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NO ONE WILL go hungry if Freak, owner of the Top Fuel Saloon in Braidwood, can help it as he plans to serve a Christmas day buffet to anyone who wants starting at 2 p.m.

## Top Fuel Saloon seeking hams and sides for Christmas buffet

BY ROSE PANIERI  
STAFF WRITER

It's been a difficult year for many families.

Black Friday Shopping supposedly broke records. And while that may be true, the success of Black Friday is mostly due to shoppers dishing out more dough for fewer goods. Of course, the same applies to groceries.

Freak, owner of Top Fuel Saloon in Braidwood, has stepped up to the plate to ease the financial and emo-

tional burden for anyone who needs help. No one will go hungry if Freak can help it, as he has proven by hosting a food pantry every Friday.

While the majority of us have Christmas Day off, Santa Freak and his "elves" will be working even more hours than usual.

Top Fuel Saloon will be open at 11 a.m. sharp, including Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, spreading cheer of one variety or another.

On Christmas Day, Freak will once again be hosting a free Christmas buffet starting at 2 p.m.

**Got an extra ham, or maybe a pie?**

In the spirit of the holidays, Freak is inviting his friends and neighbors to contribute to the feast. If you happened to catch a great deal for Thanksgiving and have some excess grub in your freezer, Freak would most definitely appreciate your help.

"Right now, we are good on stuffing, but need hams and sides," Freak said.

SEE CHRISTMAS DINNER PAGE 2

## 2024 audit passes with flying colors

BY ROSE PANIERI  
STAFF WRITER

Sarah McKenna, a senior manager at Wipfli Accounting, presented the city's 2024 audit to the Braidwood Council last week.

"I'm happy to report that we did not have any findings on internal control over finance reporting and compliance," McKenna said.

McKenna noted that assets increased \$1.4 million. Cash specifically increased \$1.8 million, and capital assets, net of depreciation, decreased \$703,000. Liabilities decreased \$1.2 million, related to the pay down of the EPA loan.

"Expenses decreased in fiscal year 2024 by \$1.2 million," McKenna said. "That was mostly due to in fiscal year 2023 there was an expense for \$1.8 million related to that redevelopment payment for the purchase of land. I think that was Bauer and D'Orazio—that land purchase."

### Yellow Book Audit

McKenna noted that the city did spend over \$500,000 in state and federal grant money, which triggered a "yellow book audit."

"Under a Yellow Book audit, we have to follow these government auditing standards," McKenna said. "So, there's some additional testing we have to do, there's an additional audit report we have to do."

A Yellow Book audit requires auditors to report

on financial statements, internal controls and compliance, ensuring proper use of public money.

McKenna said they did issue a qualified opinion on those because the city has not issued an accounting standard on other post-employment benefit plans.

"Because dependents are on city employees' health insurance plans, it is desirable to have an actuarial study performed in order to meet the accounting standard," McKenna said. "The city opted not to, which is fine, but it does qualify the opinion, and that can change as people fall off the plan—retirees and dependents."

Actuarial studies use data to assess and manage future risk.

"I think in 2024, there were eight individuals, there were like two employees and then their family members, but some of those included children so they will age out," McKenna said. "I think also as the employees become Medicare age they will age out. So, as people fall off the plan it might get down to an immaterial amount and then we wouldn't have to qualify the opinion anymore."

McKenna predicted there would likely be people aging out in 2025 and the qualification would no longer be necessary. Alternately, the city could choose to conduct an actuarial study.

### Government and business funds

SEE CITY COUNCIL PAGE 2

## Gwen Stewart earns DAR Good Citizen award

Gwen Stewart was honored with the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Good Citizen Award for Reed-Custer High School. Gwen is the daughter of Robert and Stacey Stewart of Essex.

The DAR Good Citizen Award honors an outstanding senior who exhibits the qualities of dependability, leadership, service, and patriotism. The selection was voted on by the faculty and staff.

