young actor whose father had died the day of a show. But he



Beverly Marshall directs the FACE Orchestra Christmas Concert at the Cornerstone Christian Church in Effingham in 2016. EDN file photo

performed because he felt his dad would have wanted it that way.

“We had one guy who barely made it to opening curtain, because he had a medical issue – but he made it,” said Les Liss.

Illness fell upon the set another time during a special benefit performance.

“It was a charity show for St. John’s Eagles Nest preschool,” said Nancy Liss. “It was ‘Rumpelstiltskin.’ As it worked out, it was a fairy tale story, so the lead replacement actress, Judy Macklin, just carried a large fairy tale book with the script inside, and nobody knew.”

Bronchitis hit the leading actor during one of the Christmas shows.

“It was just a one-night show, so we had a replacement, but we taped the entire script on round tables, so everywhere she would go, the lines would be there,” said Les Liss. “With some composure, we got through it.”

It’s all part of the thrill of being in a live show.

“You just keep going,” said Nancy Liss. “Like that adage, ‘The show must go on,’ we’ve done whatever it takes to just continue doing this. And basically, it’s a lot of fun.”

THE SCHOLARSHIPS

“I’m glad that I was a part of it and

could see us grow,” said Willenborg. “We don’t make a lot of money, but we are able to give back to the community in scholarships for the arts. We are so proud.”

Each year FACE offers up to \$3,500 in scholarships. These include up to \$500 for summer camps for three kids in grades 6-11. And two \$1,000 scholarships for high school seniors with a major in one of the fine arts or theater arts, according to Les Liss.

They are:

Bob and Jeanne Cox Memorial Scholarship for fine arts – music, art, or dance, \$1,000.

Bob Cox directed many of the earliest shows, Sehy said. He was also president of FACE for many years. Jeanne Cox started the chorus group for FACE.

Russ and Barb Kelley Memorial Scholarship for theater arts, \$1,000.

Russ Kelley was our everything man,” said Nancy Liss. “If we could break it, he could fix it,” said Les Liss. Both of them were the backbone of FACE. They were in a lot of plays over the years.

Through the years, FACE offered a traveling show for hire for things like charitable benefits and for entertaining at company parties.

To learn more about FACE or to get involved, visit effinghamface.com or email effinghamface442.com

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 28: Time to Kill Campout 2023 at 8724 E. Marine Rd, Effingham, IL – The Stage at Lake Sara. A Sunday afternoon small festival vibe with several local central Illinois bands hosted by Garrett Burris w/ Time to Kill and Poss Music Works.

June 3: Magic & Mischief: A Fairy Market from 1 p.m. to 8 p.m. in downtown Effingham. Event will include Food Vendors, Fire Dancers, Sidewalk Sideshow, Stilt Walkers, Face Painting, Costumes Encouraged, Fairy Vendors, DJ Music, Photography, Local Florists, Artists and Oracle Readings. Contact Hazel-Jayne in Effingham for more information.

June 3: "Scott Wattles & The Blue Suede Crew" 7 p.m. at the Effingham Performance Center. They will perform a variety of songs including Elvis hits and gospel music.

June 3 through Oct. 28: Farmer's Market every Saturday in downtown Effingham starting at 8 a.m.

June 16: 5th Annual Cruise/Car Show at Teutopolis Banquet Hall in Teutopolis, IL. Rain date will be June 17. Come cruise the beautiful streets of Teutopolis or browse through the huge car show. No cover charges. Food and drinks available for purchase. DJ and entertainment all night!!

June 16 & 17: VW Fun Fest at Mid America Motorworks in Effingham, IL. Lots of family and kid friendly activities, swap area, food and refreshment vendors, Celebrity Choice awards and the Fun Run Road Tour.



June 17: Mill Road Thresherman Tractor Drive. Registration 8 a.m. Starting location: 157 County Road 700N, Neoga, IL 62447. Contact Ken Goeckner at 618-335-3790 for more information.

June 22 to June 25: Moccasin Creek Festival 2023 at 8724 E. Marine Rd, Effingham, IL. – The Stage at Lake Sara.

July 8: Buckin For Heroes Rodeo at Teutopolis Banquet Hall grounds in Teutopolis, IL. Grounds open at 4:30 p.m. Rodeo begins at 7 p.m. Music by Dylan Wolfe starting at 9 p.m. Food Trucks, Merchandise Vendors. Full Bar. All proceeds raised donated to Make-A-Wish IL, Teutopolis American Legion Post #924, Effingham DAV and VFW.

