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INSIGHT

THE BUSINESS JOURNAL OF THE QUAD-CITIES

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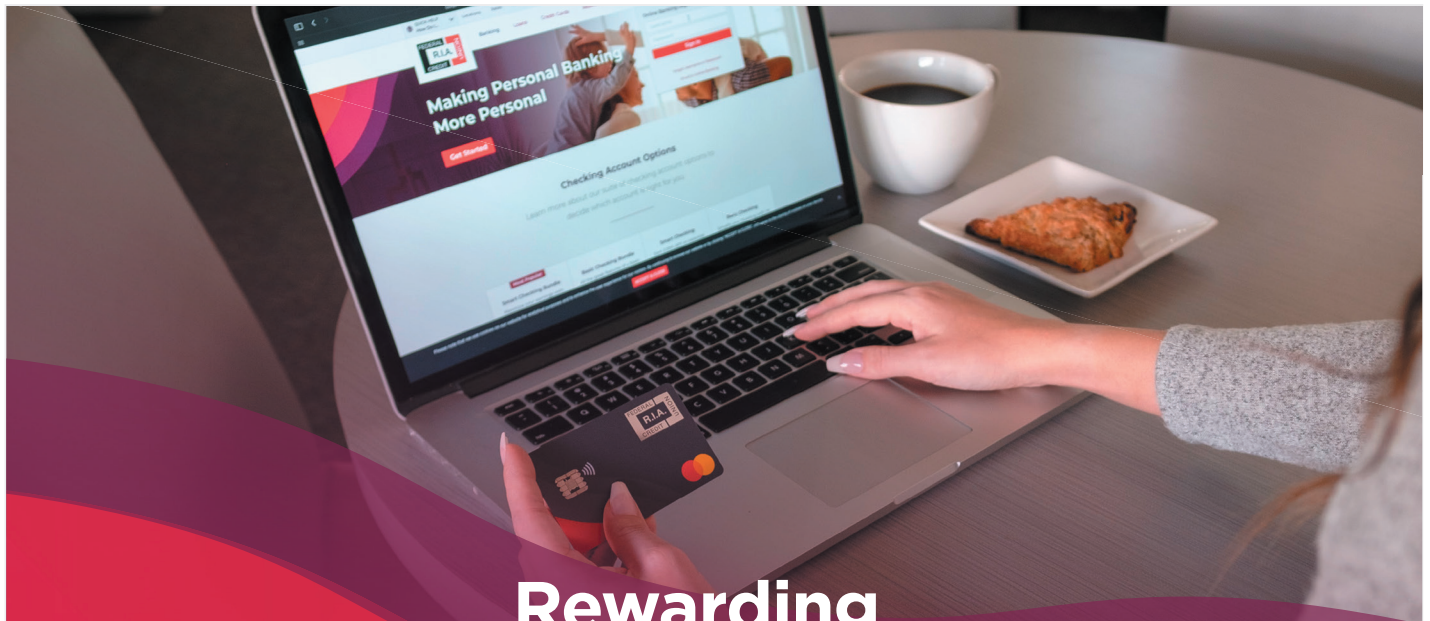
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A variety of business models contribute to the Quad-Cities economy

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A Moline company employs nearly 100, takes in \$36 million in sales

SPRING 2023



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THE BUSINESS JOURNAL OF THE QUAD-CITIES

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Summer Kuehl, founder of Quad Cities Aero flight school,
stands for a portrait in front a Cessna 172k Skyhawk,
Monday, Dec. 19, 2022, in Moline.

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laboratory equipment

Q-C Welcome Mat

Here's what the Quad-Cities offer new businesses

GRETCHEN TESKE

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Starting and succeeding in business is a tall order. When cities offer grants, loans and other incentives, taking the risk becomes more attractive.

The job of economic development directors is to find and attract businesses. In the Quad-Cities region, each municipality offers a variety of options to stimulate growth and attract entrepreneurs and/or those looking to expand.

Here is a sample of the programs currently on the table in Bettendorf, Davenport, Moline, and Rock Island.

BETTENDORF

Partnering with outside organizations is crucial to success said Economic Development Director Jeff Reiter. The city along with the Downtown Bettendorf Organization offer grants for up to \$15,000 to improve the exterior of businesses. For



Bettendorf City Hall

large-scale projects, the city utilizes tax increment financing (TIF).

They can take a variety of forms but most common is a rebate system. Once a developer completes a project, for instance, the city might rebate some of the new taxes it produces.

"You do what you say you're going to do, and the city will rebate the taxes you pay on the development," he said.

This is primarily seen in the northeast part of the city. Bettendorf has been "very judicious" with TIF dollars, Reiter said, adding he fields calls from developers regularly but fewer than 10% are related information to TIFs.

"We're very blessed in Bettendorf to have tremendous growth," he said.

DAVENPORT

Small business loans of up to \$30,000 for each 40 hours of weekly work that becomes available are offered in Davenport. The loan has a 2% interest rate, but once the jobs are created, 25% of the loan is forgivable. One of the city's most popular programs, about \$800,000 in small business loans were granted last year.

Davenport also uses tax incentive programs, one being the urban revitalization tax exemption, which offers exemptions on the increase in property taxes that result from improvements. It's typically offered in 10-year increments.

TIF is popular, too. The city offered a 60% tax rebate on the increased value over a 15-year period to Fair Oaks Foods, a ready-made bacon facility that will open in Davenport in 2024. The city also paid upfront for a \$1.1 million on-site



Davenport City Hall

pre-treatment facility, which is to be subtracted from the TIF rebates.

MOLINE

Moline is making a massive investment in small businesses with the kick off of its BOOST (Business Owner Occupied Stabilization Transformation) program. Using funds secured as part of the



Moline City Hall

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MOLINE STARTS PROGRAM TO 'BOOST' SMALL BUSINESS

GRETCHEN TESKE | gteske@qctimes.com



Sangeetha Rayapati,
Moline mayor and
professor at Augustana
College.
Nikos Frazier

Moline is making a massive investment in small businesses with the kick off of its BOOST (Business Owner Occupied Stabilization Transformation) program. Using funds secured as part of the American Rescue Plan (ARPA), the city has set aside \$1.1 million to provide forgivable loans to spur new business growth.

At the kick-off meeting on Feb. 6, more than 180 interested individuals were in attendance, said Community & Economic Development Director Ryan Hvitlok. Along with the loans, the program will offer education and mentorship for first-time entrepreneurs.

"BOOST really showed there's a hunger out there in our business community," he said.

Home-based business and food truck owners are eligible for up to \$35,000. Brick-and-mortar businesses could receive a loan for up to \$80,000, he said. The amount each receives is based on a variety of incentives the owners choose. The money is intended to be used for general assistance, which can range from marketing, signs, equipment, rent or building improvements.

Hoping to revitalize empty storefronts, Moline is planning to offer a new forgivable loan program.

At the city's rollout meeting, one of the most popular questions was if the money could be used to purchase property. Hvitlok said it cannot, but once the property is secured, the business owner may choose to use the loan to help pay the mortgage or rent.

This question was especially popular for those looking to expand, he said. If they are willing to start their business in a specific area, the city sweetens the pot.

"We have had a lot of people that are interested in the fact that we offer some additional incentives if you go in a targeted corridor," he said, including the Illinois Route 92, Avenue of the Cities and SouthPark Mall areas.