Gwen serves as the president of both the National Honor Society and Student Council. She is the team captain of the Reed-Custer Speech Team, soccer team, and her travel

soccer team. Throughout high school, she has partic-

SEE GOOD CITIZEN PAGE 2



GWEN STEWART

## Building code change would require sprinkler systems in larger homes

BY ROSE PANIERI  
STAFF WRITER

Sean Fallows, Director of Technical Services of B & F Construction Code Services of Elgin, addressed the Braidwood City Council during the Dec. 9 Committee of the Whole meeting. Fallows has been assisting the city of Braidwood with building code updates.

The last building code update was in 2009. Most cities are currently using 2021 codes.

"One of the reasons we're moving forward is with FEMA and state law, we have to say on an up-to-date code cycle where you have to stay within three versions of the published code," Fallows said.

Fallows explained that

these changes will effect homeowner insurance reimbursements, as well as FEMA assistance in the event of a large-scale disaster.

The updated codes address issues such as open floor plans, and newer hazards, and local issues such as sprinkler requirements for commercial and residential developments.

He said most commercial developments and businesses will be required to install sprinkler systems, with some exceptions. "On the residential side, when you have a very large home—over 5,500 square feet—we're going to require them to put in a residential sprinkler system," Fallows said.

Smaller homes, on the other hand, will not be

required to install sprinkler systems.

The building code updates are not retroactive. Only new projects will be required to follow the updated ordinance.

### Prevailing wage

The first item during the committee meeting was a report by Steve Gulden, the city's administrative consultant.

Gulden briefed the council on progress being made on a prevailing wage ordinance. The ordinance requires that all contractors conducting business within the city pay their employees the prevailing wage as established in this ordinance," Gulden said.

Prevailing wage rates are determined by factors such as job classification, skill level, and geographic

location set forth by the federal and state levels to ensure fair and consistent compensation for laborers.

"All we're saying is that anybody that's working in the city has to pay prevailing wage," Gulden said.

Contractors will receive a packet of information, and will be asked to sign off on the prevailing wage ordinance before initiating a project or development.

Gulden also touched on a proposed amendment updates the city's competitive bidding ordinance that requires the city to conduct

SEE COMMITTEE PAGE 2



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# Illinois Winter Disconnection rule in effect through March

The Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) is reminding customers that the state's winter weather rule is in effect from Dec. 1 - March 31. The winter weather rule limits utilities from disconnecting eligible customers who use electric or gas as their primary source of home heating.

"Illinois winters are known for frigid temperatures and frequent snow-fall. The winter weather rule protects customers who might otherwise struggle to stay warm during the coldest months of the year," said ICC Chairman Doug Scott.

The winter weather rule 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.

Residential customers or master-metered apartment buildings who used gas or electricity as the pri-

mary source of space heating equipment during the previous winter cannot be disconnected for non-payment unless: the utility has offered the customer a Deferred Payment Agreement (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.

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 disconnections related to theft, tampering, or safety.

Households struggling to pay their utility bills are encouraged to apply for

LIHEAP annually. Customers with past due balances should contact their utility to enroll in a DPA. Customers whose electric or gas service has already been disconnected should contact their utility directly to see if they qualify for reconnection at less than the full amount owed.

Ameren, Nicor, North Shore, and Peoples Gas natural gas customers and ComEd electric customers who qualify for LIHEAP or whose incomes are at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for a monthly discount on their bills through the state's low-income discount rates.

Enrollment in the above programs is free of charge, and customers can access LIHEAP benefits regardless of immigration status. Contact the ICC's Consumer Services Division at 1-800-524-0795 for further guidance or to file a complaint against a utility.