July 14 & 15: Effingham Artisan Fair at Tuscan Hills Winery in Effingham from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. on July 14 and from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on July 15. First 100 entries receives a free tote bag! The Effingham Artisan Fair is a juried art fair featuring 30 plus artists from central Illinois and the Midwest

July 21: 2023 EffingHAM-JAM from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. in downtown Effingham.

July 22: HAMCITY JAM23 Skateboard Event at the Skateboard Park in Effingham, IL.

July 29 to Aug. 5: Effingham County Fair at the fairgrounds in Altamont, IL. Tractor pulls, demo derby, queen contest, and so much more! Grandstand feature on Aug. 4 will be country music hitmaker Chris Janson with Dakota Danielle. Tickets for the concert and all the grandstand events are on sale now at www.effinghamcountyfair.com!

Aug. 10, 11, 12 & 13: Mill Road Thresherman Show at the Effingham County Fairgrounds in Altamont, IL. Visit www.millroad-thresherman.org for a complete daily schedule of events.

Aug. 23: "Happy Together – Tour

2023" 7:30 p.m. at the Effingham Performance Center. The Turtles, Little Anthony, Gary Puckett & The Union Gap, The Vogues, The Classics IV and The Cowsills return for the Happy Together Tour 2023, performing their biggest hits of the 1960s and 1970s.

Aug. 25 to Aug. 27: Summer Sundown Festival at 8724 E. Marine Rd, Effingham, IL – The Stage at Lake Sara.

Sept. 8 & 9: Midwest Market Indoor/Outdoor Market at Village Square Mall, Effingham. Sept. 8 from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. and Sept. 9 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Over 100 vendors including boutiques, home décor, vintage, food trucks, produce, mums, jewelry, live music and so much more.

Sept. 14 to 16: Corvette Funfest 2023.

Sept. 23: "One Funny Mother – starring comedian Dena Blizzard" 7 p.m. at the Effingham Performance Center. Dena will take you on a hilarious journey through the trials and tribulations of motherhood and marriage. This show is for anyone who is a mother, who has a mother or who is married to a mother.

Sept. 30: Oktoberfest 2023 from 5 p.m. to midnight at the Teutopolis Banquet Hall grounds. Bands will include Butch's Polka Kings from 5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. and Bad Habit from 9 p.m. to midnight. Free admission! Free inflatables for the kids! German style food! German style beer! Stein holding contest! Sponsored by the Teutopolis Civic Club.

Oct. 21: Magic & Mischief: A Witches Market. Events include DJ, Food Trucks, Tarot Readings, Witchy Vendors, Magical Drinks, Fire Dancers, Hula Hoopers, Henna, Face Painting and More! Witch or Wizard Attire Encouraged. For more information, contact Hazel-Jayne in Effingham.



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ELECTRIFYING EFFINGHAM



Kristie Campbell, co-owner of Firefly Grill in Effingham, stands next to one of the electric vehicle charging stations that were installed in the parking lot of her restaurant five years ago. Nick Taylor photo.

Charging stations good for travelers – and the environment

NICK TAYLOR
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

As America continues its shift toward more renewable sources of energy, electric vehicles and charging stations have been appearing in Effingham, which has long been a crossroads for travelers.

One Effingham business leading the city's efforts toward renewable energy and providing a place for drivers to charge their electric vehicles is Firefly Grill.

Kristie and Niall Campbell are the owners of Firefly Grill, where Niall also works as the restaurant's chef.

Kristie and Niall are constantly looking for any way they can

reduce their restaurant's carbon footprint, so when they were approached with a proposal to install four electric vehicle charging stations, they were quick to embrace the opportunity.

Before the charging stations were installed in the parking lot of the restaurant about five years ago, Electrify America attempted to reach an agreement with the Walmart in Effingham to have some charging units placed in the store's parking lot.

Electrify America is a company that provides infrastructure for electric vehicles, including electric vehicle charging stations in the United States.

"Evidently, their model was to come to Walmarts in the Midwest

and set up their charging stations at Walmart," Kristie said. "And, for whatever reason, the negotiations with this Walmart did not work out."

"They decided they didn't want it," Niall said.

Following the unsuccessful negotiations, a man with Electrify America decided to stop at Firefly Grill to eat.

"He came to Firefly to have lunch, and when he was sitting at Firefly, he was like, 'This is the perfect location,'" Niall said.

"So he ended up calling me and said, 'Would you consider doing this?' and then I handed it off to Niall, and he was the one that negotiated the deal," Kristie said.

Niall said they had already considered adding electric vehicle charging stations to their parking lot but had yet to find an affordable option.