Businesses may be eligible for an additional \$10,000 if they choose those areas, he said. Additional incentives are available to companies that create new jobs.

Those interested in Moline's offerings must have a complete business plan and evidence of how they will spend the money. Applications are due on the last day of every month and will be reviewed the following month. The first of the loans will come out in April and all are available on a first come, first served basis, he said.

When the program initially was set up, city officials estimated it would help 25-30 businesses, and the fund total would be divided over four years.

Due to the overwhelming response, council "front-end loaded" the program with the full \$1.1 million, Hvitlok said. As for BOOST's fate next year, he said, the council is supportive and open to replenishing it.

"We have heard loud and clear from them that if there is success, they are open to looking at other avenues to fund this in the future," he said.

Additionally, the city has multiple long-standing incentives, such as the facade improvement program and sales tax exemption on building materials for construction in enterprise zones, he said. Moline also has multiple TIF Districts.

The city is looking at the possibly of creating an Illinois Route 92 TIF. The proposed boundaries would be from 46th Street to 55th Street, 16th Avenue and a portion of River Drive near Ben Butterworth Parkway and a portion of 5th Avenue between 54th Street and 55th Street.

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ROCK ISLAND

The Commercial and Industrial Revolving Loan Fund (CIRLF) offers low-interest funding to businesses involved with job creation and business expansion.



Rock Island City Hall

"That program tends to be a good fit for larger businesses that are adding on quite a few jobs," said Miles Brainard, community and economic development director.

The money comes from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD, and comes with strings attached, he said. In the past, the money has been used for a facade improvement program and a matching grant program for commercial improvements like signs, brickwork or awnings. For more complex developments, the city has done agreements based on TIF.

Taxes and the Great Migration

As is often said, people tend to vote with either their wallet or feet. They search out cheaper prices or better value. Likewise, when the burden of taxation, regulation or quality of life becomes unacceptable, they move to where they perceive are greener pastures.

Each year, the U.S. Census Bureau tracks the changes in population for each of the 50 states. The data incorporates international migration, births/deaths and net domestic migration – the exodus or inflow of residents to or from other states around the country. Between July 1, 2021 and July 1, 2022, the three states with the largest population growth were Texas (+470,708), Florida (+416,754) and North Carolina (+133,088). Locally, Iowa's growth was 2,828. Florida's gain represented a 1.9% increase in its population over the prior year, the largest percentage increase in the nation.

The main cause of population growth within these three states was the net inflow of residents from other states. They were also the Top 3 states for net domestic migration inflows, led by Florida (+318,855), Texas (+230,961) and North Carolina (+99,796).

Conversely, 18 states posted a population decline from July 1, 2021 through July 1, 2022. The biggest net population loss was New York (-180,341) followed by California (-113,649) and Illinois (-104,437). On a percentage-basis, Illinois'

population fell by 0.8%, second only to New York (-0.9%). These three states were also the Top 3 for net domestic migration outflow. Over the 12 months, 343,230 Californians moved to a different state, the largest statewide exodus in the nation. No. 2 was New York (-299,557) and No. 3 was Illinois (-141,656).

Although many socioeconomic factors help explain the population migration between states, research suggests state and local taxes as the primary culprit. According to research by Dr. James Doti of Chapman University, the 10 highest tax states lost nearly 1 in 100 residents in net domestic migration between July 1, 2021 and July 1, 2022. Conversely, the 10 lowest tax states gained almost 1 in 100 residents.

Each year, the Washington, D.C.-based think tank Tax Foundation publishes its State Business Tax Climate Index, which analyzes the tax structure within each of the 50 states. The study incorporates each state's corporate tax, individual income tax, sales tax, property tax and unemployment insurance tax. The index then ranks each state's tax burden imposed on individuals and businesses. A rank of 1 is best, 50 is worst.

In its just-released 2023 report, the Tax Foundation's Top 5 ranked states are No. 1 Wyoming, followed by South Dakota, Alaska, Florida and Montana. Wyoming and South Dakota have no corporate or individual income tax; Alaska has no individual income or state sales tax; Florida

has no individual income tax while Montana has no state sales tax. The five lowest-ranked, or worst states, are No. 50 New Jersey, followed by New York, California, Connecticut and Maryland. Locally, and in a possible surprise to some, the 2023 index ranks Illinois No. 36, two spots ahead of No. 38 Iowa.

But the trendline over the past seven years conveys a brighter outlook for Iowa than Illinois. In 2017, Illinois was ranked No. 25. Since then, Illinois' ranking has steadily worsened to its current spot at No. 36. Iowa's ranking in 2017 was No. 46, among the worst in the nation. However, that ranking has gradually improved to No. 38.

Moreover, the Tax Foundation contends that Iowa's recent tax reform packages "accelerate and build upon two previous rounds of tax reform, will dramatically improve Iowa's Ranking." These tax reforms will include transforming the state's high graduated income tax rates to an eventual flat tax of 3.9% while lowering the corporate tax to 5.5%. Conversely, Illinois joins New York, California and a cluster of other states that have recently unveiled bills to impose new taxes on certain individuals or business income.

We all know of people, families and businesses that have left a state for their version of greener pastures. However, the latest data reinforces the contention that those greener pastures are heavily defined by their level of taxation.



MARK GRYWACHESKI

Economy

Mark Grywacheski is an expert in financial markets and economic analysis and is an investment adviser with Quad-Cities Investment Group, Davenport.

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The Future of Workforce Development



KAREN EDEN

Education

Executive Director of Graduate Admissions and Professional Development, St. Ambrose University

Have you heard any of these buzzwords lately? Upskill, reskill, workforce development, retrain, skills gap... and the list goes on.

Summits and symposiums abound in an attempt to solve the seemingly universal challenge of bridging the employee skill gap, which according to the 2023 HR Trends Report by McLean & Company, is a gaping canyon with 97% indicating their organizations have skill gaps in at least one level of their institution.

With these stats in mind, let's look into the crystal ball of the future and highlight what this means for workforce development needs.

THE COST OF THE SKILLS GAP

The U.S. unemployment rate was 3.5% as of December 2022; however, 87% of employers report having trouble finding qualified candidates, according to Monster's hiring trends.

This is when those aforementioned buzzwords come into play. The solution to finding these elusive qualified candidates has predominantly focused on upskilling the current workforce through workforce development programs, also often referred to as professional development programs.

While these programs come at a cost – the 2021 Training Industry Report indicates the average training expenditures for mid-size companies increased from \$808,355 in 2020 to \$1.3 million in 2021– it is a relatively small cost that averages \$1,071 per employee per year.

The cost seems even less significant when compared to the prediction from the World Government Summit, pronouncing that by 2030 the talent and skills gap in the U.S. alone is expected to total a loss of \$8.5 trillion.

While those loss numbers are staggering, and one could say transforming them would be akin

to a hike across the Grand Canyon (in flip flops), many higher learning institutions, such as St. Ambrose University, are stepping forward, raising their hands and offering training solutions.

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excellent success for past participants in our Genesis and Modern Woodmen of America Leadership Academies. These leadership programs are tailored to meet the strategic needs of the profession. Usually, they consist of twelve one-day sessions whereby participants develop leadership skills and techniques to become more impactful leaders and managers.

