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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2024 | A FREE PRESS NEWSPAPER • (815) 476-7966



Photo by Eric Fisher

HO! HO! HO! - Jolly old St. Nick turned in his sleigh with reindeer for a form of transportation on Saturday following the annual Braidwood Tree Lighting and Christmas parade. Santa met with young boys and girls after the parade at the Braidwood Fire Station, sitting behind the driver's seat of Braidwood reel No. 1 truck. The antique truck was a double thrill for many a youngster who got to see Santa while climbing aboard a real fire truck.



THE FRESHMEN FOOTBALL team at Reed-Custer High School served as grand marshals of the Braidwood tree lighting and Christmas parade on Saturday. Before stepping off for the parade members of the football team were introduced and praised by coach Todd Lyons for their dedicated work ethic and outstanding season. "I can't wait to see what this group of young athletes will bring to our town by the time they are varsity players," Lyons said before the team was asked to throw the switch lighting up the holiday decorations across from city hall.



MRS. CLAUS walks the parade route handing out candy on Saturday.



SOME RELIEF from a recent cold spell arrived on Saturday just in time for the City of Braidwood's annual Christmas parade. There was a good crowd lining Main Street on Saturday, thankfully with the temperature reaching a high of 52 degrees with 10 mph winds.



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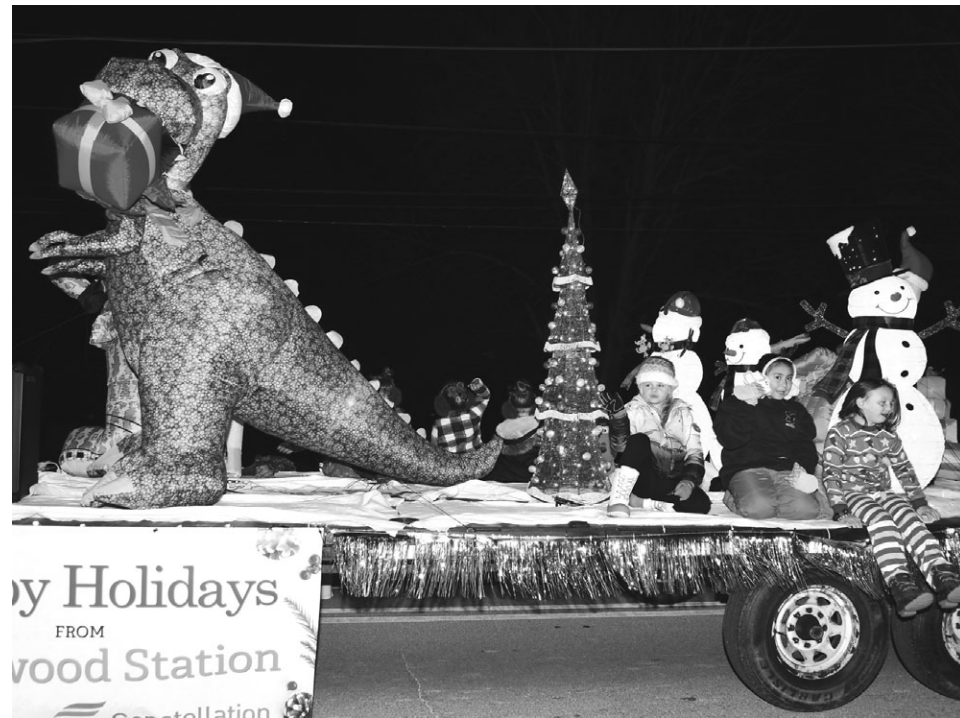
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GODLEY PARK DISTRICT entered this float and elves tossing out candy during Saturday's Christmas parade in Braidwood. The Park District will hold its annual Christmas Tree Lighting Celebration, including visits with Santa, this Saturday from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. For more details on the free event turn to the back page.



THE BRAIDWOOD STATION Constellation float was among the more colorful with Christmas tree, inflatable snowmen and a dinosaur carrying home a present. It was all part of the fun during Saturday's Braidwood tree lighting and parade.



HOT DOGS and hot chocolate were served at the Braidwood Fire Station following Saturday's parade. Youngsters got to eat a hot dog, cookie before seeing Santa.



THE RCHS MARCHING COMETS played Christmas tunes while marching in the Braidwood parade. Kudos to the band members who donned elf hats and Christmas lights including this member of the brass who even wore a Santa beard.



WILL COUNTY BOARD leadership (from left) includes District 1 representative Joe VanDuyne (from left) who has been selected as speaker, Democratic Leader Sherry Williams and Republican Leader Jim Richmond.

VanDuyne elected board speaker

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

The newly-seated members of the Will County Board elected their leadership team at a reorganization meeting on Dec. 2 and Joe VanDuyne (D-Wilmington) was elected Speaker of the Will County Board.

"District 1 will still have the same representation," VanDuyne said "I am now responsible for repre-

senting all members of the board and all districts for what is best for our county as a whole."

Sherry Williams (D - Crest Hill) was elected Democratic Leader, and Jim Richmond (R - Mokena) was elected Republican Leader.

The November election did not change the 50-50 party split between Democrats and Republicans.

"The board is split evenly with 11 Democrats

and 11 Republicans with a Democratic County Executive who may break a tie vote if she so chooses," VanDuyne said.

The speaker has the authority to set county board agendas. VanDuyne's party affiliation is therefore likely to make a difference.

"We have many diverse viewpoints on the county board, which is reflective of our county. My goal is to work collaboratively and fairly with all members to move Will County forward," VanDuyne said.

Of special note is VanDuyne is the first District 1 board member to serve as speaker.

A Will County Board member since 2018, VanDuyne has also served as chair of the Public Works and Transportation Committee and on the Executive and Capital Improvements Committee.

Village of Godley files treasurer's report

PUBLIC NOTICE

Ordinance # 22-16
ANNUAL TREASURER'S REPORT

I, Roxanne Alton, Treasurer for the Village of Godley, Will and Grundy Counties, Illinois, being duly sworn, depose and say that the following statement is a correct report for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2023 and ending June 30, 2024. Subscribed and Sworn to this 1st day of December, 2024.

Cash Balance, July 1, 2023.	\$386,119
Income:	
Property taxes	\$7,993
Municipal sales tax	\$13,358
Utility tax	\$22,911
Illinois income tax	\$94,300
Local use tax	\$21,374
Excise tax	\$3,640
Video gaming	\$24,617
Permits and licenses	\$3,017
Interest	\$21,727
Motor Fuel Tax	\$23,893
Cannabis Tax	\$896
Miscellaneous	\$254
Available Cash Balance	\$624,099
Expenditures:	
Payroll: Salaries, Wages and Meetings	\$61,765
0-\$25,000	\$11,712
AT&T/ComEd/Nicor/Garbage/Mediacom	\$4,959
Bank Fees	\$306
Dues	\$720
Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund	\$7,306
Illinois Municipal League Risk Management Association	\$15,353
Reports	\$15,645
Maintenance	\$22,609
Misc. (under \$2,500)	\$2,000
Less liabilities	\$12,199
Total Expenditures	\$154,574
Cash Balance, June 30, 2024	\$469,525

I, Roxanne Alton, Treasurer for the Village of Godley, Will and Grundy Counties, Illinois do hereby certify that the above is a true copy of the Annual Treasurer's Report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Roxanne Alton, Treasurer
Cheryl Schott, Mayor

Payroll Detail
\$0-\$25,000: T. Branum, R. Alton, G. Alton, C. Schott, C. Brockett, J. Peters, E. Burd, K. Hall, B. Hall, P. Nacey
Published in the Braidwood Journal on Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024.

Village of Godley 2025 meeting dates set

PUBLIC NOTICE

2025 Meeting Dates
Village of Godley
The 2025 meeting dates for the Village of Godley will be as follows:

January 27, 2025
February 24, 2025
March 24, 2025
April 28, 2025
May 19, 2025 (3rd Monday)
June 23, 2025
July 28, 2025
August 25, 2025
September 22, 2025
October 27, 2025
November 24, 2025
December 15, 2025 (3rd Mon.)

The meetings are held on the 4th Monday of the month, however, in May and December it will be the 3rd Monday. Meetings are held at 150 S. Kankakee St., Godley and called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Published in the Braidwood Journal on Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024.

Grundy County Board member dies in rollover

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

Grundy County Board member Caleb Counterman, 48, died as the result of a single-vehicle rollover on Lorenzo Road on Sunday, Dec. 8.

The Grundy County Coroner's office and Will County Sheriff's office are investigating the crash, which occurred at approximately 7:30 a.m. on Lorenzo Road, east of Will Road.

A resident of Morris, Counterman and a passenger were reportedly traveling eastbound, struck a patch of ice and lost control of the vehicle which rolled several times. Counterman was ejected from the vehicle.

The Wilmington Fire Protection District trans-

ported Counterman to Morris Hospital where he was pronounced dead at 8:32 a.m.

His passenger suffered minor injuries and was transported to Morris Hospital for treatment.

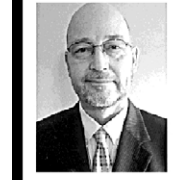
Counterman served as a Republican member of

the Grundy County Board, District 3, since 2020.

He also served as the pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Goose Lake.

Counterman is survived by his wife, Jessica, and two sons, Levi and Jared.

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NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The Braidwood Recreation Club will hold its Annual Meeting on Saturday, January 11, 2025 at the Club Office.

One Petition was submitted for the Position of Director; Raymond Marschner. The following incumbents have chosen to run for re-election as well; Russ Toler, Justen Bohac and Mike Foster. Incumbent Bud Montana chose not to run and has retired from The Board of Directors.

All positions for Directors have been filled therefore; No Election.

The following have accepted the Nomination to serve on the Board for a 3-year term. Russ Toler, Justen Bohac, Mike Foster and Raymond Marschner.

The Annual Meeting will begin at 7:00 p.m.

There will be no processing of Club Dues on this day.

Board of Directors

Braidwood Recreation Club



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Deadline for The Free Press Advocate, Braidwood Journal and Coal City Courant
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Eric D. Fisher, publisher

The entrepreneur of the coal fields, Wm. Odell

Anyone who has driven south on I-55 sees a sign for the town of Odell. Some of us have even been there. Named after a guy named Odell we guess. William Odell not only had a town named after him, but he left his name in the history books of every small and large town in this area. Today we look at the entrepreneur of the coal field.



