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SHERIFF

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**FOR WILL COUNTY SHERIFF**

MARCH 17, 2026

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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2026 | A FREE PRESS NEWSPAPER • (815) 476-7966



**A PRINCESS DRESS**—There were 34 volunteers who helped during Saturday's Melissa's Closet and Crystal's Jewelry box event at Godley Park District. Dresses were sorted and displayed for over 400 young ladies.

## Melissa's Closet and Crystal's Jewelry Box sets a record with more prom dresses

BY ERIC FISHER  
PUBLISHER

Hundreds of teens left the Godley Park District gymnasium Saturday with smiles, sparkling gowns and a reminder that kindness can carry on a legacy.

A record 4,000 prom dresses were available during the 12th annual Melissa's Closet and Crystal's Jewelry Box, with dresses sold for just \$5 each. More than 600 dresses were purchased as excited teens browsed racks of formal gowns and short dresses, with many walking out with multiple outfits for upcoming dances.

"We were able to give two formal dresses and two short dresses to every girl," organizer Laurie Becker said. "We ask them to bring the dresses back next year so someone else could love their dress."

The dresses were donated throughout the year through the 15 Whitmore Ace Hardware stores. That allowed for 1,200 more dress donations for this year alone.

"We received so many dresses this year there were honestly too many to count. We know we were close to 4,000," Becker said.

Beyond the bargain prices and

joyful atmosphere, the event carries a deeper meaning.

Melissa's Closet and Crystal's Jewelry Box was created by staff at Whitmore Ace Hardware to honor Melissa Michalowski and her best friend, Crystal Carr. The Reed-Custer High School seniors were killed in a car accident along Route 113 near Custer Park in December 2008. Crystal was 17, and Melissa had just turned 18.

The two friends never had the chance to attend their senior prom, which inspired organizers to create an event ensuring other students could experience that milestone.

"It's an honor. I really think that she would be just so honored that they actually do this for her," said Melissa's mother, Deborah Michalowski, who was there on Saturday. She volunteers feeling like every year she's helping Melissa attend prom.

The event began modestly in 2011 with just 120 donated dresses. Over the years, word spread across the region and donations multiplied. This year organizers collected nearly 4,000 dresses, filling the Godley Park District gymnasium with racks of gowns in every color and style.

Melissa's Closet and Crystal's

Jewelry Box has now helped over 6,510 students find affordable prom dresses.

The event also raises money for scholarships for Reed-Custer High School students.

"We should have a good scholarship to give out," Becker said. "We'll be making that decision after we go through all the applications."

Becker noted that Melissa's Closet and Crystal's Jewelry Box has applied for non-profit status which will hopefully open it up for monetary donations for outside organizations.

"The bigger it gets and bigger the expenses," Becker added, "we spent \$1,000 in addition racks just to keep up with the amount of dresses."

Becker said approximately 100 volunteers pitched in Thursday through Saturday. On Thursday it took Whitmore's two box trucks and a van to haul all the dresses to Godley. On Friday it took the entire day for volunteers to sort and display dresses, shoes, jewelry and purses. On Saturday 43 volunteers who present to assist teens.

Despite the long hours organizing the event, Becker said the reward comes from seeing the joy it brings to

SEE MELISSA'S CLOSET PAGE 2



TRAINS CONTINUALLY BLOCK the crossing at Lorenzo Road, and the BNSF is proposing constructing an overpass to eliminate the obstruction.

## \$18.9M contract awarded for Lorenzo Rd. overpass

BY ROSE PANIERI  
STAFF WRITER

Those who drive busy Lorenzo Road in Wilmington will soon see a major improvement to one of the region's most frequently delayed railroad crossings.

BNSF Railway has awarded an \$18.9 million construction contract to D Construction, Inc. of Coal City to replace the existing at-grade railroad crossing on Lorenzo Road with a new overpass bridge.

