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WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2026

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A \$1.32 million boost for Coal City homes

BY MIKE LOOMIS
CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-five homes in Coal City have received improvements thanks to a state-funded grant program administered through the village.

Starting with community development block grants back in 2021, the repairs range from new windows, doors, flooring and HVAC systems to electrical upgrades, plumbing and new appliances. In addition, all the homes received carbon dioxide detectors on each floor and smoke detectors in each bedroom.

In updates presented at the village board of trustees meeting on Aug. 12, Coal City Mayor Dave Spesia said the housing rehabilitation program for low-income residents concluded in June. He attended a close-out meeting held by the North Central Illinois Council of Governments earlier this month, where officials reviewed the results.

"It's been a great program for the last six years for the residents of Coal City," he said, adding that the funds over the course of the program totaled \$1.32 million.

To be eligible, applicants had to meet income eligibility requirements and own their single-family home, Village Administrator Matt Fritz said.

The block grants were administered through the village with the assistance of the North Central Illinois Council of Governments.

According to Connie Buchanon, who

oversees housing rehabilitations for the organization, improvements to homes in Coal City took place over three phases. The first was completed in 2021 and resulted in the completion of 10 homes at a maximum cost of \$45,000 per house.

The second phase, through the Illinois Housing Development Authority and the Housing Rehabilitation Accessibility Program ended in 2022 with the renovation of five homes at a maximum cost of \$50,000 per home. The final round wrapped in June with 10 more homes receiving upgrades at a top spend of \$60,000 per home.

Other topics discussed at the village board meeting:

- The Knights of Columbus are holding their annual Tootsie Roll Drive on Sept. 18-20. Volunteers from the local council of the fraternal organization will be appearing at locations in Coal City to dispense the candies and raise funds to help people struggling with intellectual and physical disabilities.

Knights of Columbus Council 1574 is based in Braidwood and serves local Catholic parishes and communities in Will and Grundy County. For more information or to volunteer, call William Pohl at 815-671-7665.

- That same weekend is when the village will hold its Sixth Annual Fall Fest and Car Show. The celebration features food vendors, games for kids, crafts by local artisans and live music.

The board announced the first band

SEE GRANTS PAGE 2



IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS for 25 homeowners in Coal City included energy saving windows, siding and doors. Interior repairs included flooring, electrical upgrades, plumbing and HVAC systems.

New year brings new teachers to Coal City

The first day of school was Monday when the Coal City Community Unit School District 1 started the academic year with 13 new educators.

Joining the faculty for the 2026-2027 school year are individuals who will work across the district's academic buildings.

KRISTINA LARDI

Kristina Lardi will serve as a math interventionist serving students in kindergarten through third grade.

She is a former Coal City resident who resides in Coal City. As an educator she has taught preschool, second and first grades.

Her path into education was developed from an enjoyment of working with children and encouraging them to learn new things. If she wasn't an educator, her path likely would have been in veterinary medicine or psychology.

Lardi is looking forward to working with students, and her advice to them is to "have a positive attitude and don't give up."

Outside of school she enjoys being with family, reading, and traveling. Her students might like to know she loves dogs and has a Bernedoodle named, Griffin, and her favorite school supply is a Trapper Keeper.

JEN DURKEE

Jen Durkee joins the Early Childhood Center as its newest resource teacher working in kindergarten and first grade.

She served as a school



Coal City School District photo

THE COAL CITY COMMUNITY Unit School District #1 welcomes 13 new staff members for the 2026-2027 school year. Joining the faculty are (from left, seated): Natalie Gill—Intermediate School fourth grade co-teacher; Emily Bonnell—High School math teacher; Moree Harney—Intermediate School fifth grade special education teacher; Jacquelyn Henrichsen—Middle School eighth grade ELA teacher, and Natalie Casey—High School social worker. Standing are Madison Phillips—Early Childhood Center social worker; Kristina Lardi—K-3 math interventionist; Kristin Wills—Elementary School third grade teacher; Taylor Gunier—Middle School eighth grade ELA teacher; Margaret Marlin—Middle School sixth grade math teacher; Jennifer Durkee—Early Childhood Center Special Education kindergarten and first grade; Alexander Smith—Middle School special education teacher; and David Lange—High School and Middle School music teacher/choir director.

library media specialist and was a preschool teacher before joining the Coal City staff.