TIME WAS....
Sandy Vasko

which are being worked.” The following year we read, “Messrs. Wm H. Odell and W. A. Steel have secured the title to the immense coal mine at Braceville and Gardner, and are preparing to work them more extensively than heretofore. They are already taking out 100 tons a day, and when their additional machinery arrives will raise at least 300 tons per day. The coal taken from these mines is superior to the Morris or La Salle coal and is already used extensively in this city, Bloomington, Wilmington, and Chicago. For sale by Mr. H. Hurlbut in this city.”

Remember, this is before Braidwood was even thought about. But it seemed that Odell did not see himself as a coal man and sold out just about the time Braidwood started to blossom. We next find him in Wilmington where he built a large mansion on Kankakee Street, opposite the Methodist Church.

Odell returned in part to his roots, the railroad. But not working for the railroad, but using it to ship the above ground wealth of grain produced in the region. In 1875 he turned he eye on Braidwood. It already had the needed railroad with many tracks to haul coal, why not corn. We read in November of 1875, “W. H. Odell, Esq., is building a large corn crib capable of holding 7,000 bushels of corn, which goes to show that he intends to buy a little this winter.”

And in October of 1876, “W. H. Odell, the corn king, has commenced

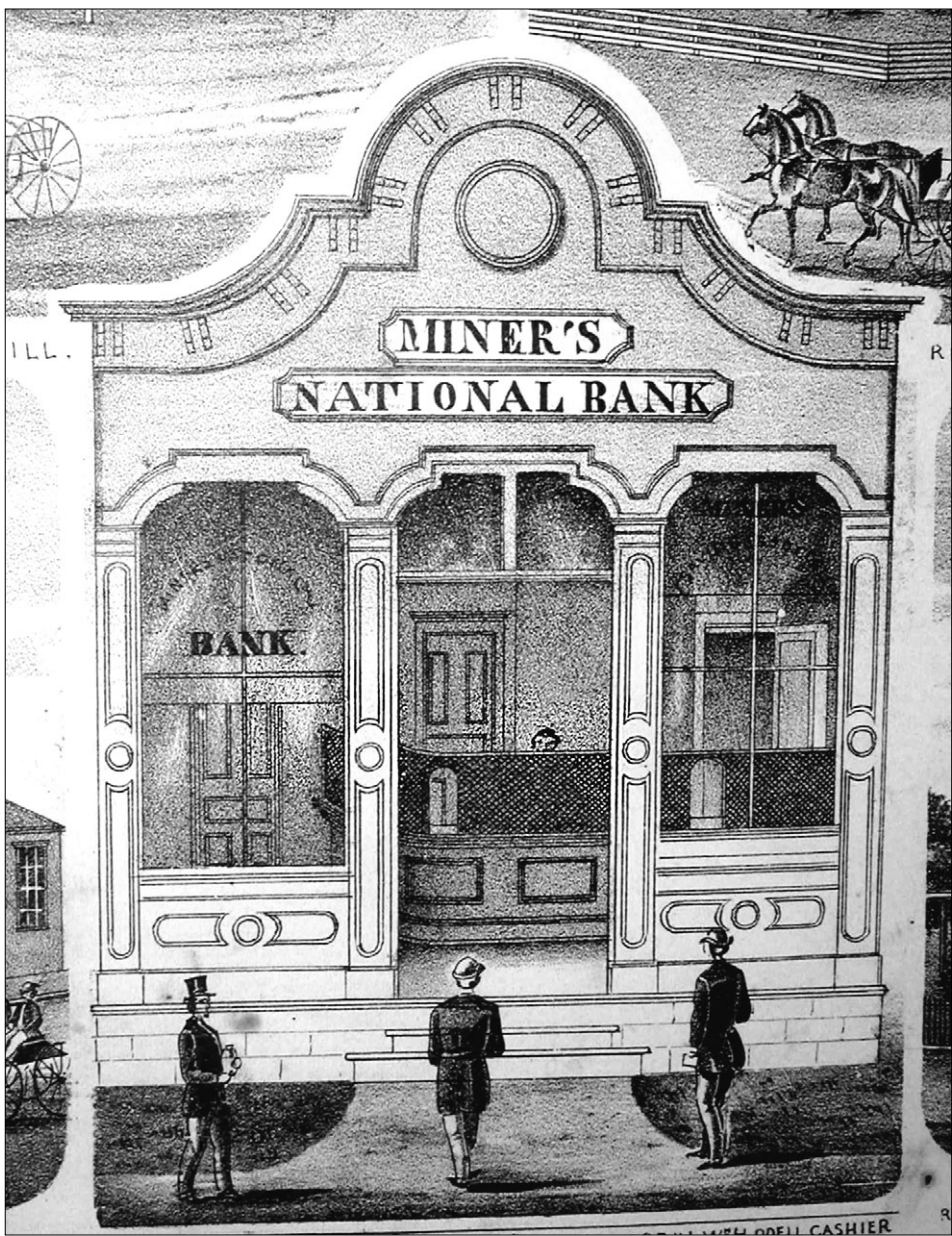
shelling corn in earnest.” He went on to add a feed mill. But then in April 1879 disaster struck. A devastating fire swept downtown Braidwood. It took out two hotels, numerous dwellings, wagon shop and all of Odell's holdings.

His losses were estimated in the Morris Herald, “W. H. Odell, Esp., has lost all his cribs - excepting three which contain about 10,000 bushels of grain - his warehouse, feed mill, office and contents. His loss is estimated in the neighborhood of \$15,000. (\$498,500 today) Insurance in the Springfield, of Mass., to the amount of \$5,000 (\$166,100).

He was interviewed on his loss. “Mine is only a flesh wound,” says Mr. Odell, concerning his heavy loss in Tuesday's fire. With characteristic pluck he will immediately rebuild his elevator and feed mills.”

He was an upright kind of a guy. Some of the grain lost, was not his, but belonged to local farmers. We read about that situation in the Wilmington Advocate, “And what sort of “honest farmers” were they who demanded and accepted Mr. Odell's money for burnt corn that he was in no wise legally or morally holden for? The grain was not his, either to control or sell; he has not even heretofore exacted storage, yet when burnt up they presumed to hold Mr. Odell liable for the full value of several thousands of bushels of grain. With the highest regard for honor Mr. Odell could have evaded paying one cent for such grain.” But he did.

He went on to purchase all the grain elevators in Essex, and by 1885 he owned the elevator next to the depot in Wilmington.



A LITHO FROM the Will County Atlas 1873 depicting Odell's Miners Bank in Braidwood. It later moved to Wilmington to become the Commercial Bank.

He went on to purchase a failing hardware store in Braidwood and soon made it pay. Another sideline of Odell's was banking. He became Cashier of the Miners Bank in Braidwood,

then moved it to Wilmington to become the Commercial Bank, now the Corner Tap.

To William Odell is due much of the prosperity of the entire coal field. He

died in Wilmington in 1907, still heading up the bank and still working for the prosperity of his community.

Esparza earns RCHS senior spotlight



SENIOR SPOTLIGHT
REED-CUSTER HIGH SCHOOL
WOULD LIKE TO RECOGNIZE



Olivia Esparza

DECEMBER 2024

The Senior Spotlight winner for the month of December is Olivia Esparza. Olivia is the daughter of Steve and Devin Esparza. During her high school career, Olivia was involved in National Honor Society, Student Council, FCCLA, Cheerleading, SSA, and the ICE Leadership Conference.

She was also a Cheer State Qualifier, a Class Officer, an Illinois State Scholar, and an RCHS Student/Athlete of the Week. Additionally, she was All-Conference and Academic All-Conference

in Cheer and was on the High Honor Roll.

Her future plans are to attend a 4-year college/university to eventually pursue a career as a labor and delivery nurse.

Here are a few thoughts from Olivia's teachers.

Ms. Chinski says that Olivia is “kind, responsible, and helpful. She works hard and it is fun to watch her talent on the cheer team!”

Ms. Ames thinks that Olivia is “an outstanding student who goes the extra mile to understand the material. She stands up to a challenge and takes it upon

herself to share her learning strategies with her classmates. She has a positive attitude and an enthusiastic spirit. I'm delighted to have her in class for the first time this year.”

Ms. Baron is grateful that Olivia “has been a student of mine for the last four years. She is currently in Advanced Art Studio working on building her portfolio for the spring. Olivia has an eye for detail, incredible creativity and always strives to do her best work. Not only is she a fantastic student, but she is also a kindhearted person.”

Mrs. Vogler appreciates

that Olivia is “always willing to help out with anything, no questions asked! She is so kind and respectful, and I really appreciate her smiling face each day!”

Mrs. Meyr believes that Olivia is “a quiet leader. She is absolutely someone others can and should look up to. Olivia works hard at all she does and is truly such a sweetheart. It will be fun seeing where life takes her after high school.”

Mrs. Morrissey says that Olivia is “one of the most thoughtful and caring people I know and is always willing to help those around her. She doesn't give herself enough credit for all she achieves.”

Mrs. Lee acknowledges that Olivia is “a great student and an even better person. She works extremely hard and tries her best in everything she does. Olivia always has a smile and a positive attitude! I have really enjoyed watching her mature and become more confident throughout high school. I can't wait to see her continue to evolve after high school!”

Mrs. Rankin thinks that Olivia is “not only a great student, she is a great person who is kind to every-

one. She is willing to help anyone, always with a smile on her face. She's an absolute joy to have in class.”

Mr. Gleixner believes that Olivia is “a great student and even better person. She truly cares about her classmates, teammates, and teachers. Olivia will be successful in the future. She is the best round off partner.”

Mr. Wolf appreciates that Olivia is “an extremely kind, intelligent young lady who always has a smile on her face. She's an incredibly hard worker and knows what she wants in life. Can't wait to see what she does!”

Mrs. Redwitz says that

Olivia is “a great young adult. She's always smiling and saying hello whenever I see her. She cares about others and tries her hardest to make everyone feel welcome. During the SSA Training she embraced the younger students and listened to them.”

As a final thought, Olivia's advice to younger students is, “High school will be over before you know it, so get involved in club/extracurriculars, step out of your comfort zone, try new things, and be you.”