To meet the growing needs of the healthcare sector, St. Ambrose College of Health and Human Services is also launching an online nursing program in the fall of '23 called the Nano Nagle Online School of Nursing at St. Ambrose University. The new program is another forward-thinking maneuver by St. Ambrose to offer flexible, remote learning opportunities to upskill working healthcare professionals.

Entirely online, the School will provide LPN-to-BSN and RN-to-BSN programs in addition to offering the option for industry-recognized certifications and credentials to support career advancement.

While these programs certainly don't fill all gaps, they are a step in the right direction as we attempt to help bridge the skills gap through education. The University is always looking into new innovative learning modes to meet the requirements of today's fast-paced change.

St. Ambrose University President Amy C. Novak, EdD sums up our efforts well in saying, "Embracing change, outmaneuvering threats, and building organizations equipped with the talent and cultural capacity to demonstrate agility can determine success for business in this fast-changing, uncertain future."

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Mary Pat Tubb, general manager at Davenport Works, Abigail Parsons, a welder, Rochelle Deshazer, a Fabrication Manufacturing Engineering supervisor, and Lynn Crosair, a UAW committee person with 10+ years at Davenport Works, stand for a photo

Nikos Frazier



Introducing women making history in the Quad Cities

GRETCHEN TESKE

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In 1987 Congress declared March Women's History Month. But the fight for recognition went on for years before.

It began as Women's History Week in Santa Rosa, California, according to womenshistory.org. The Education Task Force of the Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women planned the celebration in 1978. The organizers chose the week of March 8 to correspond with International Women's Day.

In the years that followed, the movement spread across the country. By 1980, advocates

Abigail Parsons, a welder at John Deere Davenport Works.

Nikos Frazier



with the National Women's History Project (now the National Women's History Alliance,) successfully lobbied for national recognition. In February of that year, then-President Jimmy Carter issued the

first Presidential Proclamation declaring the Week of March 8, 1980 as National Women's History Week.

From there, presidents continued to proclaim a National Women's History

Week in March until 1987 when Congress passed Public Law 100-9, designating March as "Women's History Month." Researchers at Kansas University have been tracking the history of women in business.

During World War II, the percentage of working women rose nearly 10%. By 1965 the percentage of women in the workforce rose to 39% then to 60% by 1999. By 2013, 62% of women in the workplace were in managerial positions.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Midwest and East Coast are hot spots for working women. In Iowa, women have a 79.2% participation rate and a 74.7% rate in Illinois.

In the Quad-Cities, women are making history everyday. In this issue of Insight, you will hear from women who are making their mark in their own way. From leading students to the skies with private flying lessons to women leading crews at the two largest employers in the Quad-Cities, each of these women are putting their stamp on women's history in the region.



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Summer Kuehl, founder of Quad Cities Aero flight school, pilots a Cessna 172k Skyhawk.

Nikos Frazier



Piloting her own life: How accepting a job in the Quad-Cities inspired one woman to open a flight school

GRETCHEN TESKE

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Summer Kuehl came to the Quad-Cities to sell insurance. She ended up soaring in a way she never expected.

The 28-year-old is the proud owner of Quad Cities Aero, a flight school that operates out of the Quad Cities International Airport in Moline. But her trajectory was never supposed to land her in the region. That part, she said, was fate.

In college at South Dakota State, she studied molecular biology. The career path that made the most sense was medical school, but that didn't interest her.

"I wasn't sure that's what I wanted to do, and I would have to get into hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt to do this

thing I wasn't sure about," she said.

Med school would require her to do a lot of research, and a career in academia did not sound appealing. Instead, she found a job in commercial insurance, hoping it would spark a new interest.

"I thought maybe I'd stumble into something and be able to do something with this," she said.

Turns out, she was right.

Her job with the Federated Mutual Insurance Company landed her in the Quad-Cities.

"It allowed me to meet a lot of really cool business owners," she said.

And that allowed her to meet with a few that were into aviation. Before long, Kuehl realized she had stumbled into the exact something she was looking for.

"I thought that was the coolest thing ever," she said. "I had never known that

general aviation existed."

Before long she came into contact with Jerry Coussens, who builds his own airplanes in Davenport. He offered to take her up for "cloud surfing," and it was love at first flight.

"I was like: I have to learn how to do this. This is the coolest thing I have ever experienced," she said.

In 2018, a few months into flight school, she quit her job, sold her home in the Quad-Cities and moved back home to Stillwater, MN to live with family. After about seven months of training, she was sure she wanted to make flying her full-time career.

"I was originally just going to get my pilot certificate, live in Minnesota and be done with the Quad-Cities forever," she said.

Fate, again, had other plans.

To pay for flight school, Kuehl sold her home and met her husband in the process.

After earning all of her required flight ratings in Minnesota, Kuehl moved back to the region to be with her husband, Kyle. In order to fly, the first certificate she had to earn was her private-pilot certificate.

"That's essentially your ticket to be able to go up whenever you want, in any single-engine [plane] you are rated for," she said.

This requires a minimum of 40 hours of training, but most people complete at least double that amount, she said. A portion of these hours are made up on the ground, learning about regulations, how to maintain the aircraft and learning to read maps.

Once an instructor feels students are proficient, they are cleared for solo flights. Students are required to have at least 10 hours of solo flying in order to earn their certificate.

For many aspiring pilots, the first solo flight is a rite of passage and a major accomplishment. That was no different for Kuehl.

"I was more proud of my first solo than I was any academic or athletic achievement I have ever had," she said.

From there, students can go on to earn



Cessna 172k Skyhawk sits on the tarmac at Quad City International Airport

Nikos Frazier

other certificates, which allow them different abilities in the sky. Although that requires more training, Kuehl said, they were a breeze compared to earning her private-pilot certificate.

"Honestly, out of all the ratings, I thought that was the most difficult," she said. "It's just so much new material, especially when you're starting from scratch."

But, from her first solo flight, she built



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up the confidence to continue and went on to earn her Instrument License, which allows her to fly through the clouds. Pilots are literally in a cloud and cannot see outside. They have to learn to fly, based on what the instrument panel shows them.

In order to earn this certificate, pilots must meet multiple qualifications, such as having flown at least 50 hours cross-country as the pilot in command and flying 40 additional hours, using only the instrument panel.

After that, students can begin to work on their commercial certificate. Technically, this allows for the pilot to be paid to fly someone. But, the restrictions are a mile long. Instead, most pilots go on to earn their Certified Flight Instructor certificate and build up enough hours to be hired by a private-charter company.

With her newfound passion for flight and an entrepreneurial partner backing her up, Kuehl decided to do things a little differently and embark on a new adventure: Starting her own flight school.

"I started Quad Cities Aero, because I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do with the pilot certificates," she said. "I

also knew when I started instruction in the Quad-Cities, there just was not enough of it."

At the time, Carver Aero, now Revv Aviation, was the only option in the area. A few local clubs had private instructors, but Kuehl saw room for more.

"I just thought there was a need for a flight school here and I really loved the environment of the flight training," she said.

Kuehl quickly found that starting her own school was as "terrifying" as it was exciting. But having the support of her husband, whom she describes as a "serial entrepreneur," made all the difference.

"Having him in my corner was huge," she said. "I would not have started QC Aero had I not had him pushing me and helping me through everything."