The project will carry vehicles above the busy BNSF rail line, eliminating the need for traffic to stop for passing trains, thus eliminating the frustration of long delays.

Local officials say the upgrade will significantly improve safety and reduce congestion along the heavily traveled

corridor.

Although the project will be administered by Will County, it will be fully funded by BNSF Railway.

"They are funding the entirety of this project," said Jeff Ronaldson, director of the Will County Division of Transportation. "We have to build it because we're named in the ICC order and related to the grant, but they will reimburse us in total."

The project falls within Will County Board District 1 and is part of BNSF's broader effort to reorganize rail operations in the busiest intermodal hubs in the country.

Joe Van Duyne, Will County Board Speaker, believes the project is a vital step in improving efficiency and enhancing safety.

"The construction of this bridge over the BNSF Railroad

will enhance safety and improve traffic flow along Lorenzo Road," he said.

### Major construction on the horizon

Though the rail overpass project will be long-term and complex, in the end, it will save commuters time and enhance safety.

"It's a pretty big project there, so we anticipate that to be a multi-year project," Wilmington Mayor Ben Dietz recently said.

The project will eliminate the current railroad crossing and construct a grade-separated bridge carrying Lorenzo Road over the rail line.

Key components of the project include:

- Construction of a temporary two-lane run-around road and a temporary railroad crossing north of Lorenzo Road

- Removal of the existing Lorenzo Road pavement and rail crossing.

- Construction of embankments and mechanically stabilized earth retaining walls

- Building a 351-foot, two-span bridge with semi-integral abutments and an 8-inch concrete deck supported by 66-inch plate girders.

- Installation of new approach roadways with full-depth hot-mix asphalt pavement

- Realignment of Cottage Road and development of temporary construction access routes.

### Tackling delays and safety risks

The project also supports the broader goals of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program, a public-private partnership designed to modern-

ize the rail network throughout the Chicago metropolitan area.

The Chicago region handles roughly one-quarter of all U.S. rail freight, making it one of the busiest rail hubs in North America. The CREATE program focuses on reducing bottlenecks that slow both freight shipments and passenger trains.

Freight trains moving through the corridor can stretch up to two miles long, often blocking the current Lorenzo Road crossing and causing extended traffic backups.

Once the overpass is complete, drivers will be able to pass over the tracks without interrup-

SEE LORENZO RD OVERPASS PAGE 2



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Berkot's Famous Homemade Corned Beef  
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\$4

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\$4.99















# Electronics dropoff in Wilmington

Will County's next free electronics drop-off event will be held Thursday, March 12, from 5-7 p.m. at the Wilmington City Hall parking lot, 1165 S. Water St.

Participants are reminded to remain in their vehicles, show ID by holding it to the window for staff to see and then allow staff to remove items without assistance from each vehicle.

Items accepted include: Televisions, monitors, printers, computers (desktops, laptops, notebooks, tablets), electronic keyboards, fax machines, videocassette recorders, portable digital music players, DVD players, DVD recorders, video game consoles, small scale servers, scanners, electronic mice, digital converter boxes, cable receivers, satellite receivers, cell phones,

computer cable, portable digital assistants (PDAs) and zip drives.

Electronic items contain materials that can be recycled countless times while other materials in items are considered hazardous.

Scrap metal like pots and pans, baking sheets, car jacks, chains, keys, copper pipe and wire, door knobs silverware and more.

# Save the date for April 12 fashion show

Our Caring Closet in Wilmington is planning its annual fundraiser, Our Couture Closet, a charity fashion show at the Wilmington High School to raise funds to help continue its mission.

On Sunday, April 12, at 2 p.m., models will showcase all types of clothing.

There will be a live auction, raffles, 50/50 raffle, entertainment and hors d'oeuvres. Admission is by free will donation.

# St. Vincent meals at New Hope Presbyterian Church

St. Vincent's Table will be held at New Hope Presbyterian Church, 80 N. Garfield St. in Coal City for the months of March, April and May.