On behalf of the teachers and staff at RCHS, we would like to congratulate Olivia Esparza as the December winner of the Senior Spotlight.

Fossil Ridge Library News

Adult Programs

Tuesday, Dec. 17-Cook the Book Club, 6-7 p.m. Join us on the third Tuesday of every month for our cookbook-meets-potluck. Each member chooses a recipe from the same cookbook voted on by the group and brings a dish to share at the following meeting. There is no book title this month. Just bring your favorite cookie to share. Recipes chosen may contain gluten, soy, dairy, etc.

Teen & Tweens Programs

Monday, Dec. 16-Tween Scene DIY Ugly Christmas Shirts, 5:30-6:30 p.m. These instructor-led programs are a fun, educa-

tional, and creative way for Tweens to learn crafts and socialize.

Children Programs

Thursday, Dec. 12-Toddler Time, 10-11 a.m. We welcome toddlers and their caregivers to join us weekly to explore various toys and sensory materials. Toddlers can enhance their gross and fine motor skills, social interaction, and language skills. Caregivers must accompany their little ones throughout the program.

Registration is required for all programs at the library. For more information call 815-458-2187.



RCHS psychology class takes field trip

RCHS'S MR. WOLF took his Psychology and JJC Psychology classes to the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. The students were given a presentation by members of the School's administration and faculty, highlighting the various educational opportunities offered by the school, (from left) Alice Gruber (Sr), Lily Basgen (Sr), Breanna Thompson (Sr), Joe Bembeneke (Sr), Luca Trucano (Sr), Jeremie Knutson (Jr), Nolan Smith (Sr), Hailie Carpenter (Sr), Zofia Graaf (Jr), Makenzie Gersch (Jr), Dionna Walker (Jr), Mady Meyer (Jr), Shelby Jarchow (Jr), Austin Hay (Jr), Olivia Tilley (Jr), Tanner Gehris (Jr), Abi Solis (Jr) and Skylar Zebell (Jr).

Light Up Your House contest returns to Custer

The 16th annual Lighting Up Your House For the Holidays Contest. Enter your house or a neighbor's.

Use the entry form below or get one at Santa's mailbox at the Braidwood Fire Station #2 and return it to the mailbox by Thursday, Dec. 12. Judging will be done that weekend. Prizes will be awarded Dec. 17 at 6:30 p.m. during the Custer Town Board meeting.

For more information call Bill Marquardt at 708-372-2500.

Lighting Up Your House for the Holidays Contest

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Address: _____

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CCUSD tax meeting

COAL CITY—If anyone wants to know why the school board has an issue with transparency, watch the video on YouTube of the meeting on Dec. 4. Numerous people were there and had lots of questions, but zero answers were given. "We can talk to you later." Later? There was a room of frustrated residents complaining about no answers and they gave literally zero answers. That is the reason there is little confidence in the transparency of this board. Residents are still as confused as when the meeting started. Why isn't any local media asking these questions? The residents would like to know some answers.

Preparing for the loss

BRAIDWOOD—So why didn't the self-idolized Braidwood truth seekers share the soundoff in last week's newspaper about our community preparing now for the loss of tax revenue from the nuclear power plant and the necessity of a community to bring in business, retail and industry to help boost the property tax base? Maybe because it doesn't fit their personal bashing agenda? Maybe because it was too close to the truth for them to share? More and more people in town are catching on to their antics and seeing right through their personal agendas. What's good for the goose is good for the gander, but that's not the way this group of four or five haters sees it.

Presidential pardons

WILMINGTON—So Biden pardoned his son, what's the big deal? How many sleazeballs has Trump pardoned, including Steve Bannon, Roger Stone among many others. Remember Gerald Ford pardoned Nixon, Bush pardoned his brother, the list goes on and on. Let's see how many Trump will pardon regarding the Jan. 6 attack.

A crime family

WILMINGTON—You can bet Hunter will not be the only one Joe Biden pardons. He has a whole crime family he will pardon to stop them from telling on the big guy. History books will say the Biden administration was the most corrupt in history.

Choice is yours

BRAIDWOOD—After reading the Sound-off last week it looks like we have an election coming up in April of 2025. The former chief of police is running for mayor. Well, he is responsible for bringing our police department to where it is today. Under his leadership police officers were engaged with the city and the citizens like never before. So Braidwood if you want to see everyone come together and have the small town atmosphere return to Braidwood the choice is yours. With that being said a splash pad would be great but you can't even do the dirt work and the underground for the price quoted in the paper. So let's vote to bring our city together, stand together, fight together and win together.

Bring back bridge

COAL CITY—Open the road to share the load! When, if ever. Will Coal City fix the bridge on East Valerio Road? It's been closed for well over a year now. And now with Jewel Foods being open, Route 113 is just flat out crazy. The new stop light on Will Rd. helps to get out onto Rt. 113 only a small amount. With E. Valerio Rd. bridge fixed, citizens living north of Rt. 113 would have an easier route to get out of town heading east traveling right to the new stop light on Will Rd. Thanks, JAD any years and not single out one person.

Because they care

WILMINGTON—I would like to thank Dave Melhorn for the nice thank you note he printed in the paper. Wishing the community a blessed holiday season and for thanking Bill Wiedling and Roy Strong for service to the community. Yes Dave you are absolutely right, Bill and Roy care about the community they were born and raised in. They serve the community, they have served the community and continue to serve the community because they care. They do not do it for the accolades, thank yous or anything else. They do it because they care about the community. It's about the community it's not about themselves. So thank you Bill and thank you Roy for your service to the community and Dave I would like to thank you as well for your commitment to the American Legion and the VFW and helping veterans and also for the contribution that you give to your church. May God bless you always.

Purest form of evil

DIAMOND—Everybody say Merry

Christmas to the Woke people so maybe their brains will somehow understand that they are on a path to their own self destruction when they try to oppose something that is far greater than the earth, and the sky, which is the creator of all mankind that gives life to everyone and makes them either a male or female which can never be changed because of the way the creator made the internal parts of the human body. So if anyone tries to impose alterations and reverse the creator's wondrous human form it is the purest form of evil against mankind. Live and enjoy what you are because the creator made you to enjoy life as you are. Merry Christmas.

Are they working?

DIAMOND—During COVID public servants were allowed to work from home. Now there has been a vote to allow public servants to work from home for the next five years. Are they really working when they are not monitored? So when they get up and turn on their computer, that does not mean they are working. They could be at a store using their cell phones, or they could be busy cleaning their home or outside their home. These public servants will claim they work eight hours a day because their computer is on for eight hours. Any other worker would be fired from their job if they did not show up at their place of employment. Public servants are suppose to work for the American citizens but that is no longer true because the public servants lie about how they work hard, while all they are doing is pulling a financial scam on the public. Why are they being allowed to sit at home and collect their money and do nothing? Corruption at it's finest.

Our beloved country

WILMINGTON—Now Democrats can shout "I told you so" because Trump is doing exactly as Democrats predicted. Trump is choosing his administration deliberately to destroy our government from within and doing it on the basis of outrage and shock value which will fester beyond control just like 8 years ago with the hissing and striking inside a den of wipers. Many of Trump's cabinet choices are unqualified people who have a past of sexual allegations and others have authored Project 2025 which functions as the blueprint for a strange society in which the government dictates our free will. Trump's nominees are sycophants all of whom put party over country, and in general Trump's bedfellows are convicted, disgraced or disbarred. Hardly six months ago Trump himself was pronounced 'guilty' by a jury of his peers of 34 felonies and hardly four years ago the smell of blood, feces and urine filled the air at our nation's Capitol with a hangman's noose standing ready on the grounds. Due to the corruption of the Supreme Court, Trump is now allowed to weaponize it to eliminate his enemies with immunity by 'official act'. Who would Trump destroy? Journalists? Congressmen? Yes, Trump promised retribution toward both of the above and mentioned specific names making it advisable for President Biden to grant them pre-emptive pardons. What an ugly mess Trump has made of this our beloved country. Irene

In the long run

BRAIDWOOD—The soundoff about needing to bring business and industry into Braidwood in order to prepare for the loss of property tax revenue from the nuclear power plant hit the nail on the head. Even though the actual City of Braidwood doesn't get the property taxes from the plant, there's several other local taxing bodies who do, and rely heavily on the taxes from that power plant. If the city can bring in the car dealerships, gas stations along the interstate, hotels and restaurants, that's good for the city as a whole. Sometimes a city or village needs to give a little incentives to get a bigger return in the long run. Just because there's a few people who live near these businesses developments that don't want it near to or in view from their homes doesn't mean that it's not beneficial for the community as a whole. They are the same people who would grab their pitchforks and light their torches if their property taxes had to go up by several thousand dollars to help compensate for the loss from the nuclear power plant because their city failed to bring in businesses in anticipation of such a huge loss.

Save our trees

WILMINGTON—A line from the band Pink Floyd- "Is there anyone out there" who cares about this earth? Government doesn't. Big business doesn't. Most school systems don't and 98% of property owners don't. I am alarmed and heartbroken by the amount of trees that have been



chopped down in Brookside, Northcrest, and the rest of Wilmington. Now maybe if you come from up north Wilmington looks like a forest to you. Let us remember that up north once was forest, wetlands, dunes and an abundance of wildlife. All gone, but a tiny, tiny fragment. Now it appears folks are working on the removal of nature here. I ask people why they cut down perfectly healthy trees. These are some of the responses I have been given. I don't want leaves in my yard. I don't want to rake. I don't want to take a chance of it falling on my house. I don't want to clean my gutters. The roots have or might get into my pipes. I want a pool. The seeds get into my pool filter. The seeds get into my air conditioner. If you believe in God, which man always seems to cry out to Him when there is trouble, did God create the tree or your house? A tree cools the earth. It cleans the air. It cleans the water. It provides food and shelter. It's leaves are a natural fertilizer. The leaves turn into a rich, organic soil. Its leaves are a blanket for the earth and its creatures in winter. It is beautiful. What does a human home do for anything or anyone except for oneself? This town, the above mentioned neighborhoods, they have gotten hotter in my lifetime. I feel it. Is there anyone out there? Does anyone see it? Does anyone care?