In late 2020 she started instructing, and started off with a Cessna 152, which she quickly sold and upgraded for a 172. She has now expanded the fleet with a Cessna of the same make and model as the first.

Having a uniform fleet makes it easier for students, she said. If one is down for maintenance, they can transition to the other. Currently, Kuehl employs five

instructors and has about 30 students enrolled.

In 2017, the Pilot Institute reported only 7.01% of pilots were women. By 2021, that number came up to 9.02%. The difference is slight, but Kuehl said its a trend she's noticed and is excited about.

"I'm definitely seeing more women get involved," she said. "It's encouraging when you see someone else like you that's done it before."

The Experimental Aircraft Association is actively trying to recruit women into the field. It's aware of the reputation for being "an old boy's club," and is trying to change that, she said.

"If anything, it's kind of the wind behind my back that's helping me, because people want to see more women in aviation, and they want to see them succeed," she said.

That self-actualization is key, she said. Sometimes, you have to be it to see it.

"I feel like that's why women hadn't really taken the leap and become pilots before," she said. "You don't see people doing it, so you don't think it's something you can do."

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An all female Blackhawk helicopter crew from Peoria attended the Girls in Aviation event to give kids an up-close look at careers available in the aviation field.

Courtesy of the Quad Cities International Airport

PROGRAM TO INSPIRE WOMEN IN AVIATION TAKES FIGHT AT QC AIRPORT

GRETCHEN TESKE | gteske@qctimes.com

Airlines are struggling with a pilot shortage, and one nonprofit is trying to tap into a new talent pool by inspiring women to get involved.

According to the Pilot Institute, 9% of pilots are women. When it comes to other jobs at the airport, such as mechanics, women account for just 2.63% of the total.

Girls in Aviation Day at the Quad City International Airport hopes to elevate those numbers. Once a year in September, the airport hosts an event geared toward inspiring girls to think about careers in the industry.

Women in Aviation International (WAI) is a nonprofit organization that, "encourages the advancement of women in all aviation career fields and interests" according to its website. It started in 1990 and was formally established in 1994 as a nonprofit organization.

In 2021, the airport in Moline brought the movement aboard. Airport marketing manager Ashleigh Davis said the idea to start an event came from within the community.

"We were approached by John Deere Aviation to put this event (Girls in Aviation Day) on for our community," Davis said. "We worked with Elliot Aviation as of last year to expand this event and reach as many school-aged kids as we possibly can."

From there, airport staff reached out to aviation-related businesses across the region to gauge their

interest in attending. Everyone from drone pilots to airline crew members to airport fire and rescue workers were invited to give kids an up-close experience.

"We ask them to present whatever kind of hands-on exhibit they feel best shows their industry," Davis said.

The intention is to reach a broad age range and inspire the young people to think about how they might become involved in aviation.

"The goal is to showcase just how many educational and career opportunities are available within aviation," she said.

Generally, people relate aviation jobs to being a pilot, she said, but there are many careers in the field. On average, 10% of airline executives and maintenance workers are female. Davis hopes Girls in Aviation Day can help inspire this to change.

"We need to be able to reach more populations and make aviation accessible," she said.

About 200 people have attended in the past, and Davis hopes that number continues to climb. Every year the airport adds to the event. Last fall, they brought in an all-female Blackhawk Helicopter crew from Peoria. The women talked about their journey with the National Guard and why they chose aviation.

Davis said the plans for the 2023 Girls in Aviation Day are not nailed down just yet, but it will happen in late September. The free event is open to everyone who is looking to learn more about the industry.

"We hope that it sparks a passion ... and they discover something new for themselves, even if it's a hobby," she said.

Col. Shari Bennett, commander of the Rock Island Arsenal Joint Manufacturing and Technology Center.

Nikos Frazier



'There is space for you in the military. And I'm proof of it.'

Col. Shari Bennett reflects on being first Black woman to lead Arsenal JMTC

GRETCHEN TESKE

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In July 2021, Col. Shari Bennett broke two glass ceilings in one when she became the first woman, and first person of color, to lead the JMTC at the Arsenal.

Bennett's path to the Joint Manufacturing and Technology Center (JMTC) on the Rock Island Arsenal began more than 20 years ago. As a child, the Virginia Beach native grew up idolizing her aunt, who served in the Army.

"When I was in elementary school, she was stationed in Germany and she would write me letters," said Bennett, the 51st commander of the JMTC. Photos of her aunt lined the walls of her bedroom and every time the mail came, she hoped for something special.

The stories about what was happening on the other side of the world sparked Bennett's interest. In high school, she spoke with a recruiter, but the military

path was not for her — yet.

"I didn't think that was the best route for me. I wanted to go to college first," she said.

While in high school, Bennett visited her beloved aunt at Fort Campbell in Kentucky. After seeing how everyone worked together and built each other up, she was sure the Army was where she belonged.

"I never thought about any other service," she said. "I always wanted to be a soldier."

For college, Bennett attended the University of Virginia, where she intended to study law. Two years in, her passion for the military was burning once more and she signed up to be part of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program. This allows students to earn their academic degree while training to be a commissioned member of the military.

After her graduation in 1998, she was commissioned as a second lieutenant, following in the steps of both of her grandfathers and her aunt. She continued her education with the Army and was

deployed the following year.

"For me, as a soldier, you get to do your job in a deployed environment," she said. "My journey is one that is not very different from most military officers. The Army has invested a whole lot of resources in me and my professional development."

Her first deployment was to Germany and she was soon sent to Kosovo, where she was promoted to First Lieutenant. Despite having formal training, nothing compared to the first-person experience of seeing how soldiers in other countries operated and managed day-to-day complexities.

"Being exposed to them and how they deal with leadership challenges, how they make their mission happen, and also collaborating with them for our joint mission, always stands out to me," she said.

Other deployments included trips to the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), which has authority over U.S. forces in 21 countries.

"Even though the times could have been challenging, that camaraderie that I saw in my aunt was evident on the



Col. Shari Bennett talks with Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth after touring the Rock Island Arsenal Center of Excellence for Additive and Advanced Manufacturing on Monday, June 6th, 2022.

Nikos Frazier

battlefield," she said.

The deep bonds and connections she made on the field influenced how she dealt with being thousands of miles from family.

"After a while, it's easy and you start to get stir crazy," she said. "Growing up as a kid, I never thought that I was confined to a certain area. I always thought I would go out and see the world, similar to my aunt."

Throughout her career, Bennett has had 12 duty assignments. During that time, she earned two Master's degrees and a certificate in supply-chain management. In 2021 she was selected to lead the JMTC.

"I can say that the Army trained me well for this job," she said. "What we do here is so very important to our country."

As a whole, the Arsenal employs more than 6,000 people- 80% of which are civilians. The JMTC consists of more than 30 buildings with more than 3 million square feet of manufacturing space. Of its 750 employees, 99% are civilian.

Employees work on as many as 300 projects at a time. This summer, the center will become home to the world's largest 3D printer.

It will be capable of fabricating large metal components, including hulls and

other equipment for military vehicles, in one solid piece, rather than requiring dozens of individual parts to be welded. It also will be faster and more efficient than traditional manufacturing by producing less scrap.

With great work comes great responsibility. But, Bennett said, she was never anything but confident.

"I felt ready. I was ready for the challenge. I was ready to move here, get to work, and see if I could implement all the things the Army instilled in me," she said. "I looked at it as a challenge."