Meals will be held every Monday with the exception of March 16 due

to setup for election day and May 29, Memorial Day.

These meals are provided for anyone who is in need of a meal.

Drive-thru carry-out meals start at 4 p.m. and dine in meals will start at 4:30 p.m. and end at 6 p.m.

# Knights to host Euchre event

The Braidwood Knights of Columbus are having a St. Patrick's Euchre Night on Sunday, March 15 starting at 1:30 p.m. in Coal City at the Berst Center 180 S. Kankakee St., Coal City

Entry fee is \$20 to play with option cash buyins for sidepots and loners. Wear green or basketball attire for a chance to win a prize!

Doors will open at noon and it will be BYO alcohol. Reserve your spots by calling TJ Sforza at 815-608-2110 or email KofC Braidwood@gmail.com.

# Ready for severe weather? March is time to prepare

Thunderstorms, tornadoes, lightning, floods and power outages are all possible during Illinois' spring weather season.

That is why the Illinois Emergency Management Agency and Office of Homeland Security (IEMA OHS) is urging all residents to take steps to prepare during Severe Weather Preparedness Month this March.

Millions of dollars in storm damages within the last year shows just how quickly severe weather can impact our communities, said IEMA OHS Acting Director Theodore (Ted) Berger. "We understand that severe weather can be overwhelming, but you don't have to face it unprepared."

Taking time now to plan and gather essentials can help protect the people and places you care about most.

IEMA-OHS recommends that you: Keep all important records and documents in a secure waterproof container. Make an inventory of possessions using lists and

photos/videos. Insure your property and personal items (many renters, homeowners, and business owners don't realize that flood insurance isn't automatically part of an insurance policy.) Know how to shut off your home utilities like electricity, gas, and water.

Assemble an emergency kit and go bag to help your family for at least three days during extend-

ed power outages or in case of evacuation. If power is out, make sure flashlights with fresh batteries are ready. Have a backup cell phone charger fully charged. Generators should only be run outside, never indoors or in enclosed spaces.

More tips and preparedness kit ideas can be found at ready.illinois.gov/plan/emergencykit.html

# Mark your calendars for Rescue ME Resale

The Manhattan-Elwood Quilt Group is hosting a Rescue ME Crafters' Resale to be held 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, April 11 at the Manhattan Township Office, 230 Wabash Street, in Manhattan.

This resale will feature quilting, sewing and needlework supplies. Purchase a bag to fill for a \$10 donation.

There will also be vintage quilts and sewing machines available for purchase. The funds raised from the resale will be used to offset the costs of the group's Quilting for ME - children's project and other charitable projects.

More information about the group and event is available on the Manhattan-Elwood Quilt Group Facebook page.

# CLASSIFIEDS

## APARTMENTS FOR RENT

Wilmington - 3 bedroom, upstairs. \$1,300 per month. \$1,600 security deposit. No pets. 815-365-2829, leave a message. ca10-12

## DUPLEXES FOR RENT

For Lease: Wilmington, IL - 1 (large bedroom) duplex unit, 722 sq ft, central A/C, freshly painted, newer refrigerator & stove. Nook in kitchen for tenant's washer & gas dryer. Attached private covered parking & 8'x12' storage shed. No pets, Quick access to Hwy 53 & 55 - \$1,195/month. For details and photos Email: rentduplex60481@gmail.com cc10-11

## HELP WANTED

Help wanted, experienced bartender at Tuffy's Lounge, 1099 S. Water Street, Wilmington. BASSET and food handling training required. Apply in person or call 815-476-2700. ch9-11

