



# BRAIDWOOD JOURNAL .com

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2025

A FREE PRESS NEWSPAPER • (815) 476-7966

## 2025 brought in new leadership, changes for city

BY ROSE PANIERI  
STAFF WRITER

The year 2025 brought vital changes to the City of Braidwood. A new mayor and two new commissioners are taking Braidwood in a different direction. The possibility of a data center being constructed has some residents excited and others anxious. Meanwhile, a proposed 3,600-acre solar farm planned for Custer and Reed townships never officially got off the ground.

### December

#### Goodwill toward men

Freak, owner of Top Fuel Saloon in Braidwood, stepped up to the plate to ease the financial and emotional 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 had Christmas Day off, Santa Freak and his "elves" worked even more hours than usual. Freak also hosted a free Thanksgiving buffet and recently hosted his 300th food pantry.

### November

#### Data center redux

The Braidwood city council took action in November to establish a fourth TIF (Tax Increment Financing) district where a proposed data center may be built. When a TIF district is created, the current property value is "frozen" at the baseline for a specific period of time.

Last year, Western Hospitality proposed a \$40 million data center and other potential development west of town near I-55 and Reed Road. On Nov. 12, the council passed a motion for an inducement resolution, opening the door for a possible fourth TIF district.

### October

#### Comets rule

On Oct. 3, Reed Custer Comets Football players and coaches stormed the field after a 32-yard field goal was kicked as time expired, giving them the 31-28 vic-

tory over Peotone. It was a thrilling ending that brought much celebration on the home side bleachers.

### September

#### City keeps 1% tax

At the Sept. 9 Braidwood Committee of the Whole meeting, Mayor Todd Lyons shared his plan to use the one percent grocery tax to fund the purchase of playground equipment. The state of Illinois will officially drop the grocery tax in January. However, Governor JB Pritzker gave municipalities the choice to either keep or abolish the tax. Abolishing the tax would result in residents saving at the grocery store. "As the mayor, I would recommend that we continue the grocery tax by ordinance," Lyons said. "But, we also establish an intergovernmental agreement with the Braidwood Park District to ensure that every dollar collected through this tax is used specifically for capital improvements within our parks."

### Bank opens

On Sept. 25, Federated Bank's fifth branch, now serving Braidwood, officially opened for business at 130 N. Washington Street in Braidwood.

### August

#### Video gaming revenue

In 2023-24, the city of Braidwood raked in \$119,279 in video gaming revenue. That number jumped to \$143,447 in 2024-25. This represents a 20.2 percent increase in gaming revenue. Kickin' 66 Liquor & More Corporation brought in \$45,599 of the total revenue. Braidwood currently has 10 video gaming sources.

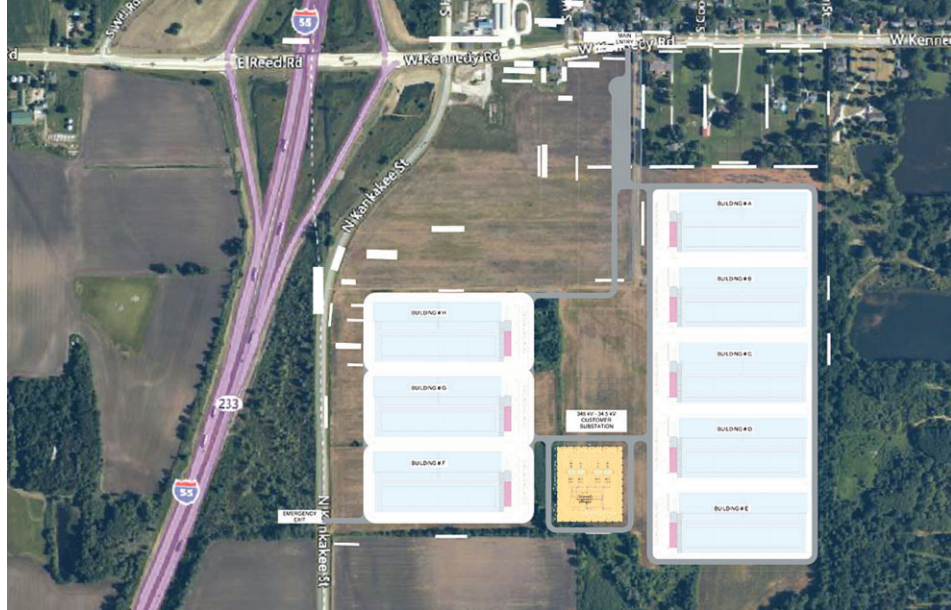
### New police chief

Braidwood also got a new police chief in August. At the Aug. 26 city council meeting, Mayor Lyons swore in the city's new chief of police, Eric Allen. Allen had previously served with the Shorewood Police Dept. since 1999, most recently as deputy chief.