A tragic death

WILMINGTON—The tragic death of United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson has brought renewed attention to the deep frustrations many Americans—particularly seniors—experience with the complexities of the health care system. Thirteen million seniors are on Medicare Advantage through United Healthcare, a company that denies more claims than any other insurer in the U.S. Additionally, an October report from the U.S. Senate found that United Healthcare "obstructs seniors' ability to receive post-acute care" and denies care simply to make more money. This echoes the phrase found on the ammunition used to kill Thompson: "deny, defend, depose." While no grievance justifies violence, this tragedy has amplified calls for greater transparency in health care. One potential response to these concerns is the proposed Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), floated as part of a potential second Trump administration. If Elon Musk is sincere about his intent to increase transparency, he could do so in seniors' health care by pushing for reforms such as plain-language coverage summaries, simplified appeals processes, and real-time updates on claim statuses. "Behind every denied Medicare Advantage claim is a senior in need of care. Improving transparency in health care isn't just about streamlining bureaucracy; it's about preserving dignity and ensuring compassion for individuals at their most vulnerable moments."

Shop with a cop

BRAIDWOOD—This past Thursday, my family went shopping at the Walmart in Morris. When we arrived, we saw numerous Braidwood Police Department vehicles and a Reed-Custer school bus in the parking lot and wondered what was going on. After we got inside, we saw Braidwood Police officers and even a couple of city officials inside the store with a bunch of kids. We then learned that they were all there for Braidwood's shop with a cop event. We ran into several of them as we made our way through the store and saw how excited all of the kids were to be there with our local police officers shopping for toys and other stuff for Christmas. Their smiles were absolutely enormous, both the kids and the cops. It was an amazing sight to see and very heartwarming to know that our local police department cares so much about the kids in our community. We moved to Braidwood five years ago and the local first responders have always been one of the best parts of this town.

Winterization needed

WILMINGTON—Winchester Manor apartments. They want the elderly and disabled when it gets real cold out to turn their heat up and let their water drip because if the water lines break the tenants have to pay part of the repairs. They won't caulk or winterize the doors and the cold leaks at the seams with the doors shut. There are drafts in the bedroom with cold air coming in and the closets at the floor need caulked to keep the cold air from coming through. Another thing is multi family members are living with the

tenants at these apartments and there's a truck around the back that has been sitting there for months. It hasn't moved and there are no license plates on it. They want all the tenants to do all this stuff but the management isn't doing anything to winterize the apartments. The city building inspector needs to inspect these apartments around the windows, doors and closets because there are a lot of drafts coming in. God bless the elderly, the disabled and the veterans in the USA.

Brainwashing voters

MORRIS—We just got done with the federal election and all the political signs were removed from yards and parkways thank God. Now the Morris mayor and his clerk are putting up signs all over their town for their election. I think there should be an ordinance that the signs can't be put up until 30 days before the election. All they want is to keep people brainwashed so they will vote for them so they can get themselves and others who work for the city a big pay raise. Why don't they work on getting property taxes lowered for Grundy County? The politicians want to spend all this money on the illegals and everything else but they give tax incentives to companies that come and close down like that electric bus company in Channahon. Let's get the property taxes lowered and give a tax break to senior citizens. Five thousand is not enough. Make it six or seven thousand property tax reduction for senior citizens.

Happy Holidays

WILMINGTON—I have a question for you people who demand I say Merry Christmas instead of Happy Holidays. Why is this so important to you? It isn't to Jesus.

Repugnant

BRAIDWOOD—Although Trump's cabinet is not yet complete, its combined wealth is nothing short of obscene which will undoubtedly make this administration prone to even more ethics violations than his first term. Meanwhile the middle class is likely to lose income. Remember Elon Musk's announcement that Americans must suffer economic hardships before prices improve? With a statement like that somebody should wipe that perpetual smirk off Musk's face. Furthermore, votes continue to come in from across the country and from overseas and Trump is receiving a lower percentage of votes bringing his total under 50% of the popular vote. Although Trump still won the required electoral votes, it was not a landslide and not a mandate. And with the Supreme Court putting Trump above the law, absolute power corrupts absolutely especially with endless money to feed the perversion. It's bad enough that we have lost many freedoms due to Project 2025. And now we are expected to trust Trump's filthy rich cabinet picks who cannot be trusted especially if they grabbed their assets illegally the way Trump did. Endless money, endless power. What can possibly go wrong?

It's what Republicans do

RITCHIE—Remember the warnings, remember the predictions, remember the alarms before the 2024 election? We were told that Republicans would cut Social Security and Medicare because that's what Republicans do and they're planning it already. Since the inception of social safety nets, it is the sheer joy of every red-blooded Republican to deprive Americans of financial peace of mind. Sure enough the proposal to stop Social Security checks has been in the news lately and Republicans aren't stopping there. The CFPB (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau) is also on the chopping block because Republicans already have forgotten that millions of Americans lost their life savings due to the 2008 recession of Republican George W. Bush's administration. And of course cutting inefficiency by Trump's new DOGE program is questionable because the government sector that is most inefficient is said to be the military. If cutting waste is the idea, then let's investigate the many instances of conning, grifting and corruption that took place during Trump's first term and make sure it doesn't happen again. But Trump would hardly agree to that because his gluttony at the government trough is what gives Trump a reason to live. Trump started sucking blood from the government at a very young age and has been going strong ever since.

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Chill out with Dec. 28 hike for women

The Forest Preserve District of Will County is offering a Stress-free Hike for Women: 9:30-11 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 28, at the Four Rivers Environmental Education Center, Channahon.

This women-only, naturalist-led hike will be a way to get outside for a quick fitness walk after the holiday season. Let the cool

air and a mindful walk lead you to calmness and tranquility.

After the hike, take a moment to sip on hot beverages and enjoy the views of the Des Plaines River. Free, women ages 16 or older. Register online at the event calendar at ReconnectWithNature.org by Dec. 26.

Madigan should have known to walk away

Whenever someone assures you that another person you're both dealing with "understands" the "quid pro quo," you'd be wise to run away as fast as you can and never look back.

But that's exactly how then Ald. Daniel Solis assured then House Speaker Michael Madigan in late June of 2017 that their mark – the developers of a West Loop apartment complex – would eventually be convinced to retain Madigan's property tax appeals law firm.

Solis chaired the powerful Zoning Committee, so the developers had to come through him, and Solis said they would understand the game: The developers hire Madigan's law firm and their zoning changes would be approved.

"I think they understand how this works," Solis told Madigan. "The quid pro quo."

Solis admitted on the stand during Madigan's corruption trial that what he said to Madigan was "dumb."

Madigan didn't know that the federal government was recording all his conversations with Solis. So, what was dumb about what Solis said is that Madigan might've immediately cut all ties to Solis, and Solis' federal handlers



CAPITOL FACTS
Rich Miller

would've been furious that he let the target get away.

Turns out, the real dummy was Madigan.

Madigan didn't walk away. Instead, he kept going back to Solis, only gently admonishing him weeks

later by telling Solis not to say the quiet part out loud and instructing him in the polite way of conducting business.

And then a few months later, while talking about another real estate deal, Solis asked whether the West Loop developers had signed on with Madigan's firm. Madigan didn't say, but appeared to give Solis the go-ahead to process their zoning request.

"You were contemplating processing something," Madigan said. "You should go ahead and process that."

The feds are also trying to prove that Madigan's consigliere, longtime lobbyist and fellow defendant Mike McClain wasn't just freelancing without Madigan's approval when it came to all the demands McClain was making of ComEd.

The trial so far has given the feds big wins on that point. Madigan and Solis were in discussions about the state transferring a Chinatown parking lot to the City of Chicago so

that it could be developed into a hotel, and Madigan could get the property tax business. So, he told Solis to reach out to McClain.

McClain would give the developer "some ideas about how to go about it."

A couple of months later, Solis again brought up the Chinatown parcel to Madigan. "Let me get back into it and, um, see if there's some way to find somebody that can talk to IDOT. That, that's where the decision's going to be made," Madigan said.

"I'm trying to figure out a way to approach it," Madigan later told Solis about the parcel. He appeared to be calculating how he could pass a bill to benefit his law firm without leaving any overt fingerprints.

Madigan eventually told Solis that one of the Chinatown developers would soon be receiving a call from McClain.

The effort to transfer the property extended into the spring of 2018 for several reasons, most importantly opposition from local legislators.

In March of 2018, Madigan told Solis that maybe McClain should talk to the Senator who was putting a brick on the land transfer and then explained to Solis at length how this particular legislation could shorten the time it would take to transfer the property to the city.

From there, jurors heard recordings about the intricacies of passing the bill, including who was blocking it. McClain is

heard on a recording briefing Madigan about which legislators were opposing the bill and about how the then-Secretary of Transportation was "getting squeamish" about it.

Also in March, Solis told Madigan that if Madigan could "take care of that [Chinatown] matter in May," during the end of spring session, "I'm confident they'll appreciate it and ... sign you up on after May." Madigan didn't run away then, either.

But the bill eventually died and a possible payday was missed.

On May 28, 2018, a few days before the scheduled end of spring session when there was still hope the bill would advance, McClain called a member of Madigan's House staff to tell them about the property tax transfer bill, "that deals with a developer of [Madigan's]." McClain told the staffer: "He wants to make sure he votes 'present.'"

In other words, if the feds didn't have Madigan, McClain and Solis on numerous recordings, Madigan could've officially covered his rear by voting "present" on a bill that would've potentially padded his pockets and that he'd allegedly been actively pushing behind the scenes for months on end.

Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax, a daily political newsletter, and CapitolFax.com.

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Thank You

The family of Pauline Daniell would like to thank the Wilmington Fire Department, the Wilmington Police Department, and Baskerville-Reeves Funeral Home for their quick response for our mom.

Your caring and compassion are truly appreciated.

The Pauline Daniell Family

Midewin welcome center will be closed until end of January

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service announced that the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie (NTP) supervisor's office, to include the welcome center, will be temporarily closed from December 9, 2024 to January 27, 2025 for extensive maintenance to the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system.

Midewin NTP trails, trails and hunting areas will remain open during this time. Some educational programming, to include the winter lecture series, that typically takes place in December and January will be rescheduled to a later date.