## FOR SALE



## HELP WANTED

Joliet Part-Time We are seeking an Optometric Office Assistant to become a part of our team! This is a part-time position that can lead to a full-time position for the right candidate. You will perform routine administrative and clerical assignments to keep the medical facility running smoothly. This is a great opportunity to join an established, slower-paced optometry practice that has been serving the community for over 25 years! Hours for the position are 10:00 am - 6:00 pm on Tuesday and Thursday, and 10:00 am - 2:00 pm on Saturday. Responsibilities: Handle all administrative duties promptly Perform routine clerical tasks to support medical staff. Communicate with insurance companies for proper billing procedures. Check-in patients and confirm insurance information. Qualifications: Previous experience in healthcare administration or a related field is a plus!! Experience with EHR software is a plus!! Familiarity with medical billing procedures Strong organizational skills Professional communication and computer skills Ability to thrive in a slower-paced environment Respond: adforhelpwanted@yahoo.com

## HOME FOR RENT

2 bedroom house on the river with a sunroom. I have lease agreements and credit check forms. Pet friendly. 1st months and security deposit Call Sam 1-708-268-2976. ch7-10

## LOST & FOUND

Have you found a lost pet or lost a pet in Will County? Please call Will County Animal Control. We may have your pet. We want to reunite your family, 815-462-5633.

## MISCELLANEOUS

Magic Chef 5.0 cu. ft. freezer for sale. Perfect condition. Inside light and food racks. White in color. 27"x21"x32". Only \$125. Call 815-503-2045. ca10

## PETS

Large Selection of Dog and Cat Food, treats, accessories, health aids, clothing, Birthday treats, wall art, jewelry, gifts, greeting cards and Home of Fritters for Critters Pet Treats. New! Brew and Chew Dog Treats. Trinity Barkery 240 W. Baltimore Wilmington., IL 60481 815-476-5104 slewis@trinityservices.org.

Want to move your car fast? Advertise it in our Classifieds!

## REAL ESTATE

SHERIFF'S SALE OF REAL ESTATE OF 920 North Mabel Court, Braidwood, IL 60408 (Single Family). On the 19th day of March, 2026 to be held at 12:00 noon, at the Will County Courthouse, 100 W. Jefferson Street, Room 1001, Joliet, IL 60432, under Case Title: Wells Fargo Bank, N.A. Plaintiff V. EDWARD JAMES HOLT A/K/A EDWARD HOLT; UNITED STATES OF AMERICA; Defendant. Case No. 25 FC 0310 in the Circuit Court of the Twelfth Judicial Circuit, Will County, Illinois.

Terms of Sale: ten percent (10%) at the time of sale and the balance within twenty-four (24) hours. No judicial sale fee shall be paid by the mortgagee acquiring the residential real estate pursuant to its credit bid at the sale or by any mortgagee, judgment creditor, or other lienor acquiring the residential real estate whose rights in and to the residential real estate arose prior to the sale. All payments shall be made in cash or certified funds payable to the Sheriff of Will County. In the event the property is a condominium, in accordance with 735 ILCS 5/15-1507(c) (1)(H-1) and (H-2), 765 ILCS 605/9(g)(5), and 765 ILCS 605/18.5(g-1), you are hereby notified that the purchaser of the unit, other than a mortgagee, shall pay

the assessments and legal fees required by subdivisions (g)(1) and (g)(4) of Section 9 and the assessments required by subsection (g-1) of Section 18.5 of the Illinois Condominium Property Act. Pursuant to Local Court Rule 11.03 (J) if there is a surplus following application of the proceeds of sale, then the plaintiff shall send written notice pursuant to 735 ILCS 5/15-1512(d) to all parties to the proceeding advising them of the amount of the surplus and that the surplus will be held until a party obtains a court order for its distribution or, in the absence of an order, until the surplus is forfeited to the State. For information Please Contact: LOGS LEGAL GROUP LLP 2121 Waukegan Rd, Suite 301 Bannockburn, Illinois 60015 P: 847-770-4348 F: 847-291-3434 PURSUANT TO THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT YOU ARE ADVISED THAT THIS LAW FIRM IS DEEMED TO BE A DEBT COLLECTOR ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE. Published in the Free Press Newspapers on Wednesday, Feb. 25, March 4, & March 11, 2026.