### July

#### City center planned

The Braidwood City Council sought



PROPOSED DATA CENTER—A conception plan details a data center proposed on farmland near Kennedy (Reed) Road and Interstate 55 in Braidwood. The site would include up to eight buildings and a ComEd electrical substation.

to build a city center and sought consultants, and grants to make the dream a reality. Tentatively, the center is planned for city-owned vacant property behind Casey's on Main Street.

### Rain on our parade

The 44th annual Braidwood Summerfest was held by the Braidwood Lions Club with the theme of "An Under the Sea Adventure." All was going fine until Mother Nature decided not to cooperate, dumping rainshowers late Saturday and severe storms on Sunday which caused the cancellation of the 1 p.m. parade. Families had fun while it lasted.

### Lawsuit

Tony Altieri, former Braidwood City Administrator sued the City of Braidwood, asking to be reinstated to the position of Supervisor of Streets and Public Improvement and Supervisor of Public

Improvement, at the annual salary of \$119,000 with health insurance, 30 days vacation, 72 hours of sick time, annual raises, a \$600 clothing allowance and a \$150 boot allowance.

### June

#### Water problems

The City of Braidwood issued a notice to water users urging them to conserve usage as the municipality struggles to meet the demand. Mayor Todd Lyons issued a notice, explaining that water use restrictions are being implemented due to the aging water treatment plant's inability to keep up and repairs were needed on the tower located behind city hall.

### Residents want facts about data center

Resident Marylu Jensen expressed concerns about a data center proposed for

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## The bells of Immaculate Conception chime again

"For bells are the voice of the church. They have tones that touch and search the hearts of young and old."  
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

BY ROSE PANIERI  
STAFF WRITER

It had been five long years since the city of Wilmington had heard the sweet pealing of the bells of St. Rose of Lima Church. That all changed on Tuesday, Dec. 9, when the sweet Christmas melody, Noël, issued from the rafters, stopping residents in their tracks to savor the sound.

On the Saturday following Christmas, an exhausted Fr. Sebastian Gargol, pastor of St. Rose of Lima of Wilmington and Immaculate Conception of Braidwood, smiled. He had made a promise to himself to restore the bells in both churches. And he had succeeded.

"On the day the bells were installed the reaction of parishioners and non-parishioners alike was overwhelming," Gargol said. "We've never had so many likes and comments on our Facebook Page."

Indeed, after five years



Courtesy photo

THE CONGREGATION at Immaculate Conception Church in Braidwood came together for holiday Mass with the chiming of new bells.

of silence, the short, sweet burst of a melody drew hosts of people to St. Rose's Facebook Page. A video on the page featured a video of the ringing bells. The post was viewed 27,000 times and 92 visitors commented.

"I had few people that were asking through the years, you know, and saying

that they missed the bells," Gargol said. "And when I reached out to the company that sells them, we got a good deal because we were buying two systems, one for Wilmington and the other for Braidwood, where the bells also didn't work."

### The sounds of silence

Why had the bells been

silent since 2018?

Despite the nearly magical effect church bells have on communities, the five-year silence came down to money. Both St. Rose and Immaculate Conception churches needed bells, but the cost was prohibitive. The parish would budget for bells, but

something always came up to claim that money.

"The last system we had was from 1960s," Gargol said. "We were fixing it pretty often. Unfortunately, the last person who knew how to fix that system was no longer available. Of course, Braidwood had the same

problem."

Gargol became the pastor of both churches early in 2025 when the Diocese of Joliet closed some Catholic churches and merged others. Gargol inherited Immaculate Conception Church. And wouldn't you know it, the Braidwood church also needed bells.

Gargol sighed. Without a doubt, he understood the ethereal magic of bells, but as pastor he was forced to set priorities.

"We had every intention of replacing the system, but other expenses took priority," Gargol said. "Of course, people—human beings—always get top priority, and these are some difficult times for many. Then there are necessary repairs. Replacing the heater is more important than bells."

### Electronic bells

Very few churches still utilize cast brass or iron bells. The melody we hear from St. Rose and Immaculate Conception come from high-tech elec-

SEE CHURCH BELLS PAGE 2



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# COMET SPORTS



Photo by Amy Walker

REED-CUSTER's Chase Isaac reaches for a loose ball while playing against Coal City during the Shipyard Showdown tournament played in Seneca.