But there was one challenge she didn't expect to take on: The 50 people who held the position before her were white men.

"When I got here I didn't know I was the first female. And I didn't know I was the first Black person," she said. "I'm very proud to be in this position. I am extremely grateful for all the women who came here before me and who dedicated their life to service."

The women who came before her were the ones who broke through barriers and allowed her to take this position, she said. But she also is aware how important it is for women and children to see a woman

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taking on a massive leadership role now.

"I am completely aware that my role in this factory is extremely important for young people to see," she said.

For that reason, she always has one piece of encouragement ready to give out.

"There is space for you in the military.

And I'm proof of it," she said.

Looking back on her career, Bennett said she is proud of where she has been and excited for what lies ahead. Even with more than two decades of experience under her belt, she still loves her job as much as she did when she started.

"My Mom told me a long time ago, as I was trying to figure out what I would do with my life, do something that you love. And when you stop loving it, that's when you move on to something else," she said. "I hit 25 years with the Army in May, and I still love it."

A MAN'S WORLD NO MORE: 3 WOMEN WHO MADE HISTORY ON THE ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL

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Decades before Col. Shari Bennett made history as the first woman to be commander of the Joint Manufacturing and Technology Center, other women were laying the groundwork.

Cora De Wilfond motored past barriers in 1918 when she became the first woman to drive a motorcycle on the island. As a dispatch courier, she drove around the Arsenal to deliver messages and packages, said Kevin Braafladt, Army Sustainment Command Historian.

According to an article published by the Army, De Wilfond used roller skates before getting her license to drive a bike.

The only time the Arsenal has produced ammunition on a large scale was during World War I, Braafladt said.

"Dangerous work like that was restricted for male employees," he said.

Due to the demands of the war, however, women were asked to take on the positions, filling 155mm artillery shells with the liquid explosives. During that time period, there was only one accident and no injuries were reported.

The war changed how the Arsenal ran in many ways. Prior to it, the female workforce accounted for about 10% of the total. Women were restricted to administrative and secretarial jobs, but as the war ramped up, they were allowed

to work "blue-collar labor" positions that previously were regarded too dangerous for women.

Another key figure who broke barriers was Helen Erickson, who began her career on the island in October 1918. She started out as a typist and office worker but, by her 25th anniversary in 1943, she was named secretary of the commanding general.

"This was something that normally had been assigned to a soldier. Because of her experience and expertise through the Arsenal, she was assigned," Braafladt said.

By the time she retired in 1962, she was credited as being the first public information officer on the Arsenal. Upon her retirement, Erickson was presented with the National Press Photographers Association President's Medal for her years of assistance to photographers in their assigned duties of covering news events about the U.S. Army and Rock Island Arsenal.

As World War II came, so did more women. In 1942, Catherine Robinder began working as a draftsman on the Arsenal. She left shortly after to pursue a different opportunity but returned in 1948 and stayed for the next 29 years.

Robinder rose through the ranks and became an engineer and mathematician. According to her obituary, she was the first woman professional in the scientific field



Top: Cora De Wilfond, the Rock Island Arsenal's first female motorcycle driver.

Bottom: Helen Erickson, Secretary for the RI Arsenal Commanding General

at the Arsenal and was a certified teacher of needlework and Japanese embroidery. The Silvis native died in 2000 at the age of 78.

While these three women broke barriers, that was only the beginning, Braafladt said.

"During World War II, our population exploded here in a lot of ways," he said.

Following each war, the female workforce increased. During World War I, there were about 2,000 employees on the island, and 15% were women. By the start of World War II, the number of employees exploded to 16,000 with women making up 45% of the workforce.

Today, the ratio of male-to-female workers on the Arsenal is a near 50/50 split, Braafladt said.



Sangeetha Rayapati, Moline mayor and professor at Augustana College.

Nikos Frazier

Making her voice heard: Sangeetha Rayapati leads Moline as mayor, students as a professor

GRETCHEN TESKE

gteske@qctimes.com

Sangeetha Rayapati knows the power of a voice.

By day, she leads the voice program at Augustana College in Rock Island. Her students know her as a professor. But she has another job that requires her voice and a different title: She's mayor of Moline.

Rayapati grew up in West Chester, PA, about 30 miles west of Philadelphia. From an early age, she knew she wanted to help people. She also knew she had a passion for music. Eventually, that brought her to the Midwest. At Valparaiso University in

Indiana, she double majored, earning a Bachelor of Nursing and a Bachelor of Music.

"I think I'd always been drawn to helping professions, but when I got really heavily involved in music, I just wanted to know more and do more," she said. "So I dedicated myself to that, and I was able to bring my nursing and arts interests together because of the job I have here at the school."

Before her interests aligned in the Quad-Cities, they came together in Minneapolis. After graduating from Valparaiso, she started her career as a nurse, working in the Huntington's Disease Unit at University Good Samaritan nursing home.

"That's where they housed the creative arts therapies, so I was constantly exposed to the fact that this particular skilled nursing home was investing in those therapies to help their patients," she said. "I would see a music therapist come and do group therapy there while I was at work."

During the three years she worked as a nurse, Rayapati was earning her Master and Doctorate of Musical Arts degrees from the University of Minnesota. She then decided to make the transition from nurse to teacher.

The move may be unorthodox, but Rayapati said she saw the classroom as another way to take care of people.

"I was attracted to the freedom of creativity and the different type of work schedule," she said. "I just had a passion for wanting to bring out the best in my students and helping them reach their full potential. That became the passion. You're caring for humans, but you're doing it through teaching."

In 2001, Augustana offered her a job as professor of music, and she quickly accepted. Rayapati had no doubts about where she wanted to be. Shown her studio at Augie, she recognized it. In high school, she had visited for a summer music program.



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"I came as a pianist, but I took voice lessons, and I now teach in the studio where I had my first lesson," she said. "I felt like I had come full circle in the place where it all started — where my potential was unleashed."

Turns out, that potential was just being tapped into. After a few years of teaching, Rayapati decided she needed to do more for her community, so she ran for the Moline-Coal Valley School Board.

During her four-year term that began in 2017, she served as vice-president for the first two years and president for the last two. Her propensity for finding a challenge and running toward it, she said, comes naturally.

"I think it comes from being raised Lutheran, where you are raised to be a community servant and be a leader. I saw a need for good leadership," she said. "When I saw an opportunity ... that was aligned with my interest in education and helping people fulfill their potential, I put all my tools to work and said I would run for school board."

Her tools, she said, were learned mostly in the classroom. As a teacher,

she encourages and supports students to find their passion. By taking on positions within the community, she is able to flex the same muscle in a different setting.

"It's really about helping folks fulfill their full potential. I have been very pleased that I have been able to have that symmetry in the things that I do," she said.

One key element is collaboration. As a nurse, she worked with other medical staff to help patients. As a teacher, she works with students to help them evolve. As a community leader, she worked with other elected officials toward a common goal. But her training for all of it has been in motion for most of her life.

"As a musician, you are trained to be a collaborator," she said. "Working with others to get everything done is part of how I manage any of the times where it can get overwhelming."

In late 2020, with her term on the school board coming to a close, she upped the tempo of life and found a way to use her voice in a broader way. That led her to the steps of Moline City Hall, where she announced her bid for mayor.