## SERVICE & REPAIRS

Vibrant Finishes by Nathan - Power Washing - Siding, Fences, Walkways. - Painting - Interior/Exterior, Refinishing, Staining - Flooring - Hardwood, Vinyl, and Staircases. Nathan Troy, Braidwood, 815-671-5245

Bubbles Cleaning Service Dawn Boardman Business and Home Cleaning Service. Weekly, bi-weekly, monthly. Many references available. Please leave message 815-661-6180.

## GOT GRASS

Lawn Care Jim Baudino 815-342-6394 cc7-23

Julie's Remodeling Siding, soffit, roof repairs, painting, seamless gutters, fencing, tree removal, lawn care, Complete Handyman service! Bonded and Insured, 20 yrs., Call Lee 815-791-5731.

Mike Collins Roofing, re-shingles and gutter cleaning, aluminum gutter screen, no repair to small or too big. Free roof inspection. Low prices. Lic #104.007296 Ask for Mike at 815-730-1303. ck47-17

## SERVICE & REPAIRS

A Thousand Words Photography 385 N. Second Ave. Coal City Mandy Eaton 815-791-2913

## STORAGE



## WANTED

WANTED Cadillac • Lincoln Mercury • Buick Running or Not Cash Buyer Larry T. 815-671-8741

## WANTED

SCRAP METAL • Farm Machinery • Garden Tractors • Snowmobiles • Appliances • Anything Metal Free pickup 7 days 815-210-8819

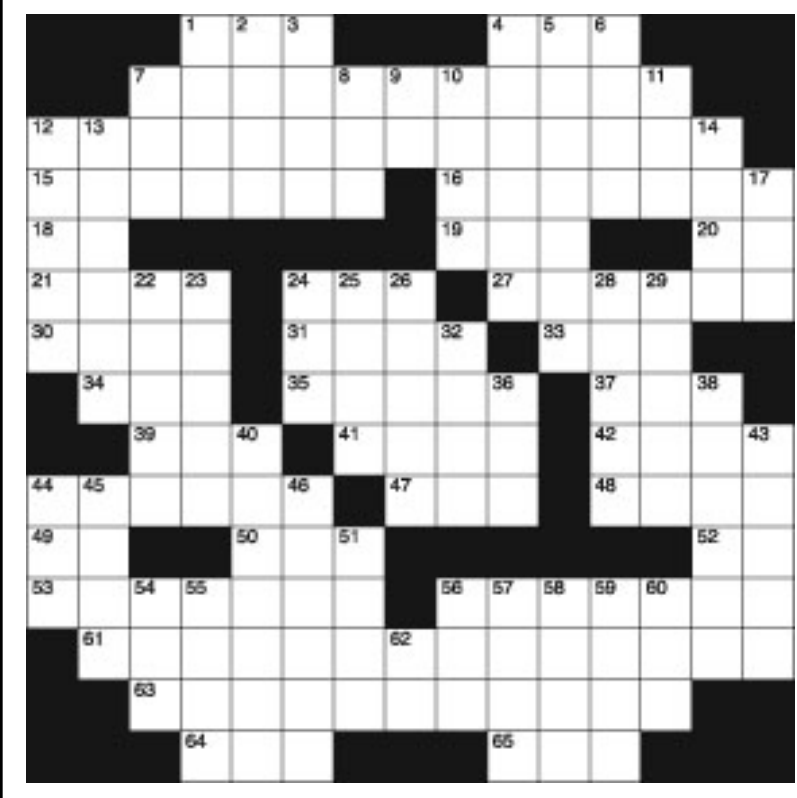
## CLASSIFIED DEADLINE

Friday at 5:00 p.m.