"Originally, probably in 2015-16, we were looking at Tesla but the install and the infrastructure was very, very expensive," Niall said.

They explained that Electrify America was established in the wake of the Volkswagen emission scandal which occurred in 2015 when the United States Environmental Protection Agency found that the company's emission levels violated the Clean Air Act.

The agreement that followed the emissions scandal included a requirement that Volkswagen contribute to efforts to reduce emissions. That led to the creation of Electrify America, a subsidiary of Volkswagen Group.

Niall and Kristie said that since the chargers were installed at Firefly, many drivers – locals and travelers alike – stop inside the restaurant for a farm-to-table meal as they charge their vehicles before getting back on the road. The customers say the stations are usually

difficult to find in rural areas.

"There are people charging around the clock, but when they plop in, and they charge at 11 o'clock in the morning, they hop over, they have lunch and then they charge it 20, 25 minutes and they're done," Niall said.

"They're excited at how fast they are," Kristie said. "We're very much an urban model in a rural location."

Niall and Kristie said they didn't have to pay anything for the installation or the charging units themselves.

"Actually, they paid us," Niall said.

"That was part of their settlement in the emission scandal," Kristie said.

In addition to the charging stations at the restaurant being conveniently located for customers charging their vehicles while they eat, Kristie and Niall say the charging stations themselves are

of the highest available quality.

"I don't know where the technology stands now, but I know at the time they put those in, they were the most advanced EV charging stations in the world," Kristie said.

"They still are," Niall said.

In addition to the charging stations, Electrify America installs solar canopies, something Kristie and Niall have been considering doing in the parking lot of their restaurant.

"They've realized how much traffic we're getting, so there's a lot of people using those chargers," Niall said. "So what they've decided to do is to build a rooftop, which would be like a garage canopy, and on the top of that canopy it would be solar which obviously won't maintain all of it, but it helps."

"It offsets it," Kristie said. "He's going to be paying close attention to it to see if that is a potential model

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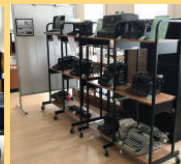
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In the parking lot of the Holiday Inn in Effingham, there are several Tesla Superchargers so drivers can charge their electric vehicles. Nick Taylor photo

for Firefly as well."

Niall explained what this model would look like for the restaurant.

"We could possibly do canopies for all of our parking spaces which would pick up solar and drop into the restaurant," he said.

Kristie said that in addition to shielding customers from the elements, particularly rain, solar canopies would also help the restaurant offset the cost of energy which has increased significantly.

Like many other businesses, Niall said the restaurant's energy bill tripled in January.

"We were paying 4 cents per kilowatt hour, now we're paying 12," Niall said.

Niall and Kristie used to purchase the energy for the restaurant through an energy buying cooperative, but switched to a new group that only purchases renewable energy, including wind energy, solar energy and hydro power.

"So 100% of our energy that we're using at Firefly is reusable, and actually it was one of the cheaper ones at 9 cents per kilowatt hour," Niall said.

Niall also explained that although electric vehicles don't release the same harmful emissions gas

powered vehicles do, some of the sources of electric energy like coal powered electricity certainly can.

"It's easy to say you have an electric car, but it doesn't really matter if you're burning a hole somewhere else," Niall said.

Furthermore, Niall believes that it is their responsibility as restaurant owners to minimize their carbon footprint.

"The amount of energy restaurants use is extensive," Niall said. "I believe it's our responsibility as restaurateurs to do anything we can to try to help on any level."

Kristie said they've tried a number of "small things" to reduce the restaurant's emissions, including tinting the windows of the restaurant and lowering their HVAC.

Additionally, Kristie said the restaurant is collaborating with the Effingham Tourism Office to order 5,000 hand fans, which will include the logo of the city on one side and another side which will read, "I heart Firefly Grill."

"We're trying to just find ways where we can keep our clients comfortable but also reduce energy consumption," she said.

Kristie explained that the restaurant's self-efficient model of food

production doesn't just allow them to serve customers fresh, high quality food, it allows them to do so in a way that is sustainable.

"Obviously, the farm and the food that we grow here makes for some of the most extraordinary flavors on the planet, but it also dramatically reduces our carbon footprint because we're not gassing things over here, we're not putting them in plastic packages," she said.

"It's been incredible, and we're doing a dramatic farm expansion this year and continue to source locally whenever possible."

Niall explained that although efforts to reduce the restaurant's carbon footprint are often expensive, it is their goal to have the restaurant's energy usage to be net neutral. At the same time, he expects to offset the cost of the various projects.

"We're also looking at a massive solar project here in the next couple of years," he said.