In the April 2021 election, Rayapati

defeated incumbent Stephanie Aciri, earning 61% of the vote. Her motivation for running was simple: Multiple department head positions were open, and the city needed a strong person to get them filled and to lead the staff.

"The staff had been decimated in many ways, and you can't provide services and move forward without the people to do the work," she said.

Two years into her post, Rayapati said she's happy with the progress the city is making.

"We have turned a corner. We are moving forward and there are a lot of positive developments," she said.

As a woman in leadership, Rayapati acknowledges moments of feeling overwhelmed. At Augustana, she oversees eight professors. With the city, she looks out for thousands of people. But she uses the tools she learned in her first voice lesson at Augustana: Big things happen when you make your voice heard.

"Those of us in these kinds of roles understand it comes with the territory, and we end up getting a lot of good advice on how to deal with that ... because there is a solidarity in that," she said.

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A portrait of Denise Garrett, a Black woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a black blazer over a patterned scarf. She is seated in a chair, with her hands clasped in her lap. Behind her is a white shelving unit filled with various decorative items, including books, a teddy bear, and a star-shaped object.

Raising the bar: Denise Garrett uses law degree at Gates Foundation

GRETCHEN TESKE

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Graduating high school was a requirement in Denise Garrett's childhood home. She met her mother's expectation, then went off to college — again and again.

With three degrees under her belt, she now is a tax attorney with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. She lives in Bettendorf with her husband, Jim Niedelman, and their dog, Kopi. But neither is a Midwest native.

Garrett grew up in Southern Virginia, then moved to Northern Virginia for work. After accepting a job with the Gates Foundation, she relocated to Seattle. Her husband, an LA native, accepted a job in Rock Island, and the pair moved to the Quad-Cities. Moving from one coast to the other, then settling in the Midwest, was a change Garrett welcomed.

"I grew up in a small town in Virginia, a rural area, and I have to say: I love having the ability to have a yard again," she said. "I'm a bit of a small-town girl."

Her law career began at a small firm in Washington D.C. Her primary focus was nonprofits, and during law school she did extensive research on the foundation. She was interested in the return on investment and how it continued to make progress.

"The Gates Foundation, even way back then, was the leader in that, and I was pretty intrigued and impressed on the dedication of making sure that the solutions they

Denise Garrett, general counsel for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Nikos Frazier

were investing in were scalable and could impact a large number of people," she said. "When this job opening came across my desk ... I was thrilled by it."

In her role, Garrett helps create solutions and provides legal guidance. Her primary role is determining how to get money into the hands of people that are doing the physical side of the philanthropy work. It may be difficult, but the greater goal is what keeps her motivated.

"I see myself in what they are trying to accomplish; create opportunities through education and economic mobility," she said.

Growing up, her mother's goal was that all four of her children would earn their high school diplomas. Her mother's mindset was to see the next generation do better than the previous, she said.

"So much of my life has been about moving forward and being able and ready to take the opportunities that I have been given," she said. "Education was the path for me to move forward and have more economic stability and experience things."

Not only did Garrett graduate high school, but she earned her first college degree, a Bachelor's, in 1991. That

achievement, she said, was beyond her mother's wildest dreams.

"I was really lucky growing up because I read a lot. It exposed me to a lot of different experiences and ways people were living their lives that were different from how I was living," she said. "Through exposure from teachers and reading and learning about other people, I saw my path was going to college."

Becoming a lawyer was always in the back of her mind, she said. As a kid, she viewed them as respected leaders in the community with a specialized knowledge to help.

"Growing up, I saw that as something I wanted to aspire to and learn about, but I didn't start on my initial path as an attorney. This is my second career," she said.

Her first career was in accounting and finance, where she worked for various for-profit companies while earning an MBA in 1998. Once she felt financially stable, she enrolled in the Duke University School of Law, graduating in 2007.

As a woman in business, she has learned many lessons, including that connections can open doors.

"The way that I looked at my career, I never assume who is or is not going to help me," she said. "There are definitely challenges in business. There's potential bias in perception, but what you have to do to continue to move forward is find the people that want you to succeed."

Making connections and moving forward is crucial, as long as you are ready, she said. Being prepared and wanting to move forward are the keys to success.

"My whole philosophy is about working hard. I take pride in my work, and I want to show up as the best attorney I can be," she said.

Working with a "rock star" legal team helps, she said. Knowing they are willing to share their expertise and help each other grow helps create a space where everyone has a voice. A self-proclaimed introvert, Garrett said it's crucial to meet people where they are and allow them to speak when they are ready.

"You're missing out, possibly, on some really great ideas and solutions if you don't make space for everyone to speak when they are comfortable," she said. "Everyone in the room can play a role."

TOP LAWYERS

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

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Mary Pat Tubb, general manager at Davenport Works, Abigail Parsons, a welder, Rochelle Deshazer, a Fabrication Manufacturing Engineering supervisor, and Lynn Crosair, over a decade long UAW committee member.

Nikos Frazier

'The more years we stay on, the more years we prove we can do this ... And we can do it better most of the time.'

Women shine in their roles at John Deere's Davenport Works

GRETCHEN TESKE

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At 19, Abigail Parsons already is working full time as a welder at John Deere, and she's one of few women to do so.

The summer before her senior year of high school, Parsons started a welding apprenticeship program, working 40 hours a week in addition to studying. In school, she took every "garage" class she could find. The apprenticeship offered her dual enrollment with Scott Community College, where she could earn credits toward a degree.

"That program allowed me to spend more of my time during the school day in the garage, welding," she said.

The program led her to John Deere Davenport Works, where she began as a welder.

"Once I was near the end of my apprenticeship, they offered me a job and I signed on right after," she said. "I went from working down there in the factory to getting trained in Harvester."

Parsons said she never liked school and was not a good student. Graduating, landing the apprenticeship and the eventual job was more than she thought she could accomplish.

"Without the apprenticeship, I would have dropped out of high school," she

said. "I am the first person in my immediate family to even graduate."

But that wasn't the only barrier she had to cross.

"In almost any garage classroom throughout my high school career, there was maybe one other girl, but most of the time I was the only one," she said.

Only one other girl was in her high school's vocational program. When she got to Deere, the only other woman dropped out of the program early.

"It's hard sometimes. You have to fit in with the guys ... but they kind of look at you like you're not supposed to be there," she said. "They look at you and go, 'Well, we're going to have to fix stuff there.'"

Parsons had been through this treatment

before. In high school, the guys in her class would make comments. However, her work proved her worth.

"The instructor would say, 'Pick on her all you want. She has better welds than all of you,'" she said.

According to the Universal Technical Institute, only 3.8% of welders in 2020 were women. According to the Department of Commerce, women make up 30% of the manufacturing workforce. Of them, one in four managers are women.

Rochelle Deshazer, a fabrication manufacturing engineering supervisor, has a story similar to Parsons'. She also completed multiple internships after high school and now has progressed to being an engineering supervisor in the welding department.

"You can't go wrong working for Deere, but I didn't have my sites set on a specific career," she said.

The Rock Island native has an industrial engineering background but slowly gravitated toward the manufacturing field. In her role, she also has had to face misconceptions about women in her field, but most of them are short-lived, she said.

"When you demonstrate what you can do, it doesn't take long to get past those perceptions," she said.