COST*	
1 Week	\$17.00
2 Weeks	\$21.00
3 Weeks	\$25.00
4 Weeks	\$29.00

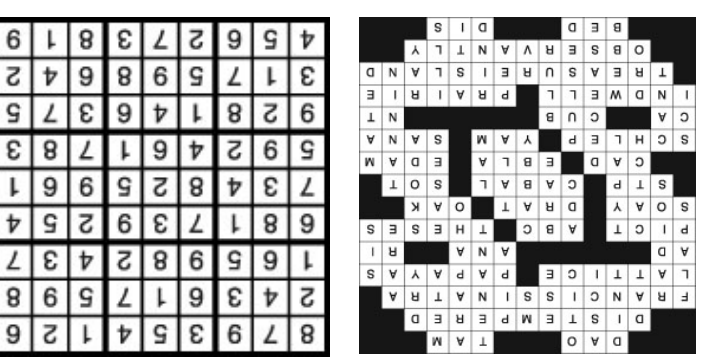
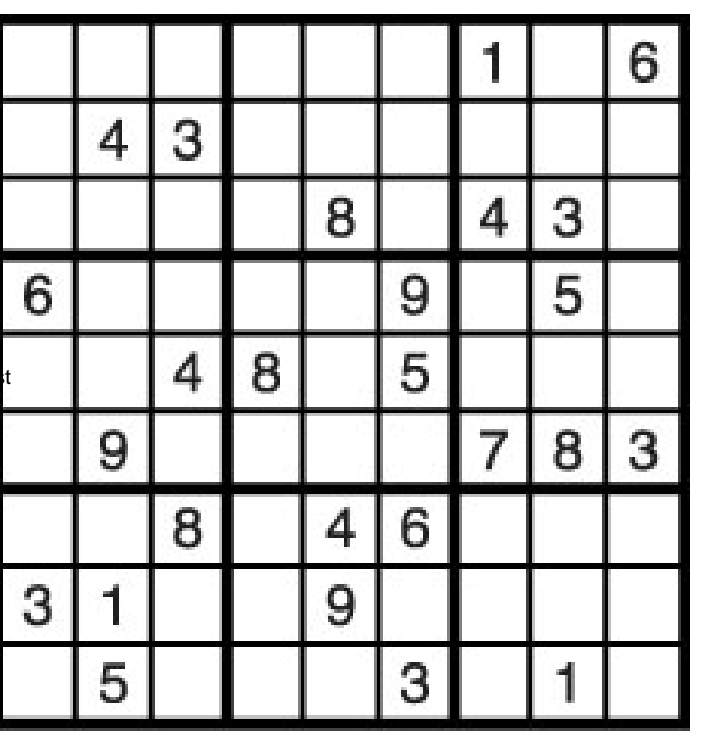
\*Up to 30 words, 20¢ for each word after 30.

Details call 815-476-7966 or 815-634-0315



- CLUES ACROSS**
- Blockchain-based entity
  - A woolen cap of Scottish origin
  - Painted with glue
  - Legendary crooner
  - Structure made with strips of wood
  - Tropical fruits
  - Commercial
  - Comedienne Gasteyer
  - The Ocean State
  - Ancient Scot
  - Basics
  - Stated propositions
  - Scottish island group
  - Expression of annoyance
  - Large tree
  - Engine additive
  - Conspiracy
  - Drunkard
  - Someone who is morally reprehensible
  - Ancient Syrian city
  - Mild yellow Dutch cheese made in b
  - Carry (slang)
  - Sweet potato
  - European river
  - The Golden State
  - Windy City ballplayer
  - New Testament