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## STORAGE

## WANTED

# Crossword and Soduk Puzzle

### CLUES ACROSS

1. American automotive titan
4. Tire term
7. Two-year-old sheep
10. Indigenous people of Thailand
11. Anti-Soviet Cold War group
12. Actress de Armas

### CLUES DOWN

13. Not moving
15. Cool!
16. Plants of the arum family
19. Connected with touch
21. Pen stain
23. Monetary units
24. School kids' art project

25. Early Bell Canada executive
26. Sword
27. Hates
30. Fixed in one place
34. Pie \_\_\_ mode
35. Moved swiftly on foot
36. Carrier on vehicle
41. A path to get through
45. •Rule, Britannia! composer
46. Spiritual leader
47. Flowing
50. Respectful compliments
54. Cure
55. Soft, lightweight fabric
56. Building material
57. Japanese delicacy
59. A way to cause to be swollen
60. One and only
61. You might get one in summer
62. Wreath
63. Thus far
64. They \_\_\_
65. Employee reference number

### CLUES DOWN

1. Policemen (French)
2. Toy dog
3. Intestinal condition
4. Muscular weaknesses
5. Helps little firms
6. Alphabetical lists
7. Takes down
8. Facilitates
9. Ethnic people of Ethiopia

13. Engine additive
14. Explorers group
17. Written account
18. Consumed
20. Opposite of first
22. No (slang)
27. Government lawyers
28. NY Giants great
29. Small amount
31. A way to save for your future
32. Fall behind
33. Midway between north-east and east
37. Head pain
38. Wildly popular sport
39. •Princess Diaries actress Hathaway
40. Boat race
41. About fish
42. Nursemaid
43. Able to be marketed
44. Not as large
47. Parts per billion (abbr.)
48. Paddle
49. Oneness
51. Bitter chemical
52. Not around
53. Very fast airplane
58. Main tributary of the Rhine

## Answers



# COMET SPORTS



Photo by Miley Morris

**REED-CUSTER JUNIOR** Harlie Liebermann cuts to her right to avoid a Blue Devil defender at the top of the key.



Photo by Miley Morris

**LADY COMET** Atiana Hood dribbles away from trouble while battling Peotone last week at home.

## Lady Comets defeat Streator to snap streak

The Reed-Custer girls basketball team snapped a four-game losing streak on Thursday, putting together a big third quarter to defeat Streator, 41-31.

The Lady Comets jumped in from 15-6 in the opening frame but scored just two points in the second quarter. Thankfully, Alyssa Wollenzien kept them in the game, scoring 19 points total, when the Lady Comets went on a 16-6 run in the third period before coasting to victory.

Also chipping in were Kamryn Wilkey with 10 points, Harlee Libermann with seven points and Atiana Hood with five.

### Edged by PC

Despite a strong fourth-quarter push, Reed-Custer (5-5 overall, 1-3 in the conference) came up short last Tuesday, falling 40-37 to Prairie Central in a non-conference matchup. The loss marked

the Comets' fourth straight setback.

Prairie Central built an 11-5 lead and took a 22-15 advantage into halftime. Reed-Custer gained momentum coming out of the break, outscoring the Hawks 7-3 in the third quarter to pull within 25-22. Both teams traded baskets in the fourth, with each scoring 15 points, but the Comets were unable to erase the deficit.

Wollenzien powered the Lady Comet with 19 points and 11 rebounds, knocking down three 3-pointers and shooting 5-for-12 on two-pointers while adding 11 rebounds, 2 steals, and 1 assist.

Wilkey, a sophomore, added 9 points, hitting a three and going 4-for-6 at the free-throw line, while Hood contributed 6 points on 2-of-3 shooting from beyond the arc. Liebermann

chipped in 2 points, 3 rebounds, 2 assists and 2 steals.

Reed-Custer finished with 6 threes, and finished 5-for-14 at the line.

### Another close one

In a game that came down to the final minutes, the Reed-Custer girls dropped a narrow 38-36 loss to Peotone Monday in conference play.

Both teams were slow getting started. The Comets held the Blue Devils to just three first-quarter points but managed just five for themselves for a 5-3 lead. Reed-Custer carried that momentum into the second quarter, outscoring Peotone 15-12 to build a 20-15 halftime advantage.

Peotone seized control in the third, putting up 16 points to move ahead 31-32 entering the fourth.