"I've heard such wonderful things about the district and the community," Mrs. Durkee said.

Her path into education is based on a love of working with children, and she is excited to get to know the students she will be working with this school year.

Mrs. Durkee's advice to students is, "believe in yourself and embrace mistakes as opportunities to learn."

Mrs. Durkee holds a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and a masters in instructional technology.

If not in education, she would likely have become a travel writer. So it should come as no surprise that she enjoys traveling. Additional interests outside of the classroom including reading and cooking.

She believes her students will find it interesting that she knows a lot about Pokemon—her son is an expert.

MADISON PHILLIPS

Madison Phillips will assist students as the social worker at Coal City Early Childhood Center.

"I love working with kids and love helping people," Ms. Phillips said, noting her interest in working in the Coal City School District was due to the family-like atmosphere among the staff.

She holds a bachelor's degree in social work from Illinois State University and a master's from the University of Illinois. Prior to joining the ECC staff, Phillips was employed by the Grundy County Special

Education Coop.

She is looking forward to building relationships with staff and students, and providing a room where students feel safe and respected.

If not in education, Ms. Phillips shared she would likely be working with animals.

Outside of the classroom she enjoys reading, being outside, and spending time with family and friends.

Her go-to school snacks are beef jerky, veggie straws and chocolate.

KRISTIN WILLS

Kristin Wills will once again walk the halls of Coal City Elementary School, this time as a teacher.

Wills grew up in the community and attended Coal City Schools. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Illinois State University and a master's in math education from Ball State University.

She has served area schools as a second, third and fifth grade teacher, as well as middle school math instructor. This year she will be teaching third grade and is excited for the opportunity to work in the community where she lives.

A happy, fun, successful year meeting new students and families is what she is most looking forward to in her new position.

Wills' advice to students is, "try your best and you will find success."

Her path into education was paved by her grandfather, Marvin Kessler, who served as a teacher, coach and administrator in neighboring school districts.

If not a teacher, she would likely be a dog trainer.

Outside of the classroom she enjoys reading and traveling.

Wills will also serve as a JV tennis coach at the high school.

SEE TEACHERS PAGE 2



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Teachers, continued from page 1

NATALIE GILL

Natalie Gill loved growing up in the Coal City community, and is glad to begin her teaching career in the school district she attended.

Gill earned a degree in elementary education from the University of St. Francis and completed her student teaching assignment at Morris District 54. This year she will serve as a fourth grade special education teacher at the Intermediate School.

She is looking forward to building connections with her students and learning new things.

It was her family that encouraged her to follow a path into education, "They inspire me each day to be great and do hard work," she said.

When not in class, Miss Gill enjoys reading (30 books last year) and spending time with family.

Had she not pursued a career in education, she would have selected to work with animals, probably becoming a vet.

MOREE HARNEY

Moree Harney is no stranger to Coal City Intermediate School as she has served as a paraprofessional in fourth and fifth grades. This year she returns from summer break as a fifth grade special education teacher.

Harney holds a bachelor's degree in organizational communication from North Central College and a master's in elementary education from the University of Phoenix with a special education endorsement.

As someone who always enjoyed working with kids and being a part of her community, this year will allow her to develop a community within the classroom, one that serves as a positive place that everyone is a part of.

Harney, a resident of Coal City, enjoys running, reading and crafting. If not working in education, she would have selected a field that allowed her to craft and be creative, or serve as an event planner.

A fun fact about her is that she's driven a race car, and when it comes to snacks—popcorn is her top choice.

TAYLOR GUNIER

Taylor Gunier has a unique connection to American history—she is related to Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States.

Gunier will likely be asked about her connection to the iconic president from

time to time, especially as she begins a new chapter at Coal City Middle School, where she will teach eighth grade English/language arts.

Just as much as her students and coworkers will be interested in learning more about her, Mrs. Gunier said she is looking forward to getting to know them.

She has spent the past six years teaching at Manhattan Junior High and when an opportunity came to work in Coal City she welcomed the move as it provided a small town community feel while bringing her closer to home.