- Possess spiritually
  - A treeless grassy plain
  - Popular historical novel
  - In a law-abiding way
  - A place to sleep
  - Criticize
- CLUES DOWN**
- Impression in a surface
  - Computer language
  - Relating to the ear
  - Occupant
  - Member of Great Plains people
  - Social media firm
  - Digital audiotape
  - Midway between east and southeast
  - Chronic, progressive disease
  - Chinese lute
  - Not wet
  - Moves wings up and down
  - Communication devices
  - Swiss river
  - Female sibling
  - Receive
  - Relating to a type
  - General's assistant (abbr.)
  - Steep bank
  - Taxi driver
  - Moves into without difficulty
  - Bicycle manufacturer
  - Traditional rhythmic pattern
  - Fugitives are on it
  - Bitter-tasting organic substance
  - Die
  - Matched
  - Literary genre \_\_\_-fi
  - Cannot
  - Pounded
  - British rock group
  - Debt relief order
  - 2006 NL Cy Young winner
  - Green vegetable
  - Tough outer skin of fruit
  - \_\_\_ Spumante (Italian wine)
  - Ailments
  - Famed singer Charles
  - Camper



# COMET SPORTS

## RC boys basketball seniors and parents honored



Courtesy photo

RCHS BASKETBALL SENIOR Vincent Bollino, is escorted by his parents Jason and Courtney Bollino. After graduation, Vinny is joining the U.S. Army and has a goal of driving a tank.



Courtesy photo

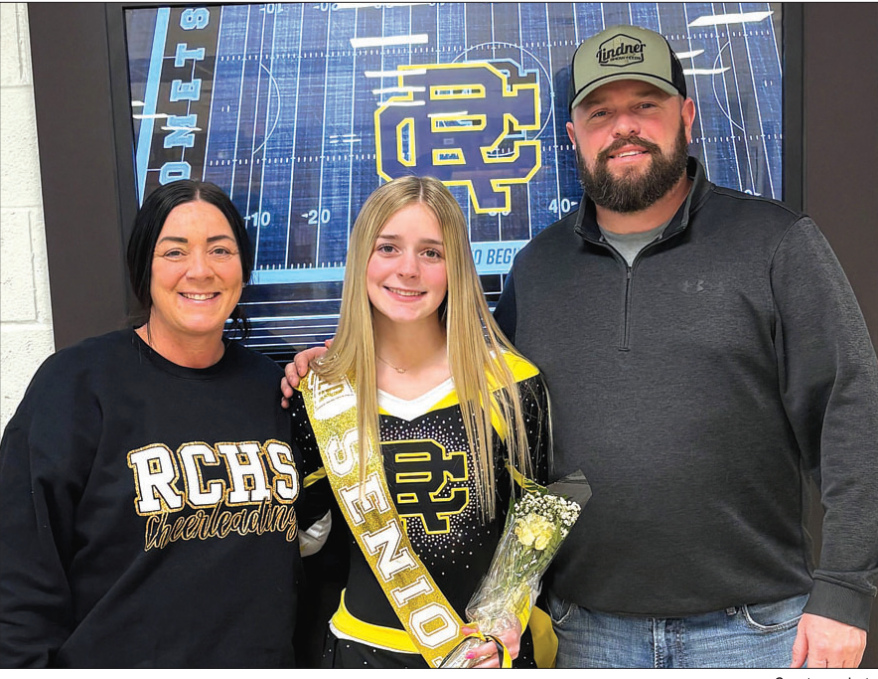
RCHS BASKETBALL SENIOR Colton Waldvogel is the son of Cal and Tara Waldvogel. In the fall, Colton plans on attending Central Michigan and major in Cinema Arts.

## RC cheerleader seniors and parents honored



Courtesy photo

RCHS CHEERLEADER SENIOR Dianna Walker, daughter of Denise Flint, is escorted by her brother, Tyler Walker. After graduation, Dianna will be joining the EMT program to eventually find a career as an EMT or firefighter.



Courtesy photo

RCHS CHEERLEADER SENIOR Kamryn Marschner was honored with the basketball seniors during Senior Night. She is the daughter of Stacey Caise and Ray Marschner. In the fall, Kamryn will attend Kankakee Community College and join the radiology program.