Switching to renewable energy isn't just about offsetting costs for Niall and Kristie. They have grown increasingly concerned about the ever-growing climate crisis the world is facing, especially when they consider the future of their 11-year-old daughter, Camden.

Kristie said they are further reminded of the impact climate change is having on the earth when they travel throughout the world in search of new ideas for their menu.

"Each year we do a big culinary adventure, which influences our menu," Kristie said. "Our next big trip is in Asia."

As they prepare for the trip, they are also preparing for rising temperatures.

"It's going to be over 100 degrees. It was the same thing in Italy last summer," Kristie said. "It's really sad."

"Things are changing pretty quickly and we're just trying to slow that down."



Photo courtesy of Getty Images

Tackle goals with fitness-friendly tech gadgets

STORY COURTESY FAMILY FEATURES

Committing to getting fit and actually doing it aren't always one and the same but relying on tech devices can be an effective way to tackle your fitness goals.

From watches and phones to earbuds and virtual reality headsets, technology can make it easier to track your progress and create a more enjoyable workout experience. See how some of the latest technology is fueling new devices ideal for amping up your workouts this summer with these trendy ideas.

Find more inspiration to energize your fitness regimen at Qualcomm.com

WELLNESS YOU CAN WATCH

Powered by the Snapdragon 4100+ Wear Platform, the Fossil 6 Wellness Edition watch provides the speed, power and performance you need to efficiently track your health, all with extended battery life, Bluetooth 5.0 LE connectivity, rapid charging and more features to elevate your experience.

The watch detects movement and starts a workout for you. In addition, not only does it allow you to monitor how hard your heart is working and provide estimated blood oxygen measurements so you can see how well your body is circulating oxygen, but it also measures your cardiorespiratory fitness, allowing you to track the amount of oxygen your body utilizes during exercise.

In addition to keeping tabs on your active hours, the watch also helps you understand more about your sleep habits, including sleep quality and history, restfulness and progress against sleep goals.

A SMART WORKOUT BUDDY

If you're always on the go, a powerful smartphone is a smart way to get in a streamlined workout. An option like the OnePlus 10T 5G delivers on multiple levels. Driven by the powerful Snapdragon 8+ Gen 1 mobile platform, this is a phone built to evolve beyond speed.

It has Qualcomm FastConnect 6900 for premium Wi-Fi connectivity and a Kryo CPU for unbeatable performance, ideal for multitaskers and power users. The charging system delivers a day's power in 10 minutes.

What's more, the antenna system, featuring a total of 15 antennas, provides a 360-degree closed-loop system to avoid blind signal angles, while simple and textured visuals help you focus and move seamlessly between work, rest and play.

SOUND TO MOTIVATE MORE MOVEMENT

An energizing workout requires a soundtrack to get you pumped up and moving. Enhance your listening experience with LG Tone

Free T90 wireless earbuds, which feature Dolby Head Tracking and Snapdragon Sound. These earbuds identify the location of sound as you turn your head, recalibrating to enable a more natural sound experience so you're always in the center of the scene.

The speaker driver is made of a strong, lightweight material that delivers better overall audio clarity and reduced vibration so you can hear every sound come alive. Exceptional audio combines with superior connectivity for music, movies, crystal-clear voice calls, gaming and a low latency fit for aptX Adaptive compatible devices.

PLAY YOUR WAY TO FITNESS

If your workout regimen needs an infusion of playful fun, the Meta Quest 2 virtual reality headset may be just the ticket. This VR headset is your ticket to the metaverse (and so much more), whether you're working out, gaming, meet-

ing up with friends or going on a virtual field trip. Industry-leading graphics and immersive audio put you in the middle of the action.

The portable device is ideal for workouts on the go, and you'll find a wide range of apps that let you work out amid stunning scenery, compete against friends and participate in challenges. The immersive experiences break up the monotony of a boring, basic workout, making exercise fun and playful.

MUSIC TO POWER YOUR WORKOUT

Enjoy stereo-quality sound wherever your workout takes you with a state-of-the-art smartphone like the Motorola Edge+ Gen 2, powered by the Snapdragon 8 Gen 1 Mobile Platform. Giving you up to two full days of power, lightning-fast speeds and pro-quality features for doing more of what you love, this smartphone can provide music that motivates you

regardless of your exercise style. When it's time to rest and recover, you can enjoy days of entertainment on a beautiful display that wraps around the edges.

TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

Setting fitness goals starts with a plan and achieving them requires strong work ethic and, just as importantly, the ability to track progress so you can enjoy the success. The ultimate expression of ultra-portability and versatility, the Lenovo IdeaPad Duet 5 Chromebook is powered by the Snapdragon 7c Gen 2 Compute Platform. Slim and sleek, this 2-in-1 features a detachable keyboard to transform from a tablet to a laptop so you can keep an eye on your fitness goals whether you're working out at home or on the go, and 15 hours of battery life means you can enjoy usage from day to night.

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Sun Safety Tips to Prevent Damage from Harmful UV Rays

With summer approaching, HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital and HSHS Medical Group are encouraging sun safety awareness and to remind everyone to protect their skin while enjoying the outdoors.

Following guidance from the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), HSHS St. Anthony's and HSHS Medical Group offer the following answers to some of the most frequently asked questions regarding the use of sunscreen.

Who should wear sunscreen?

Everyone older than six months of age who will be spending any time outside. Children younger than six months old shouldn't be exposed to the sun's rays for any length of time.

Do I only need to put on sunscreen when it is sunny outside?

You should apply sunscreen every day if you will be outside. The sun emits UV rays year-round, and even on cloudy days up to 80% of the sun's harmful



Dr. Page sees patients at HSHS Medical Group Multispecialty Care - Effingham, located at 900 W. Temple Ave., Building B, Suite 2500, Effingham, Illinois. To schedule a consultation with Dr. Page, please call 217-540-2350 or ask your doctor for a referral.

UV rays can penetrate your skin. The reflection from sand, sun and even snow can increase your need for sunscreen.

What sunscreen should I use?

To protect your skin from sunburn, early skin aging and skin cancer, everyone should use sunscreen that offers:

- Broad-spectrum protection that protects against sunlight's ultraviolet A- and B-rays (UVA and UVB).
- Sun Protection Factor (SPF) 30 or higher.
- Water-resistant (effective for up to 40 minutes in water) or very water-resistant (effective for up to 80 minutes in water). Reapply after getting out of the water or sweating.

Is a higher SPF sunscreen better than a lower SPF sunscreen?

Dermatologists recommend using a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30, which blocks 97% of the sun's UVB rays. Higher-number SPF's block slightly more of the sun's UVB rays, but no sunscreen can block 100% of the sun's UVB rays. A higher-number SPF does not mean you can spend additional time outdoors without reapplying.

hours, or after swimming, sweating or toweling off.

Does sunscreen expire?

Yes. If you find a bottle of sunscreen that you have not used for some time, here are the AAD guidelines:

- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires that all sunscreens retain their original strength for at least three years.
- If the expiration date has passed, throw the sunscreen out.
- If you buy a sunscreen that does not have an expiration date, write the purchase date on the bottle.
- Look for visible signs the sunscreen may no longer be effective – discoloration or change in the product's consistency.

Dean Page, MD, FACS, an HSHS Medical Group plastic surgeon in Effingham, offered these additional tips. "Use sun protection products that contain zinc oxide, titanium oxide or both," recommends Dr. Page. "And if you do have a fresh sunburn, aloe lotion works best to ease the burn as gels tend to have alcohol in them."

Scan this QR code with your phone to learn more about sun care from Dr. Dean Page with HSHS Medical Group. https://youtu.be/c_gEa1D0uaM



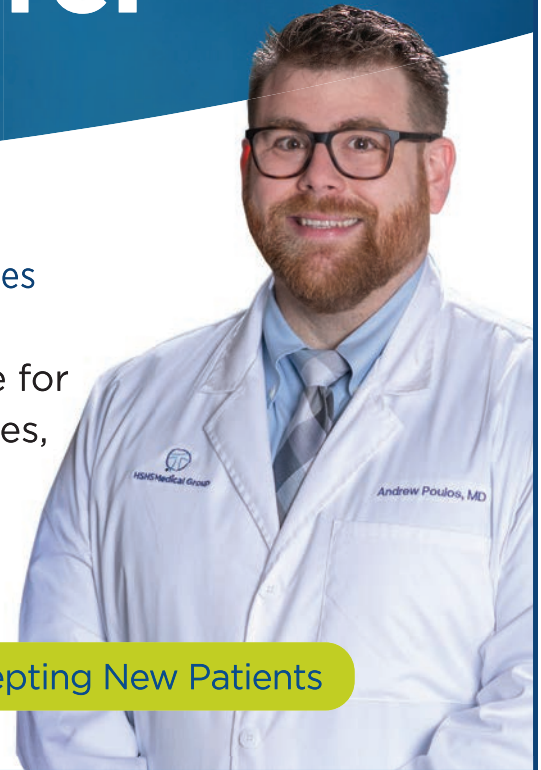
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