The Comets kept the game within one possession throughout the final quarter but were held to four points in the closing frame, allowing Peotone to escape with the two-point win.

Wollenzien led with 14 points, hitting a three, going 3-for-4 at the free-throw line, and adding 7 rebounds, 6 steals and 2 assists.

Wilkey finished with 7 points, including a perfect 2-for-2 at the line, while junior Liebermann added 7 points, 5 rebounds, 4 assists and 4 steals.

Senior Anastasia Smith scored 2 points while Hood had 3 points with 6 rebounds and 2 steals. Senior Morgan Toler added 2 points.

The Lady Comets host Somonauk Thursday then rest before entering the Dec. 26-29 Peotone Holiday Tournament.



Photo by Miley Morris

**RUNNING THE OFFENSE** while being defended by Peotone is Reed-Custer sophomore Kamryn Wilkey.

## R-C matmen continue to dominate with 10-0 run

The Reed-Custer varsity wrestling team picked up three more dual victories last week, defeating Wilmington and Lisle on Thursday before cruising past the Dwight Trojans on Friday.

"The team was excited for the challenge and showed it on the mat. RCHS came out victorious in both duals, defeating Wilmington 60-18 and Lisle 54-29," coach Yale Davis noted.

Against Wilmington, the Comets jumped out to an early lead with forfeits at 106, 113 and 120

pounds. Kaaden Wood added to the advantage at 126 with a pin at the 4:13 mark, followed by another forfeit win from Jayden Sanchez at 132.

At 138, Rylan West earned a quick pin in 1:26, and Nathan Kuntz followed with a pin in 2:25 at 144 to take a 42-0 lead.

Wilmington answered with a pin at 150 and 157.

The Comets picked up additional team points via forfeits at 165 and 175. At 190, Aiden Shultz recorded a pin in 1:56. Wilmington earned a narrow 1-0 decision at 215, where Dominic

Alaimo was edged by Logan VanDuyne. The Wildcats closed out the dual at 285 with a 4-2 decision for Will Wilson over Comet Christian Mounts.

On Friday, the Comets followed up with a dominant performance against Dwight, winning nearly every bout in the dual.

Collin Bryant (106) and Jakub Lichaj (113) both earned forfeit victories, while Cole Harris (120) posted a technical fall, defeating Dalton DeLong 15-0. Kaaden Wood (126) and Jayden Sanchez (132) added more

forfeit wins before Rylan West (138) pinned Sawyer Kucera.

At 144, Nathan Kuntz earned another forfeit victory. Jordan Hickman (150), Adrian Aleman (157), and Reed Newbrough (165) each picked up forfeits to continue the Comets' momentum. Dwight earned its lone win at 175, where Gavin Bafia pinned Nathan

Vogler.

Reed-Custer finished with forfeits from Aiden Shultz (190), Dominic Alaimo (215) and Christian Mounts (285).

Reed-Custer is 10-0 and excited for today's (Wednesday) quad meet at Seneca, followed by Thursday's triangular meet at Clifton Central. On Saturday JV wrestlers will compete in the

Wilmington JV tourney while the female wrestlers will travel to Morris for a girls only invite.

On Friday, the girl wrestlers traveled to Clifton to compete in the Clifton Girls Extravaganza. RCHS brought four girls and they all wrestled tough. Sophia Flowers (115) won both her matches and Kalyn New (100) got a win.



Photo by Eric Fisher

**ON TOP OF** the competition is Reed-Custer's Reed Newbrough who won both of his matches on Thursday.



Photo by Eric Fisher

**GETTING A LEG** up on the competition is Reed-Custer's Kaaden Wood who ended up pinning Wilmington's Devin Findlay in 4:13 on Thursday.



Photo by Eric Fisher

**COMET WRESTLER** Nathan Kuntz gets a slap on the mat by the referee, indicting a pin over his Lisle opponent. Kuntz won both of his 144-pound matches by pin on Thursday.