She believes that a successful classroom is one where kids want to be—a place where there is engagement, questions and personal connection.

Outside of school, Gunier enjoys being in the outdoors and playing with her children—ages 5 and 1.

JACQUALYN HENRICHSEN

Jacquelyn Henrichsen will be teaching eighth grade English/language arts at Coal City Middle School.

Miss Henrichsen attended Kankakee Community College before earning a bachelor's degree in Secondary Education from Olivet Nazarene University. As part of her preparation for the classroom, she completed her student teaching at St. Anne Community High School.

It was during her time at the community college when she decided to enter the field of education.

"My speech professor at KCC was everything I ever wanted in a teacher, and I decided I wanted to be like her and inspire lives," she said.

Miss Henrichsen aims to make her classroom a place where students are not afraid to have academic discussions, ask questions or make mistakes, because they will be supported.

She enjoys walks, crocheting, reading, art and all types of music.

MEG MARLIN

Meg Marlin followed her parents into the field of education, and when the opportunity presented itself, she sought to return to the school district she attended as a student. "I wanted to leave the same impact that my teachers left on me," she said.

A graduate of CCHS, Ms. Marlin attended Illinois State University where she earned a bachelor's degree in exercise science, continuing her schooling at Lewis University earning a master's in

Education in middle level math and science.

After six years as a sixth grade teacher in Romeoville, Ms. Marlin is coming home to Coal City to serve as a sixth grade math teacher at the middle school.

"I'm looking forward to giving back to the community and seeing my student succeed," she said.

In addition to teaching, she is assisting with the middle school soccer program.

Reading, hiking, playing board games and entertaining her dog—Gryffin, keep her busy outside of the classroom.

A fun fact her students will find interesting is she was born on Star Wars Day.

ZANDER SMITH

Xander Smith is looking forward his new role as a special education teacher at Coal City Middle School. He previously served the school district as a paraprofessional.

A resident of Coal City, Smith's path into education was developed from an interest in looking for unique solutions to problems.

Had he not become a teacher, his other career choice was in engineering.

Smith's advice to his students is to advocate for themselves the best they can.

Outside of class he enjoys reading and his dog, Higgs.

DAVID LANGE

David Lange will be splitting his time between the middle and high schools in his role with the district's fine arts department.

Mr. Lange will instruct sixth grade music and the middle school choirs, and direct the high school's Coaler and Concert Choirs, along with overseeing the Footnotes show choir.

A graduate of North Central College, he previously taught at East Aurora's Waldo Middle School, and is coming to Coal City due to its philosophy of community and students first.

"I am looking forward to making great music and seeing student growth," Lange said, noting his classroom will be a positive space where students can make mistakes and have opportunities to grow.

He plays piano and guitar in his free time, and enjoys watching football. This summer he traveled to Nashville to take in all of the music the city has to offer.

EMILY BONNELL

Emily Bonnell will be teaching

Algebra 1 and Geometry at Coal City High School, and plans to work with the school's math team.

Coal City's academic excellence, community and abundance of activities are what drew Mrs. Bonnell to seek a position in the district.

For the past four years she taught math at Tri-Point High School and began her career in education as an eighth grade math teacher in Kankakee. She attended college in Florida, earning her bachelor's and master's degrees in mathematics.

It was her high school advanced placement stats teacher that inspired her to enter the education field. The instructor, she said, "instilled a love for math in me." Her parents also played a significant role in her love for education.

She is looking forward to building relationships with students and going to football games to cheer on the Coalers.

Her advice to students is not to be scared to ask questions or make mistakes, "it's how you learn," she said.

In her free time, she enjoys reading, especially fantasy.

NATALIE CASEY

Natalie Casey joins the student services staff as a social worker at Coal City High School, and will be helping with the Best Buddies program.

She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and master's in social work. Mrs. Casey completed her internship with Coal City Schools and welcomed the opportunity to join the staff and be a part of the small town atmosphere.

Her path into social work was driven by her elementary school social worker who helped her. "I want to make the same impact on my students," she said.

She encourages students to ask for help when needed, making it clear that the staff and teachers want to see students succeed and are willing to help in any way they possibly can.