Photo by Amy Walker

ROUNDING THE HORN for Reed-Custer on Saturday is guard Kaiden Klein.

## R-C battles back during Shipyard Showdown

The Shipyard Showdown boys basketball tournament took place last week at Seneca High School, bringing together 16 teams for three days of holiday competition.

When the final horn sounded, Indian Creek emerged winners of the championship bracket, finishing above Lexington in second place, followed by Marquette in third and Hall taking fourth.

In the consolation bracket, Coal City captured the top spot, with Reed-Custer finishing as the runner-up.

### Wilmington

Wilmington (8-3 overall, 3-1 in conference) finished the showdown in fifth place after a solid four-game stretch. The Wildcats opened tournament play on Dec. 23 with a 52-32 win over Gardner-South Wilmington. Later that day, the Wildcats ran into a tough Marquette squad and fell 52-40.

Wilmington rebounded on Dec. 26 with an impressive 68-59 victory over Dwight, their highest-scoring game so far this season. On Saturday, the Wildcats closed the tournament on a high note, defeating Woodland 58-54 to secure fifth place.

### Coal City

The Coalers (6-7, 0-4) delivered a strong run through the consolation bracket, ultimately earning the consolation championship.

The Coalers opened the tournament Tuesday with a lost to Dwight, 58-45. After that, they fought back by winning three straight including a dominant 68-20 win over Earlville.

On Friday, the Coalers

earned a 40-30 win over Gardner-South Wilmington, advancing to the consolation final. Coal City capped off its tournament on Saturday with a convincing 68-45 victory over Reed-Custer, claiming the top spot in the consolation bracket.

### Reed-Custer

The Comets (6-8, 2-3) finished the tournament as consolation runners-up, winning two contests and losing two. The Comets began play against the hosting Irish, falling 57-42, but later on Tuesday battled hard for a 73-40 win over DePue.

Reed-Custer kept its momentum on Friday with a 60-49 win over Serena, advancing to the consolation championship game. On Saturday, the Comets faced Coal City and came up short in a 68-45 loss, closing the Shipyard Showdown with a second-place finish in the consolation bracket.

The Shipyard Showdown once again provided a competitive holiday stage for area programs, with teams logging meaningful game experience as they head into the heart of the season.

The Wildcats will face two tough back-to-back opponents after their break, hosting Indian Creek Jan. 6 before traveling to Streator to face the conference leading Bulldogs.

The Coalers will travel Friday to Dwight before hosting Herscher Jan. 6 and then travel to Manteno Jan. 9.

The Comets will host their next three games including Serena Jan. 6, Lisle Jan. 9 and Dwight Jan. 10.