Factory manager Mary Pat Tubb reflected that sentiment, saying the statistics and nature of the job play into why people are generally surprised to see women working in manufacturing.

"When you walk into a group, people have a certain perception of what you're going to be good at and what you're not," she said. "I think that's a thing to overcome, but I have been here 25 years, and I have a really solid reputation."

When she accepted the supervisory position, her trainer asked what she thought would be her greatest obstacle. Tubb assumed it would be her age, but the trainer told her it would be the fast-paced atmosphere and having to make decisions all day long.

"As far as working with a bunch of guys on the floor, it took two days and they didn't care," she said. "Some of those guys are my biggest advocates today."

Being respected by peers can pay off in a big way. Lynn Crosair knows this well.

Since starting at Deere in 2005 as an

assembler, she has worked her way up the ranks and was elected as a UAW committee person in 2016. In her role as a liaison, she works with contracts, paperwork and advocates for teams within the factory.

"I like to help people and when I notice people are out working and asking questions but don't get answers, I like to help," she said. "I want them to know there's someone they can talk to if they need to."

But it wasn't always that way. Crosair said when she first started, it was rough. She fielded many comments from male co-workers who didn't think she could keep up. However, the challenge of proving herself is what motivated her to succeed.

"All I kept thinking was: I had to show them," she said.

Flash forward to 2023 and that sentiment still is felt by Parsons. Watching other women go through the apprenticeship programs as she did with welding encourages her to remain in her role and continue paving the way for future generations.

"The more years we stay on, the more years we prove we can do this," she said. "And we can do it better most of the time."

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Chris Posey, Director of Marketing & Franchise Sales, stands for a portrait at Barrel House's downtown Davenport location, 211 East 2nd St.

Nikos Frazier



Franchise vs licensing:

A look at two different business models

GRETCHEN TESKE
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Owning a business franchise is one thing. Owning a business license is another.

The distinction is not always clear, so here is a shortcut: When you buy a franchise, you acquire a business that has a proven track record and business model. When you hold a license, you hold the freedom to operate your business as you please.

A local example of a franchise can be found at Barrel House, which got its start in downtown Davenport.

First opened in 2011 at 211 E. 2nd St., Barrel House since has opened a second location on Utica Ridge in Davenport and in other cities, including Dubuque, Cedar Rapids and Des Moines. Locations in Moline and Silvis did not survive the pandemic.

When COVID-19 struck, Barrel House owner Jimmy Holt started thinking about franchising, which is to say he decided it was time to allow others to buy his business model. Having previously owned an insurance franchise, he was familiar with how it works.

Chris Posey, director of marketing and franchise sales for Barrel House, said the ball got rolling in 2020.

"We saw it as an ability to open more Barrel House restaurants in multiple states, but with people being able to uphold our culture and processes, instead of us trying to do it from afar," he said.

Opening multiple restaurants in Iowa was one thing, he said, because they're close enough that management can get there if a problem arises. But operating across the country would create logistical challenges that go away when a franchise is offered instead.

"We are very passionate about our system, our process, our culture and our brand," Posey said. "We can still continue to open Barrel House restaurants, but with like-minded partners."

The advantage to purchasing a franchise as opposed to starting a business from scratch is the support, Posey said. Beginners have to figure out every step of the process — point of sale, vendors, recipes, managing inventory — all on their own.

With a franchise, all the pieces to a puzzle are supplied, and the operator simply puts it together.

"Through trial and error and trial and growth, we have streamlined that into a system and a process," he said.

Barrel House currently has one franchise in Bloomington, Ill. The owners of the Double Tree by Hilton reached out about a possible purchase after the restaurant they had in their hotel went under due to the pandemic. By Fall 2022, all the paperwork was signed and the restaurant officially opened.

Criteria for a franchise are dependent upon location, Posey said.

Generally speaking, he is looking for a town with at least 50,000 people that has large corporations, universities and a high traffic count. With Bloomington being home to multiple universities, including



A look at Barrel House's downtown Davenport location, 211 East 2nd St.

Nikos Frazier

Illinois State, it was a good fit.

It currently is the only confirmed franchise but talks are ongoing in Wisconsin and Texas. Typically, it takes anywhere from three to six months to close a deal, he said.

A licensee is different from a franchisee.

While a franchise includes the business name and all the tools, merchandise and instruction to run it, a licensee has a little more freedom. A licensee is not instructed



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Jeff Matt and Marshall Matt,
owners of La-Z-Boy Furniture
Galleries Davenport, 4475 Elmore Ave.

Nikos Frazier

on how to decorate or what employees should wear, for instance, but they maintain the right to sell certain products.

For example: Brothers Marshall and Jeff Matt have been in the furniture business all their lives. Their father started Matt Furniture in Marshalltown in the early 1960's. La-Z-Boy had just launched its line of rocker-recliners, and the Matts instantly jumped in.

Marshall Matt said his father mentioned being a La-Z-Boy licensee would be an ideal business venture. Deciding to sell the furniture was the easy part, Jeff said. Deciding where to put the store was a different story.

"The Quad-Cities wasn't even on the radar for us initially," he recalled.

Over the course of six years, the brothers discussed a variety of options. They each were in different states, but coming home to Iowa appealed to them.

"At that point in time, there was maybe one or two stores out here on Elmore," he said.

When the brothers were ready to branch out on their own, the Elmore Avenue area looked a lot different than he remembered, Jeff said.

"When we decided to look at this market and come out here, it amazed me to see that growth," he said.

By the time it opened in 2005, theirs was the first La-Z-Boy store in Iowa. There now is another in Cedar Rapids.

At one time, Marshall said, the La-Z-Boy corporate office encouraged the brothers to consider opening a second location in Moline. When they looked at where their customers were traveling from, it didn't make sense to open a second location so close.

Customers come from about a 70-mile radius, meaning it would not be profitable to put another one so close. For years, the Matts' store was the top seller in the Midwest — until recent years when Detroit took the lead.



2023 SEASON SCHEDULE

APRIL

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					7 SB 6:30pm	8 SB 6:30pm
9 SB 1:00pm	10 OFF	11 @CR	12 @CR	13 @CR	14 @CR	15 @CR
16 @CR	17 OFF	18 WIS 6:30pm	19 WIS 6:30pm	20 WIS 6:30pm	21 WIS 6:30pm	22 WIS 6:30pm
23 WIS 1:00pm	24 OFF	25 @LAN	26 @LAN	27 @LAN	28 @LAN	29 @LAN
30 @LAN						

MAY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1 OFF	2 @GL	3 @GL	4 @GL	5 @GL	6 @GL
7 @GL	8 OFF	9 CR 6:30pm	10 CR 6:30pm	11 CR 6:30pm	12 CR 6:30pm	13 CR 6:30pm
14 CR 1:00pm	15 OFF	16 @WIS	17 @WIS	18 @WIS	19 @WIS	20 @WIS
21 @WIS	22 OFF	23 BEL 6:30pm	24 BEL 6:30pm	25 BEL 6:30pm	26 BEL 6:30pm	27 BEL 6:30pm
28 BEL 1:00pm	29 OFF	30 @LC	31 @LC			