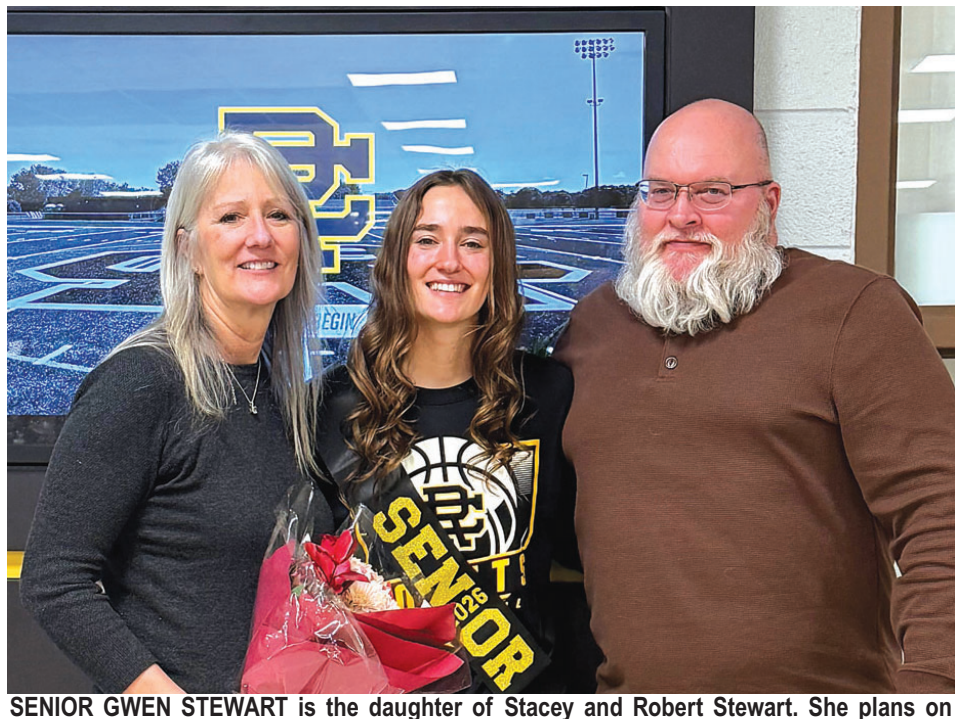
Courtesy photo

RCHS CHEERLEADER SENIOR Roman Espinoza is the son of Sarah Shaik (right). After graduation, Roman plans on attending ISU to major in Mechanical Engineering.

## RC girls basketball seniors and parents honored



ANA SMITH is the daughter of Jordan and Jeff Smith. In the fall, Ana plans on attending the University of Illinois Chicago to work towards a career as a nurse practitioner with a focus in women's health. Ana will miss the bus rides full of laughter and playing their version of tag at practices.



SENIOR GWEN STEWART is the daughter of Stacey and Robert Stewart. She plans on attending Knox College in the fall to study Political Science with the hopes of attending law school and with her love of the sport, Gwen will continue to play soccer at Knox. Gwen will miss playing this sport with all of her friends, especially the times she got to be on the court with Alyssa, getting steals and layups.



SENIOR MORGAN TOLER is the daughter of Candi and Russ Toler. After graduation, Morgan will continue her education focusing on a major in Biology. Her favorite memory was winning regionals and all of the fun practices where Coaches little boy, Eli, would have them all laughing. Morgan will miss having fun but hard-working practices with her team and coaches, and the bus rides and locker room talks with the group of girls she knew she could rely on.



SENIOR SKYLAR WILKINS Skylar is the daughter of Beth and Clint Wilkins. After graduation, Skylar plans on attending a four-year university to work towards a career as a Family & Consumer Science Teacher. Her favorite memories from basketball were all of the practices, especially the fun effective Fridays, which she thinks there needs to be more of. She also liked the fact that she got to go through the program with the same three girls. Skylar will miss talking and playing games on the bus, especially when Coach Mountain would join in.