Throughout the clo-

sure, staff and partners will be assigned to alternate work locations to complete the ongoing work of restoring and administering the Forest Service's only Tallgrass Prairie.

"We had hoped to be able to update the system without closing the entire supervisor's office," said Christina Henderson, Midewin NTP's prairie supervisor. "Unfortunately, with the nature and the extent of the work that needs to be done, that isn't possible."

During the winter months of 2024, the HVAC system's inability to keep the temperature regulated led to frozen pipes that eventually broke.

"We've seen over the last

few years that our HVAC system simply couldn't keep up with the extremely cold days in the winter, and the hot days in the summer," said Henderson. "For the health and safety of our staff and our partners, this overhaul of the system has to be done."

For more information please contact the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Visitor Center at (815) 423-6370 or email SM.FS.Midewin_RSVP@usda.gov.

The USDA Forest Service has for more than 100 years brought people and communities together to answer the call of conservation. Grounded in world-class science and technology- and rooted in

communities-the Forest Service connects people to nature and to each other.

The Forest Service cares for shared natural resources in ways that promote lasting economic, ecological, and social vitality. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners, maintains the largest wild-land fire and forestry research organizations in the world.

The Forest Service also has either a direct or indirect role in stewardship of about 900 million forested acres within the U.S., of which over 130 million acres are urban forests where most Americans live.

Gas prices dipping below \$3/gallon

Average gasoline prices in Illinois have fallen 8.8 cents per gallon in the last week, averaging \$3.11/g, according to GasBuddy's survey of 4,378 stations in Illinois.

Prices in Illinois are 5.3 cents per gallon lower than a month ago and stand 14.2 cents per gallon lower than a year ago.

That may be true in general, but in our coverage area gas stations seem to have a difficult time keeping gas below \$3/g.

In Wilmington, expect to pay anywhere from \$2.88/g at Mohsen up to \$3.07/g at Circle K. Braidwood gas will run you \$3.03/g at BP, or up to \$3.15/g at Casey's.

Coal City gas prices are \$2.99/g across the board. Morris gas ranges from \$2.94/g at Casey's, up to \$3.09/g at Amoco.

Bourbonnais comes in lowest with gas ranging from \$2.77/g at Gas N Wash, up to \$2.83/g at Circle K.

"The national average has finally fallen below \$3 per gallon, and it couldn't come at a better time for motorists with the holidays upon us. One would need to count over 1,300 days since we've seen the national average this low, with the affordability of gasoline at its lowest non-COVID level since 2015," said Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy.

"With average gas prices in 35 states and nearly 110,000 stations below \$3 per gallon, Americans are putting in just 5.44 minutes of work to buy a gallon."

The lowest price in the state Monday was \$2.49/g while the highest was \$4.59/g, a difference of \$2.10/g.

Wish your customers a Merry Christmas

Parent, grandparents and children love this!

We have children from area schools drawing Christmas art to be featured in our Dec. 25 issue.

Your business can sponsor a child's drawing to send out a season's greetings message to your customers. Parents, grandparents, and children comb through the ads looking at all the businesses who supported these community pages. Make sure your business isn't left out by scheduling TODAY.

Deadline is Dec. 18

Merry Christmas

Artist Name - School
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THANK YOU & MERRY CHRISTMAS!

I would like to thank following individuals and groups for helping to make the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce's annual Christmas parade such a huge success. The City of Wilmington, Adam Zink, Justin Dole & Wilmington Police Dept., Todd Friddle & Wilmington Fire Dept., James Gretencord & Public Works Dept., Kirstin Van Duyne & Wilmington Park District. A huge thank you to Marty & Veronica Orr for giving us another successful parade. Dennis Housman & Rich Princko from the Wilmington ESDA and all the ESDA volunteers. Santa Claus, Nancy Kirwin, Sarah Krohn, Eric Fisher & the Free Press Newspapers, Ralph "Tuffy" Stevens, Betty Evans & David Quigley. Band Director Ellen Geogeff and the WHS marching band, and to the ShowCats for performing under the gazebo and getting everyone into the Christmas spirit. D'Orazio Ford for donating a truck for the parade. Wilmington High School football players Gavin Gabriel, Joe Van Duyne, Alex Will, Hunter Osipavious & Hannah Basinger for helping Marty. Without all your help this would not have been possible! Thank you again.

Steve Evans

Wilmington Chamber of Commerce, President

Call 815-476-7966 to be included

email: efisher@fpnusa.com or fpnpatti@comcast.net

Grundy Bank thankful to all who gave to coat drive

Grundy Bank's annual coat drive kicked off on Oct. 7 and turned out to be a huge success for the local communities. This year's coat drive brought in around 400 winter coats as well as over 100 items in scarves, hats, gloves and

winter boots. All donations collected will benefit the families in Grundy County and Southern Will County. All winter items collected were dispersed to We Care of Grundy County in Morris, Our Caring Closet in

Wilmington and The Forgotten Garden in Braceville. "Hosting a local coat drive is a powerful way to bring warmth and comfort to those in need during the chilly months. It fosters a sense of community and

compassion, ensuring everyone has the means to stay warm and healthy." Said Kevin Olson, President & CEO of Grundy Bank. "By coming together, we can make a tangible difference in our neighbors' lives."

For years, Grundy Bank has been hosting this drive with the goal to provide warm winter coats and accessories to those in need during this winter season. The kindness and compassion received from individuals, businesses and organizations who have donated throughout this drive has been tremendous.

Grundy Bank is committed to continuing this drive each year and believes it is a testament to the communities' support and generosity.

"This initiative not only provides those in need with essential warmth but also closely brings our community closer and shows the compassion and collaboration we have." Said Christine Mendez, Marketing & Sales Director with Grundy Bank. "Together, we can create and continue to support our local communities from the harshness of winter weather."

For more information on Grundy Bank's annual coat drive contact Christine Mendez, Marketing & Sales Director at 815-513-2241 or cmendez@grundy.bank.



THE GRUNDY BANK coat drive was a big success with over 400 winter coats collected to help families in need. Delivering coats, scarves, hats and gloves last week were Grundy Bank Wilmington branch manager Stefany Mickelson (from left) and teller Amy Castillo. Accepting the items at Our Caring Closet, where they will be given away, are Ruth Lockwood and Anthony Ritz.



Jennifer awarded Chamber trophy

THE WILMINGTON CHAMBER of Commerce awarded the Employee of the Month trophy to Jennifer Juknuis who is often behind the courtesy counter at Berkot's Super Foods in Wilmington. Chamber President Steve Evans presented Juknuis with the trophy noting that she was nominated by a customer who stated "She is always there when I come to shop, day or night, and always very nice." If you like to nominate a worker at a Wilmington business who you feel deserves the traveling trophy email your comments to sevens2546@yahoo.com.

Braidwood Lions to collect used Christmas lights

The Braidwood Lions Club is collecting used/non-working strands of Christmas lights thru Jan. 31.

Collection bins will be located inside Whitmore Ace Hardware in Braidwood and Coal City. The Lions will also accept them during the club's Christmas Tree sale fundraiser during hours of operation.

All proceeds from the recycling will benefit the Braidwood Lions Club's sight

and sound services for the visually and hearing impaired residing in the Braidwood, Godley and Shadow Lakes communities.

Please place all strands of lights into plastic bags before placing them into the collection bins.

For more information please call (815)791-8093 or visit www.braidwoodlionsclub.org.

JJC receives \$3 million to boost clean energy workforce

Joliet Junior College (JJC) will receive a \$3,086,111 grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) to implement the Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program.

This transformative initiative aims to expand training in clean energy-related fields.

The program, funded annually for the next three years, will provide essential skills and opportunities in the growing clean energy sector.

JJC will offer training for electric vehicle assembly technicians, residential energy auditors, and more, ensuring a diverse and skilled workforce ready to meet the demands of the clean energy industry.

"This grant will enable us to support students and community members in pursuing careers that drive economic growth and sus-

tainability," said Ken Santiago, Dean of Applied Arts and Workforce Education and Training at JJC.

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OBITUARIES

Thomas W. Atherton Jr.



WILMINGTON—Thomas "Tom" Atherton, Jr., 82 of Wilmington, passed away peacefully on Sunday Dec. 1, 2024, with his family at his side. Born on June 7, 1942 in Chicago, Tom was the son of Thomas and Margaret (McKay) Atherton. Tom attended New Lenox grade and high schools. Tom was a veteran of the U.S. Army. In 1960 he married Sandra "Sandy" Stephens. He was an Operating Engineer and member of I.U.O.E. Local 150. Tom was also a 50 year member of the A.F. & A.M. Matteson Lodge No. 175.

Tom enjoyed being with his family. He enjoyed playing cards and watching sports on television. He also enjoyed cutting grass and taking care of his yard which he kept in park like condition.

Survivors include his wife of 64 years, Sandy; his sons, Thomas (Tari) Atherton of Florida; John (Christine) Atherton of Arizona; his daughter Christine (Chris) Patterson of Braidwood; eight grandchildren: Kristie (Marc) Girardet of Oregon;



Katie (Mike) Bols of Mazon, Kellie Calderon of Coal City; Olivia (Gent) Silberkleit of California; Jared (Kelly) Atherton of Florida; Alex (Chris) DeLaRosa of Braidwood; Isaac (Emma) Sawyer of Kentucky; and Steven Patterson of Braidwood; seven great-grandchildren: Drake McPherson of Florida; Haelyn McPherson of Oregon; Michael Bols of Mazon; Theo, Evan and Gillian Calderon of Coal City; and Barrett "Bear" DeLaRosa of Braidwood.

Tom was preceded in death by his parents and a son-in-law, Bart Sawyer.

Cremation services and arrangements have been made under the direction of Genuine Care Cremations. Family and friends are encouraged to sign the online guest book, upload photographs at genuinecarecremation.com and share Tom's memorial page via social media.

Interment will be at Abraham Lincoln Cemetery in Elwood, IL. and a celebration of life will be held at a later date.

Joe Cora

COAL CITY—On the evening of Dec. 7, 2024, the sky was filled with the most vibrant sunset. This was a beautiful sight that brought calm and peace to the hearts of the family and friends as Joe Cora, born May 20, 1968, passed away peacefully and pain-free later that evening.