JUNE

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1 @LC	2 @LC	3 @LC
4 @LC	5 OFF	6 FW 6:30pm	7 FW 6:30pm	8 FW 6:30pm	9 FW 6:30pm	10 FW 6:30pm
11 FW 1:00pm	12 OFF	13 @BEL	14 @BEL	15 @BEL	16 @BEL	17 @BEL
18 @BEL	19 OFF	20 PEO 6:30pm	21 PEO 6:30pm	22 PEO 6:30pm	23 PEO 6:30pm	24 PEO 6:30pm
25 PEO 1:00pm	26 OFF	27 OFF	28 WIS 6:30pm	29 WIS 6:30pm	30 WIS 6:30pm	

JULY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1 WIS 6:30pm
2 WIS 6:30pm	3 WIS 5:00pm	4 @CR	5 @CR	6 @CR	7 @CR	8 @CR
9 @CR	10 OFF	11 OFF	12 OFF	13 OFF	14 SB 6:30pm	15 SB 6:30pm
16 SB 1:00pm	17 OFF	18 @BEL	19 @BEL	20 @BEL	21 @BEL	22 @BEL
23 @BEL	24 OFF	25 LAN 6:30pm	26 LAN 6:30pm	27 LAN 6:30pm	28 LAN 6:30pm	29 LAN 6:30pm
30 LAN 1:00pm	31 OFF					

AUGUST

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1 @PEO	2 @PEO	3 @PEO	4 @PEO	5 @PEO
6 @PEO	7 OFF	8 CR 6:30pm	9 CR 6:30pm	10 CR 6:30pm	11 CR 6:30pm	12 CR 6:30pm
13 CR 1:00pm	14 OFF	15 BEL 6:30pm	16 BEL 6:30pm	17 BEL 6:30pm	18 BEL 6:30pm	19 BEL 6:30pm
20 BEL 1:00pm	21 OFF	22 @WIS	23 @WIS	24 @WIS	25 @WIS	26 @WIS
27 @WIS	28 OFF	29 PEO 6:30pm	30 PEO 6:30pm	31 PEO 6:30pm		

SEPTEMBER


SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1 PEO 6:30pm	2 PEO 6:30pm
3 PEO 6:30pm	4 OFF	5 @SB	6 @SB	7 @SB	8 @SB	9 @SB
10 @SB						

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Jim Nelson, President
and Chief Operating
Officer of Parr Instru-
ment Company.

Nikos Frazier

A peak into the Parr Instrument Company and its 112-year history in Moline

GRETCHEN TESKE
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On one side of 53rd Street in Moline is a row of houses. On the other side is a long, red building, where engineers are building and designing millions of dollars worth of equipment every day.

Parr Instrument Company has a rich, century-long history in Illinois, said President and COO Jim Nelson. It started with University of Illinois professor Samuel W. Parr opening the Standard Calorimeter Company in Champaign in 1899.

Parr developed a "calorie meter," now known as a calorimeter, while studying the heating value of coal. A calorimeter is a piece of equipment found in chemistry labs and used to measure the volume and heat produced by an object during a certain time frame. Today, about 30% of Parr's products are calorimeters.

In the 21st century, a common use is determining the number of calories in food products. At the turn of the 20th century, Parr used it to help determine if bituminous coal could be used for heat. He quickly encountered an issue: "Back then, Illinois mined a lot of coal and it was high in sulfur content. It was corrosive to the metals that we were trying to test it in," Nelson said.

To combat this problem, Parr developed the alloy Illium, named for the University of Illinois. It has powerful corrosion-resistant properties that made it a precursor to stainless steel, which was invented in the United Kingdom by a metallurgist in 1913. The calorimeters were then made out of the Illium.

In 1911, the company was moved to East Moline, then to Moline after World War I. In addition to the calorimeter business, the business had an alloy foundry, where the Illium was made.

The company joined with Madison-based C.F. Burgess Laboratories in 1927 to form the Burgess-Parr Company. This lasted until 1933, when Burgess split off to continue in the alloy business. The newly incorporated Parr Instrument Company remained in the calorimeter and laboratory-apparatus business with Harold L. Parr, son of the founder, as president.

During World War II, the company expanded its line to create high-precision machine parts, while still producing calorimeters and other laboratory equipment, as allowed by the limited availability of critical raw materials. Following the war, the company introduced a new line of laboratory-pressure vessels and chemical reactors.

Today, Parr Instruments has 94 employees and in 2022 hit a record with \$36 million in sales. This year, the company is on track to reach \$38 million.

"It's a niche business, but we are known internationally for what we do," Nelson said. "We are in pharmaceutical, energy and of course chemistry [labs], which essentially touches everything."

At its peak, the company was exporting 60% of its products outside the United States. That number has fallen to about 50% now as the U.S. market gets stronger. Competition is another factor, depending on the product line, Nelson said.



A worker assembles a component to a Parr 6755 Solution Calorimeter at Parr Instruments.

Nikos Frazier

In the case of calorimeters, which are of a standard design, countries such as Germany, India and China recently have emerged as competitors. Despite the copycat products, he said, Parr continues to dominate the U.S. market.

Customers range from industrial chemistry companies, like Exxon Mobile, to start-up businesses that are doing alternative energy research.

"In a typical year, we don't have one customer with 1% of the business. It's very diverse," he said.

Nelson credits Parr's reputation for the broad range of customers, saying, "Our reputation is our best sales tool."

What brings customers to the business initially, though, is its ability to create exactly what the customer needs.

"Our strong point is custom equipment," he said. "Typically we can quote that, design it, and build it faster than our competition can give them a quote."

A look inside Parr Instruments.

Nikos Frazier



Despite the sound reputation and century-long local tenure, Nelson said, the company has encountered setbacks.

"It's not always easy to find good, technical people in the Quad-Cities," he said. "We are not a hotbed for the chemistry industry."

But that doesn't stop Parr. The sales staff is typically chemical engineers, who help customers find equipment that will help with their research. From there, the design team takes over, then passes the order off to the manufacturing team, which crafts the pieces.

Looking forward, Nelson said, the company is looking at expanding operations. Construction last was done in 1990, and the company has since grown, he said.

"We manufacture a high-quality product here in Moline," Nelson said. "We're proud to be made in the USA."



A look inside Parr Instruments.
Nikos Frazier



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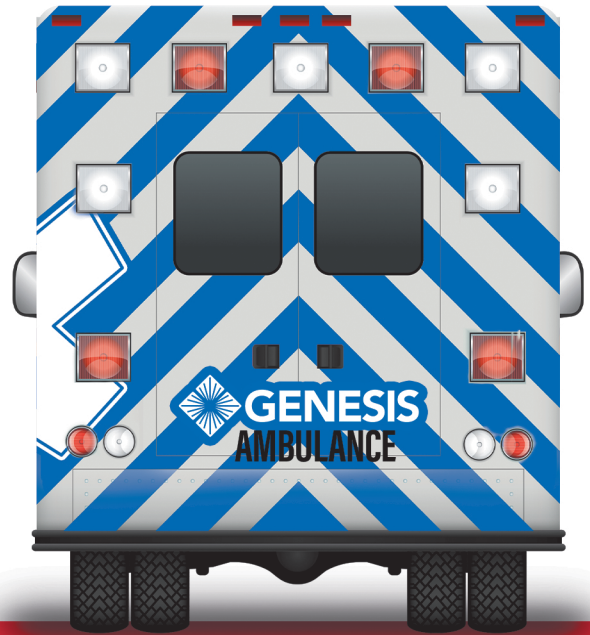
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