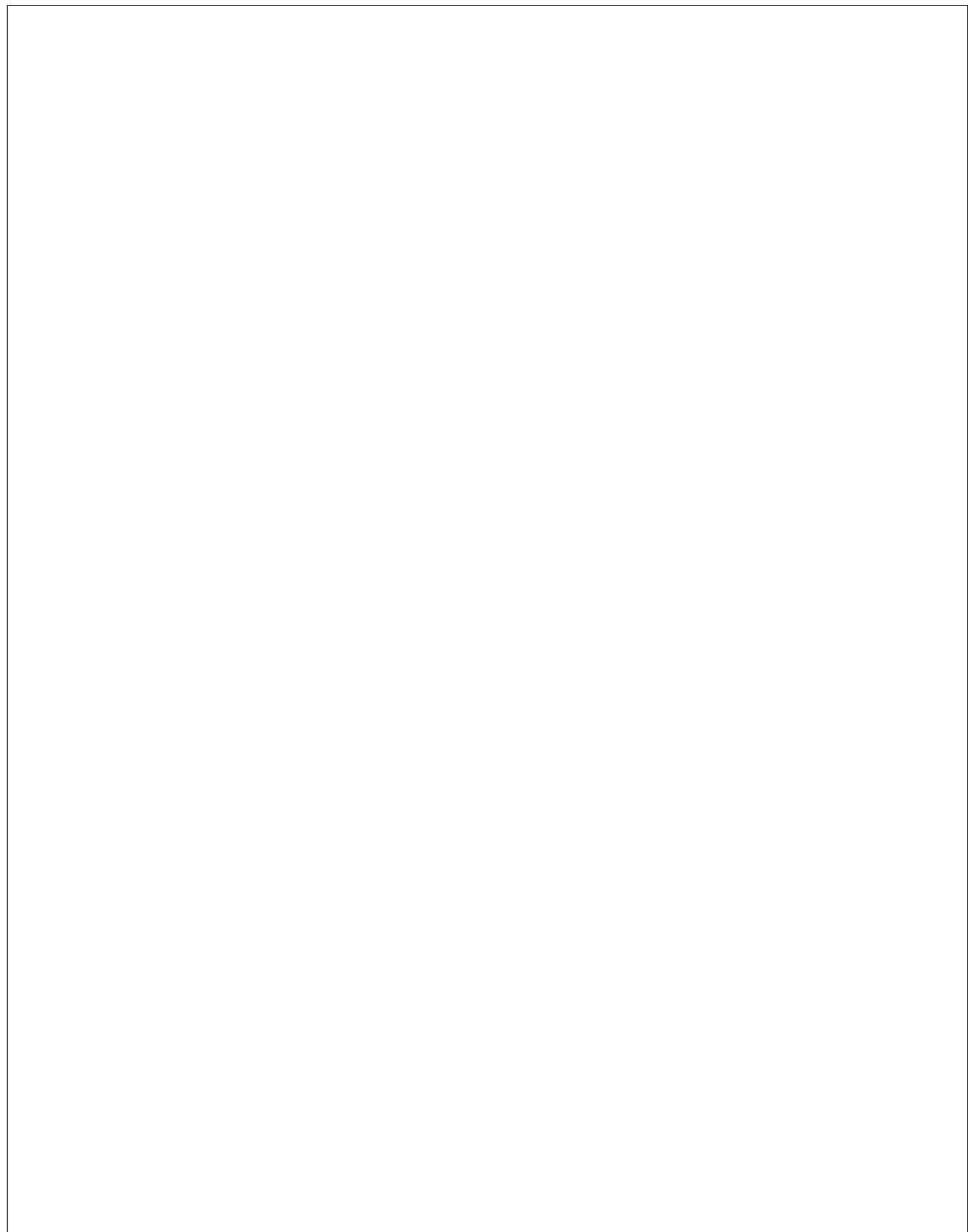


Photo by Amy Walker

SURROUNDED BY COMETS, Defending the lane while playing against Coal City on Saturday are Reed-Custer's Vinny Bollino (32), Eddie Bryan (21), Colton Waldvogel (24) and Chase Isaac (4).

## Lady Comets end tourney with a late run victory

The Reed-Custer girls basketball team continued its strong play Monday with a 56-47 victory over the Richards Bulldogs at the Peotone Holiday Tournament.

The Comets (8-7 overall, 1-4 conference) led by a slim margin after each of the first two quarters, holding a 13-12 edge after one and extending it to 25-22 at half-time.

Richards outscored the Comets 16-15 in the third period but the Lady Comets stayed composed, going on a decisive 16-9 run in the fourth to win.

Alyssa Wollenzien was impressive, pouring in 29 points on 10-of-14 shooting, including 9-of-13 from two-point range. She was also active on the glass with 11 rebounds and added seven steals, helping Reed-Custer.

Kamryn Wilkey chipped in with 14 points, knocking down a three-pointer and going 7-for-12 at the free-throw line. Harlie Liebermann added four points, five rebounds and an assist.

Reed-Custer won the rebounding battle 40-34 and forced 25 turnovers, turning defensive pressure into timely scoring opportunities late in the game.

Reed-Custer opened tourney play on Friday with a 49-32 victory over Beecher. The Lady Comets set the tone early, jumping out to a 22-13 lead after the first quarter and maintaining control the rest of the way.

Again, Wollenzien delivered another standout performance, scoring 27 points while going 7-for-12 at the free-throw line. Playing a sup-

porting role was Wilkey who finished with 11 points, Liebermann chipped in eight points.

On Saturday, the Comets fell 42-33 to the Reavis Rams.

Reed-Custer led 10-9 after the first quarter, but Reavis used a strong second and third quarter to pull ahead.

Credit the Rams for limiting Wollenzien to 10 points, while Liebermann added eight, while Morgan Toler and Atiana Hood scored six points apiece.

Reed-Custer battled on the glass, collecting 29 rebounds, and forced 17 steals, but struggled from the field, shooting 24 percent overall.

The Lady Comets will host Lisle on Jan. 8 before traveling to Coal City Jan. 12.

Photo by Miley Morris

WORKING THE BALL down low near the basket is Lady Comet Brooklyn Gonzalez.