Joe was a man, as the Bible references in 1 Corinthians, 9:22, that was all things to all people. Joe's love and forgiveness knew no bounds. When he loved you, he loved you with his whole self.

Joe was a hard worker. He ran his own roofing company, but some of his greatest work had nothing to do with earning a living. He did his best work when he was mentoring people who suffered with addiction or being a father figure to children who needed the guidance only a loving father could provide. He was a selfless man who cared about people. Joe was a kind and forgiving man. He was a dedicated son, loving brother, fun uncle and faithful friend.

Joe's greatest passion was for his family. Those whose hearts will forever be changed by his absence are his wife, Lori Cora; his daughters: Michaela Phillips (Matt Johnson), Alana Phillips and his baby girl, AnnMarie Cora; grandchildren, Macklan and Merrick (Squishy); his sisters: Kathie (Doug) Favero, Teri Cora, and Jan (Mark) Keefer; mother-in-law, RuthAnn,



(the late James) Brady; father-in-law, Larry Bushue. Also missing his smiling face are treasured nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews, aunts, uncles and close friends

Joe was preceded in death by his parents, John and June Cora; father-in-law, James Brady, and brother-in-law, Troy Bushue.

In Joe's final weeks and days in our midst, he enjoyed a "living funeral." His days were filled with family and close friends who told stories, laughed with him, cried with him and shared loving words and hugs with him.

Cremation rights have been accorded. At his wishes, no public service will be held. The family will be honoring his wishes.

In lieu of flowers, preferred memorials may be made as gifts in Joe's memory to the family to establish an education fund for his daughter, AnnMarie.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the online guest book at www.ReevesFuneral.com, upload photographs, and share Joe's memorial page via social media.

Cremation services and arrangements have been made under the direction and care of Reeves & Baskerville Funeral Homes and Crematory in Coal City.

Joan M. Ferari

WILMINGTON—Joan M. Ferari, 81, of Wilmington, passed away Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024 at Riverside Medical Center in Kankakee.

Born Jan. 18, 1943 in Chicago, Joan Marie was a daughter of Stanley and Eve Erchul. She was raised and educated in Chicago and on Aug. 28, 1971, she married Charles Ferari Sr. Joan was an avid reader and a woman of strong faith. She will be remembered for being a loving wife and mother who cherished her family above all else.

Survivors include her son, Charles "Chuck" Ferari Jr., of Wilmington; three siblings: Carol Porter, Dan Erchul and Dave Erchul and three nieces and nephews.

Joan was preceded in death by her

parents, Stanley and Eve; her husband, Chuck Ferari Sr., and one brother, Rich Erchul.

A visitation will be held at Baskerville Funeral Home, 700 E. Kahler Rd., in Wilmington on Saturday, Dec. 14, 2024 from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. Graveside services will immediately follow at Oakwood Cemetery in Wilmington, where Joan will be laid to rest with her husband, Chuck.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the online guest book at www.ReevesFuneral.com, upload photographs, and share Joan's memorial page via social media.

Funeral services and arrangements have been made under the direction and care of Reeves & Baskerville Funeral Homes and Crematory in Wilmington.



MORRIS—Pastor Caleb B. Counterman, 48, of Morris, passed away suddenly on Sunday, Dec. 8, 2024 as a result of injuries sustained in a motor vehicle accident.

Born July 25, 1976 in Stroudsburg, PA, Caleb was the headstrong, eldest son of Dr. Andrew and Jo Ellen Counterman. He was raised in upstate New York spending countless hours in the woods making forts with his brothers. They moved to Maryland during Caleb's high school years, where he graduated from Severna Park High School with the class of 1994. Caleb finished his time in college at Maranatha Baptist University with a degree in business, a fervent burden for pastoral ministry, and a fiancé.

He married the love of his life, Jess, and began working on his Master of Divinity at Lansdale Theological Seminary, graduating in 2005. For 10 years, he served on the pastoral staff at Anchor Baptist Church (1998-2008); In 2003 and 2006 respectively, he and Jess welcomed their two strapping young boys, Levi and Jared. From 2008-2023, Caleb was pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Morris, completing a Master's in Apologetics, and nearly finishing his Doctorate of Pastoral Ministry. He and his family were currently serving at SouthField Church in Channahon.

Caleb was fun-loving and always up for a family jeep ride, theological debate, political discussion, Cowboys football game, or some good hot wings. He fiercely loved his wife, telling and showing her daily that he loved her. He fiercely loved his sons, spending quality time teaching them to be men. He fiercely loved his family, his brothers and parents becoming some of his best friends as an adult. He just loved people.

Most importantly though, he loved God and lived to know Him and make Him known to others. While Caleb's life seems too short, his impact was far-reaching. His life of service included: Pastoral ministry, Grundy County Board member, soccer coach, counselor, Big Brother program, Child Advocacy Council, mission's trips, and numerous other volunteer positions that

allowed him a chance to speak God's truth and love into people's lives. He was known for his selfless, caring, wise, timely, patient, honest actions and words. He was a man of integrity. Our loss is Heaven's gain. Caleb wanted his life to reflect the good God he served. He succeeded. His life's verse was found in Titus 2:11-14, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people...(and we are) looking for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for Himself a people for his own possession eager for good deeds."

Survivors include his wife, Jessica; sons, Levi and Jared; parents, Andrew and Jo Ellen Counterman; brothers, Luke (Liesl) Counterman and Simeon (Bonnie) Counterman; in-laws, Gerry and Rae Ann Smith; brothers-in-law, Ed (Alyssa) Smith and Aaron Smith; nephew and nieces: Elijah, Azriel, Eden (JP), Cana, Titus, Kezia, Lydia, Timothy, Ezra, Lucy and Elliott.

Per Caleb's wishes, cremation rites are being accorded.

A memorial visitation will be held at SouthField Church, 24557 W. Eames St. in Channahon on Friday, Dec. 13, 2024 from 2 p.m. until 3:30 p.m. Memorial services will follow the visitation at 4 p.m.

Those who wish to join the services virtually may view the livestream of the service provided on Caleb's tribute page at www.ReevesFuneral.com.

Interment will be private.

Preferred memorials may be made as gifts in Caleb's memory to the family for distribution to local charities of their choosing. If you wish to send flowers, the family requests that you send poinsettias in honor of Caleb's love of Christmas.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the online guestbook, upload photographs, and share Caleb's memorial page via social media.

Cremation services and memorial arrangements have been made under the direction and care of Reeves & Baskerville Funeral Homes and Crematory in Coal City.

Barbara K. Cooley

COAL CITY—Barbara K. Cooley, 75, of Coal City, passed away on Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024 at Morris Hospital.

She was born on Jan. 5, 1949 in Chicago, to Bob and Martha (nee Terry) Crain. She grew up in the Skokie area. Barbara married Alan V. Cooley Sr. on Sept. 24, 1972. Together they raised three sons. Barbara was a devoted and loving wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Being with her family was the joy of her life.

She is survived by her husband of 52 years, Alan; her sons, Alan V. Cooley Jr., of



Lockport; David P. (Stephanie) Cooley, of Coal City and Scott W. Cooley, of Chicago. Also surviving are six grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Bob and Martha Crain.

Cremation rites have been accorded. There will be no services.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the online guestbook at www.ferrarifuneral.com.

Ferrari Funeral Services in Coal City are entrusted with arrangements.

Gerald Halm



WILMINGTON—Gerald Halm, 84, of Wilmington, formerly of Midlothian, IL, passed away Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024 at Ascension Villa Franciscan Nursing Home in Joliet.

Born July 17, 1940 in Peru, IL, Gerald William was a son of William and Dorothy (Haupt) Halm. He was raised and educated in Chicago and Worth, IL, and worked as a Teamster for many years. Gerald was an avid outdoorsman, looking for any opportunity to go fishing whenever he could. He was a member of many of the local area clubs, including The Gooselake Association, Braidwood Recreation Club, and the Alsip Sportsman's Club. Being outdoors is what truly made Gerald happy, but he also took pleasure in traveling across the country.

Survivors include his sister and brother, Shirley (Dennis) Thoms, of Braidwood and Phillip (Lucille) Halm, of Morris; nieces and nephews: Jeff Thoms, Keith Thoms, Phillip Halm, Christopher Halm, Jennifer Halm, and Rose McGuire; as well

as many numerous cousins and his good friends: Walt, Mike and Greg.

Gerald was preceded in death by his parents and his wife, Genevieve Halm on Jan. 31, 2011.

Cremation rites are being accorded, and the family will receive friends for a memorial visitation at Baskerville Funeral Home, 700 E. Kahler Rd., in Wilmington on Monday, Dec. 16, 2024 from 10 a.m. until the time of memorial service at 11 a.m. Inurnment with full military honors will immediately follow the services at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood, where Gerald will be laid to rest with his wife.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the online guest book at www.ReevesFuneral.com, upload photographs, and share Gerald's memorial page via social media.

Cremation services and memorial arrangements have been made under the direction and care of Reeves & Baskerville Funeral Homes and Crematory in Wilmington.

Walter Stromquist



WILMINGTON—Walter "Wally" Stromquist, 84, of Wilmington, formerly of Chicago and Richton Park, IL, passed away peacefully on Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024 at his home.

Born July 4, 1940 in Chicago, Walter William was a son of Carl and Frances (Schuricht) Stromquist. He was raised and educated in Chicago and graduated from Manley Vocational High School with the class of 1958. Wally then served in the United States Army from 1958 until his honorable discharge in 1962. On Nov. 9, 1963, he married Patricia Gricus in Chicago, with whom he would share 61 years of marriage. Wally worked as an electrician with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 134 in Chicago, working diligently to provide for his family for 25 years until retirement in 2005.

He was a member of St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church in Wilmington where he was a member of the Father George Kuzma Knights of Columbus Council #11149. With his free time, Wally enjoyed using his talents and creativity to make many things through woodworking. He was also a die hard Chicago White Sox fan, but he was the biggest fan of his grandchildren. Wally was a proud grandfather who made it to every baseball game, dance recitals, or concerts that his grandchildren participated in. He



was a true family man, whose faith and strong work ethic were important to him, and he was blessed to have the love of his wife, children and grandchildren, and any who were lucky enough to be called a friend.

Survivors include his wife, Pat Stromquist, of Wilmington and his children: Theresa Solick and Cynthia Stromquist, both of Bourbonnais and Eric (Holly) Stromquist, of St. John, IN; and four grandchildren: Danielle Solick, of Bradley, IL; Nicole Solick, of Bourbonnais and Nathan and Owen Stromquist, both of St. John, IN.

Wally was preceded in death by his parents and one grandson, Jason Solick.

A private Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated, and Wally will be laid to rest at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood with Full Military Honors.

Preferred memorials may be made as gifts in Wally's memory to St. Rose Catholic Church, the Wilmington Fire Department, or to Uplifted Care Hospice.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the online guest book at www.ReevesFuneral.com, upload photographs, and share Wally's memorial page via social media.

Funeral services and arrangements have been made under the direction and care of Reeves & Baskerville Funeral Homes and Crematory in Wilmington.

State Police seeing drop in road shootings

After extensive investigations, Illinois State Police (ISP) Zone 1 Violent Crime Unit East special agents obtained charges in all five Chicago area expressway shooting homicides that occurred in 2023.

"With intelligent investigations, technology, and good old-fashioned persistence, ISP special agents were able to not just clear 100% of Chicago area expressway shooting homicides in 2023, but obtain criminal charges in 100% of cases," said Illinois State Police Director Brendan F. Kelly.

"We will continue to relentlessly pur-

sue justice for the victims of gun violence."

ISP obtained first-degree murder charges in each of the five Chicago area expressway shooting homicides in 2023.

Those shooting occurred on Interstate 55 northbound, two on Interstate 57 northbound, Interstate 290 eastbound, west of Laramie Avenue and on Interstate 94 northbound at 138th Street.

Chicago area expressway shootings are down 32% compared to this time last year, 51% compared to 2022, and 71% compared to 2021.

Low income consumers protected from having their heat shut off

The Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) is reminding consumers that Illinois' winter weather rule is in effect through March 31.

The winter weather rule prohibits utilities from disconnecting eligible customers who use electric or gas as their primary source of home heating.

"The state's winter weather rule offers peace-of-mind for individuals and families who might otherwise be struggling to stay warm during the coldest months of the year," said ICC Chairman Doug Scott.

To protect Illinoisans during dangerous cold, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) participants; electric space heating customers; and military personnel and veterans cannot be disconnected if they fall behind on their utility bills. The rule excludes disconnec-

tions related to theft, tampering, or safety.

The cold weather rule also protects residential customers from disconnections when temperatures are forecasted to be at or below 32 F, and on days preceding holidays and weekends when the forecast is expected to drop to freezing.

To protect against disconnection, customers with past due balances should contact their utility to enroll in a Deferred Payment Agreement (DPA). If your electric or gas service has already been disconnected, contact your utility directly to see if you qualify for reconnection at less than the full amount owed.

Other residential customers or master-metered apartment buildings who used gas or electricity as the primary source of space heating equipment during the previous winter cannot be disconnected for non-

payment unless: the utility has offered the customer a DPA with a maximum down payment of 10 percent; provided the customer with contact information for public and private aid agencies; the customer refused to enter a DPA; and all disconnection notices provisions have been met.

Households struggling to pay their utility bills are encouraged to apply for LIHEAP annually with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

Natural gas customers who qualify for LIHEAP or whose incomes are at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty line are eligible for a monthly discount on their gas bills through the state's new low-income discount rates.

Contact the ICC's Consumer Services Division at 1-800-524-0795 for further guidance.

Whispering Pines Reindeer Ranch & Tree Farm delivers holiday glee

BY CELESTE HUTTES
ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU
PARTNERS

Every morning, Randy and Beth Espe watch reindeer frolic outside their kitchen window as they sip their morning coffee - a delightful daily ritual they have fondly dubbed the "rodeo."

Santa himself would envy their view.

"When they go out into the pasture, they get giddy because it's cool, and that's their playtime," Randy says of the reindeer. "They run, they jump, they kick, they spin. It's pretty amazing to see."

And so, the day begins at Whispering Pines Reindeer Ranch & Tree Farm in Shabbona, where the Espe family's labor of love grew into a beloved holiday tradition for countless families.

Reining in holiday cheer

What might seem an unlikely retirement gig comes as a slight surprise to those who know Randy well.

"People would bring me abandoned and orphaned animals when I was young," Randy says. "We raised a lot of raccoons, a pet fox, a little bit of everything. I always dreamed about raising white-tailed deer at some point. But reindeer turned out to be a better choice because they are domesticated. You can snap a halter on them and walk them around on a lead rope - and you can just sit and love on them."

His dream of deer became a reality after Beth retired from Northern Illinois University and Randy wrapped up a 40-year career in the seed business. As they started a second act in life, the couple set aside 18 acres to grow the small Christmas tree operation they began years earlier on the family farm.

As Randy researched ways to promote Christmas trees, he discovered Hardy's Reindeer Ranch in Rantoul. He visited owner Mark Hardy for some tips and promptly fell in love with reindeer.

"In hindsight, I wish I had listened better to Mark," Randy says. "He told me to take all the money I was going to spend on Christmas trees and buy another reindeer or two. Reindeer have turned into our major focus, and they are actually less work than the Christmas trees."

Before buying any reindeer of their own, the Espes joined the Reindeer Owners and Breeders Association (ROBA) and the Reindeer Farmers Association (RFA) to learn



Photo by Nathan Lambrecht/Journal Communications

WHISPERING PINES REINDEER Ranch & Tree Farm owner Randy Espe brings holiday glee to seasonal events with his reindeer.

how to responsibly breed and care for reindeer. By 2018, they felt ready to welcome their first four reindeer from Alaska. Today, their herd numbers more than a dozen.

Arctic adaptability
A close but more laid-back cousin to the caribou, reindeer represent a distinct subspecies and long-time friends to humans.

"The Laplanders domesticated reindeer thousands of years ago," says Randy, referring to the Sami people of the northern regions of Scandinavia. "Reindeer are to the Laplanders what the buffalo was to the American Indian."

Far from their native lands in the Arctic and mountainous regions of eastern Europe, Siberia and Scandinavia, reindeer living in Illinois require special care. According to Randy, ticks and heat present the biggest challenges.

Reindeer delight in frigid winter weather. During warmer months, the reindeer typically stay in the barn throughout the day, emerging at dawn and dusk to graze in cooler temperatures.

Those amazing antlers - grown by both males and females - also present a serious safety hazard for reindeer. Sprawling like a tree canopy, the antlers can easily become wedged in a fence or gate.

"Reindeer antlers go in all different directions," Randy says. "It's one of the bigger challenges of working with them. We've done everything we can to make our fencing safer and try to eliminate places they can get caught."

Randy notes the steep

learning curve involved with raising a nonnative animal and the importance of joining organizations like RFA and ROBA to learn from others' experiences.

"A lot of products you might typically use for farm animals are not labeled for reindeer," Randy says. "We medicate them like sheep, feed them like a cow because they're ruminant, and treat their hair and skin like a horse because they're sensitive."

Magical moments

The Espes have also learned reindeer have a magic all their own. With their friendly natures and impressive appearance, the Espes' reindeer often outshine Santa at the many holiday events they attend.

"The reindeer always create a lot of excitement," Randy says. "Kids just get giddy, and their eyes light up. It's heartwarming to see how much happiness they bring."

Every Thanksgiving weekend, the Espes open their ranch to the public for a holiday experience, complete with Santa, reindeer and countless Christmas trees. Eight varieties of evergreen trees grow at Whispering Pines Reindeer Ranch & Tree Farm, and 2024 marks the first year you can cut your own.

You will also find the Espe family and their reindeer at holiday festivals, Christmas parades and tree-lighting ceremonies across northern and central Illinois throughout the holiday season. To further delight young visitors, Randy and Beth's three daughters dress up as elves.

Beth recalls a young boy named Fritz who was only mildly excited to see

blessed to get to see that every day. Reindeer have become part of who we are. And the way they make people feel is magical."

This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit ILFBpartners.com.

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Catholic Charities' Mobile Food Pantry will be distributing food on Monday, Dec. 16, from 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. at St. Lawrence Church (135 Rice Road in South Wilmington) in the church parking lot (rain or shine).

Catholic Charities and the Northern Illinois Food Bank have partnered to deliver nutritious food (meat, produce and nonperishable items) to people in need.

Participants are asked to stay in their cars. The Mobile Food Pantry will use a "drive thru" method to distribute pre-packed groceries.

You do not have to be Catholic to participate. Catholic Charities helps people of all faiths and beliefs. For more information about Catholic Charities, please visit catholiccharitiesjoliet.org.

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Concerns about dish soap being bad for the planet

Dear EarthTalk: Are mainstream dish soaps really that bad for the planet? And if so, what are some greener alternatives?
-- P McGrath, Boulder, CO

Popular dish soaps often claim to easily tackle grease, leave dishes sparkling clean and uphold commitments to sustainability and safety. But these promises are often misleading.

These products may deliver on cleaning power,

EARTH TALK

Questions & Answers About Our Environment

but they often come at a high cost to human health, animal welfare and the environment. Many well-known dish soaps contain synthetic chemicals and

additives that are harmful. The main chemicals in dish soaps include Methylisothiazolinone, 4-dioxane, and fragrance and dye additives. Methylisothiazolinone is a synthetic preservative which inhibits the growth of bacteria and fungi, helping to give sponges a long useful life.

The chemical is also a skin irritant for many and highly toxic in aquatic environments. 4-dioxane, though not intentionally

added into dish soaps, is the byproduct of other chemical reactions. As a recognized groundwater pollutant, 4-dioxane is notoriously difficult to filter out during water treatment. The lemony-fresh scent many associate with cleanliness comes from synthetic fragrances, which act as air and aquatic pollutants. Dyes, which create visual appeal, are persistent pollutants that can linger in the environment for decades, contaminating waterways.

The environmental harm of dish soap extends beyond usage to its production. The industry ranks as the fourth-largest contributor to toxic pollution, with weighty impacts on com-

munities near production facilities.

The factories emit high levels of harmful chemicals, worsening climate change and exposing local populations to increased cancer risks. The toxic footprint also extends along transportation routes, especially from South Carolina through Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

Luckily, there are several options that are better for the environment and individual health. Cleancult Liquid Dish Soap is made from plant bases and does not use animal testing.

It cleans efficiently, is easy on sensitive skin, does not contain harmful chemical, and received an "A"

environmental rating. Dr. Bronner's Pure Castile Liquid Soap, generally known as a camping dish soap, is another grade "A" certified soap with strong Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles guiding production.

It uses basic ingredients, designed to be safe in waterways.

Koala EcoNatural Dish Soap is made without synthetic fragrances, using essential oils instead, and holds two toxic chemical-free certifications. These alternatives are available at a slightly higher price point, but are much worth the investment.

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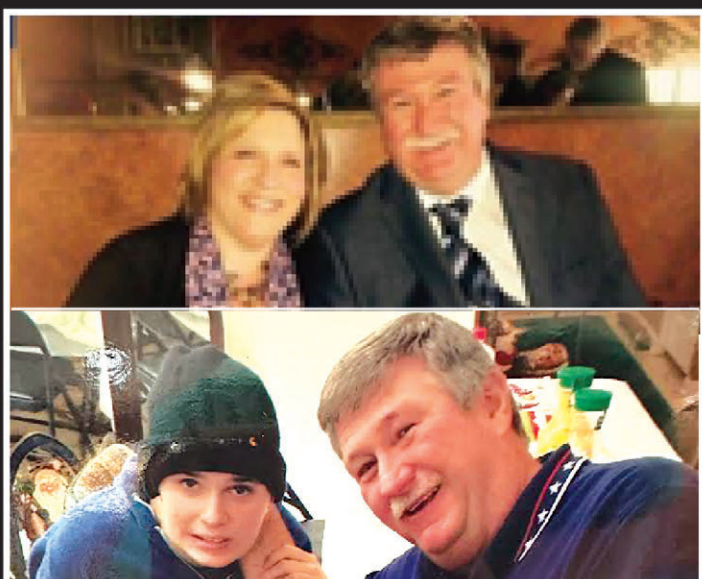
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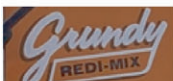
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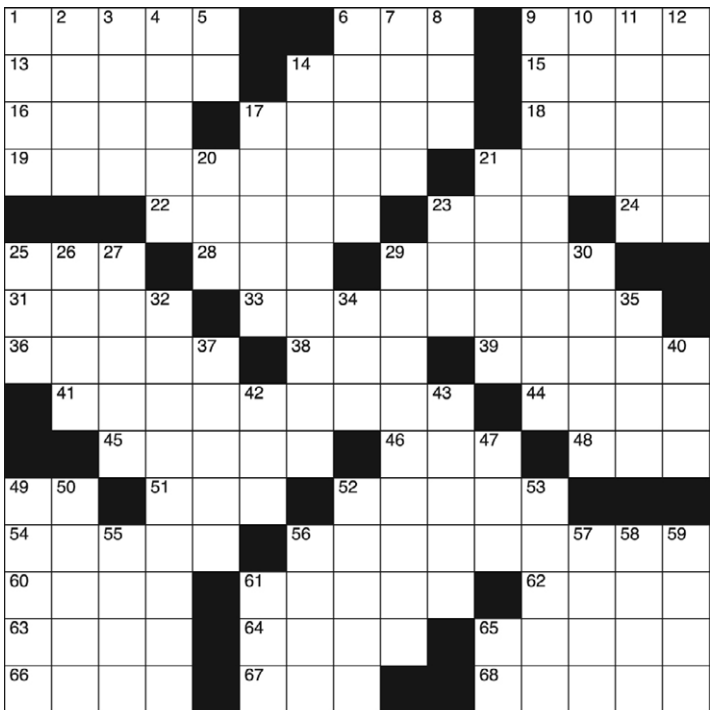
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25. "The Godfather" character Johnny
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29. City in Zambia
31. A type of beginning
33. Numb
36. Gurus
38. Small, gray-headed crow
39. Vehicle type
41. Disorders

44. One point east of southeast
45. Indian soldier
46. Tree type
48. Midway between south and southeast
49. It cools your home
51. Corn comes on it
52. Ship's deck
54. A way to bake
56. Improvised
60. Butterfly genus
61. Baseball fields have them
62. Designated space

CLUES DOWN

1. One-time Aaron Rodgers target
2. Wings
3. Overly studious person
4. They protect your valuables
5. The Volunteer State
6. Non-hydraulic cement

7. Horse mackerel
8. Jackson and Diddley are two
9. Splendid displays
10. Mountain in NE Greece
11. A daughter or your brother or sister
12. German surname
14. Having more than one husband at a time
17. Romanian city
20. Energy
21. Makes less hot
23. Gas diffusion electrode
25. Former CIA
26. Set an example for others
27. Support of a particular person
29. One from the Big Apple
30. Mountain range
32. Violate the sanctity of something
34. Supervises flying
35. Talks
37. Persian male given name
40. Born of
42. Forcibly take one's possessions
43. Discounts
47. Knockouts
49. Posh Colorado destination
50. Form of therapy
52. British rock band
53. Type of virus (abbr.)
55. The U. of Miami mascot is one
56. Volcanic crater
57. Middle Eastern nation
58. Sinn __, Irish organization
59. Ethiopian lake
61. Bits per inch (abbr.)
65. Equally

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7	8			9	3			
		4		7		9		
2	3				6		5	7
							1	
3							8	
	4		8	1			7	
	7				9			1



1	4	9	6	8	2	8	7	9
8	7	9	9	1	8	2	7	6
6	8	2	7	9	7	9	1	8
2	1	8	7	9	6	7	9	8
7	9	4	9	8	1	6	8	2
8	9	6	2	7	8	7	9	1
7	2	1	8	6	9	9	8	7
9	8	7	8	2	9	1	6	7
9	6	8	1	4	7	8	2	9

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Photo by Eric Fisher

SIDELINE SUPPORT—Reed-Custer wrestlers encourage Brock Billingsley to make his move while battling Dominic Lewis of Princeton in the 150-pound bout last week. Billingsley scored often, getting a 12-1 major decision.



Photo by Eric Fisher

QUICK WORK—Reed-Custer's Dominic Alaimo needed only :45 seconds to pin his Princeton opponent during the first home meet of the season.



Photo by Eric Fisher

FINAL SQUEEZE—Comet Cole Harris hangs on to pin Princeton's Jacob Paul in the first period at 113 pounds.



Photo by Eric Fisher

WORKING IT—Reed-Custer's Jeremy Eggleston outmuscles his opponent at 138 pounds, getting a fall at the 2:00 mark.

Comet wrestlers off to a perfect start

On Saturday, the Reed-Custer wrestling team traveled to Prairie Central High School to compete in the North-South Duals. Reed-Custer battled hard and finished the day 4-0. The Comets defeated El-Paso Gridley 45-31, Monticello 48-32, Prairie Central 67-10 and Hoopeston Area 38-37. The Comets are now 6-0.

On Tuesday they opened their season hosting Morris and Princeton at beautiful Comet Gymnasium. Both duals had great matches and the coaches were super proud of the effort.

Reed-Custer started with a W against Princeton, 52-30. Going into the Morris dual, RC knew they were a very talented, tough team. The dual came down to the last match with Christian Mounts getting the pin ending the dual in a tie at 35-35. RC won 36-35 on tiebreak criteria.

Reed-Custer 36, Morris 35

106—Owen Sater (M) over Colton Drinkwine dec 6-0
113—Paxton Valentine (M) over Cole Harris TF 23-3
120—Brandon Anderson (M) over Kaaden Wood fall 1:29
126—Brock Claypool (M) over Tyson Whittum fall 1:36
132—Aidyn Taylor (M) over Jayden Sanchez MD 17-5
138—Jeremy Eggleston (RC) over Carvotta dec 16-9
144—Jacob Meloun (M) over Maxymilian Lichaj fall 2:24
150—Kolsyn Payne (RC) over

Jordan Martinez fall 3:02
157—Andrew Peterson (M) over Brock Billingsley TF 15-0
165—Reed Newbrough (RC) over Jeffery Martinez TF 18-3
175—Nathan Vogler (RC) over Aiden Whennen fall 3:21
190—Aiden Shultz (RC) over forfeit
215—Dominic Alaimo (RC) over Malachi Congo dec 5-1
285—Christian Mounts (RC) over Ziaire Davis fall 0:43

Reed-Custer 52, Princeton 30

106—Colton Drinkwine (RC) over Brayden Bickett fall 1:29
113—Cole Harris (RC) over Jacob Paull fall 1:42
120—Kaaden Wood (RC) over Allister Swanson fall 0:53
126—Jaydon Cooke (P) over Ryder McGee fall 1:27
132—Kane Dauber (P) over Jayden Sanchez fall 0:20
138—Jeremy Eggleston (RC) over Corbin Brown fall 2:00
144—Ace Christiansen (P) over Maxymilian Lichaj fall 3:44
150—Brock Billingsley (RC) over Dominic Lewis MD 12-1
157—Kolsyn Payne (RC) over forfeit
165—Casey Etheridge (P) over Reed Newbrough fall 1:51
175—Nathan Vogler (RC) over forfeit
190—Aiden Shultz (RC) over forfeit
215—Dominic Alaimo (RC) over Eli Berlin fall 0:45
285—Cade Odell (P) over Christian Mounts fall 0:43

Lady Comets finish strong against Streator

The Reed-Custer girls basketball team finished strong against Streator on Thursday to win 45-27.

The Lady Comets went on a 27-14 run in the second half to improve to 4-3 overall, 1-1 in the conference before losing to Manteno on Monday 41-21.

Reed-Custer and the visiting Bulldogs were tied 10-10 at the end of the first quarter before the Lady Comets pulled ahead 18-13 at the half.

They came out more aggressive after the break, pulling ahead 29-20 after

three and not looking back for the win.

Sophomore Alyssa Wollenzien paced the Lady Comets with 18 points and four rebounds. Leah Grace and Gwen Stewart finished with 10 points each. Scoring two points each were Harlie Liebermann, Anastasia Smith and Cameron Wallace. Morgan Toler made her presence known by grabbing nine rebounds.

Reed-Custer travels to Herscher on Thursday. Their next home game won't be until Jan. 13 against Lisle.



Photo by Eric Fisher

SHOOTING FOR the Lady Comets is junior forward Anastasia Smith.



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