In the coming year, she will become a first time mom and professionally looks forward to learning and growing in her field and making an impact on students.

In her personal time she enjoys football, reading, watching television, and spending time with her husband, family and friends,

An interesting fact about her is that she is the second oldest and only girl in a family of six children who range in age from 30 to 6 years old.

Tornado-spawning storms leave a trail of destruction

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

What began as a powerful line of thunderstorms in the morning hours of Tuesday, Aug. 11, almost immediately evolved into one of the most destructive weather events to strike the area in years, leaving damaged homes, downed trees, overturned vehicles, and thousands without power across Will and Grundy counties.

Wilmington's wide swath of damage

Surveying the destruction from Tuesday's storm, Wilmington Mayor Ben Dietz declared a state of

emergency.

"We know many of our residents are still dealing with the aftermath..." Dietz said.

The hardest hit community was Wilmington, where National Weather Service investigators confirmed an EF-1 tornado touched down at approximately 10:40 a.m. near West Baltimore Street and North 1st Street.

The twister packed winds of up to 90 mph and remained on the ground for about 1.5 miles, leaving a swath of destruction, before crossing the Kankakee River.

The tornado tore a large section of roof from Tire Tracks, an automotive repair shop at 507 W. Baltimore St., sending debris into a nearby strip mall.

The tornado then crossed the Kankakee River and subsequently tracked across the South Island Park before hitting the Oakwood Cemetery, where it virtually uprooted trees, causing widespread dam-

age. The tornado continued east on Ridge Street before finally lifting near the Forked Creek Preserve.

The funnel cloud grazed the ground for 1.5 miles, nearly two minutes and 150 yards wide, leaving a trail of damage. South Water Street (Highway 102) was closed for two days due to a massive tree that had fallen on power lines. South Main Street was also blocked by a tree.

Traffic on Highway 53 was rerouted onto Strip Mine Road due to leaning power poles south to Coal City Road.

While Wilmington bore the brunt of the storm, neighboring communities also suffered significant impacts.

Braidwood straight-line winds

As families prepared for the first day of school on Aug. 12, Mother Nature struck. In Braidwood, winds snapped utility poles, downed power lines and brought a massive tree crashing across the north-bound lanes of Interstate 55 near Coal City Road, blocking traffic during the height of the storm.

According to Josh Bolatto of Braidwood ESDA, the most significant damage was due to tree limbs snapping power lines.

"One of the worst incidents was on Cermak Road between Mitchell Street and Novy Road, where a large tree fell onto power lines, taking down multiple power poles with it," Bolatto said.

Torrential rainfall that followed prompted flash flood concerns as drainage systems clogged with storm debris. City crews and ESDA personnel launched a community-wide cleanup effort and

are urging residents to report damage through the Will County Storm Damage Survey to help qualify for disaster assistance.

Coal City power outages

Coal City was hampered by winds estimated between 60 and 70 mph. One of the most dramatic incidents occurred along Route 113, where a massive tree snapped and fell onto a home, causing major structural damage.

More than 10,000 utility customers across Grundy County lost power as the storm tore through heavily wooded residential neighborhoods.

Despite the widespread destruction, there was one piece of welcome news: No injuries or fatalities were reported.

As residents continue with cleanup and recovery, officials warn homeowners about potential contractor scams and urge anyone seeking repairs to use only licensed, bonded and insured contractors.

ComEd crews worked overtime through Friday morning to restore service for the last few customers and offered emergency storm kits to residents through Wilmington City Hall. All of the kits have been distributed.

For many residents, Tuesday's storm lasted only a few minutes. The cleanup, however, will continue for days or even weeks, and the impact will haunt many for years to come.



Courtesy photo

BATHROOM UPGRADES for several Coal City homeowners were included as part of a state-funded grant program administered through the village.

Grants, continued from page 1

scheduled to appear is Any Given Weekend. From Lakeside, Ind., the dance and rock cover band will perform at 7 p.m. on Sept. 18, in front of Bob's Advanced Auto & Tire, 655 South Broadway Street.

• Mayor Spesia announced which village trustees will serve on the committees that advise the board:

—Planning & Zoning Board: Pam Noffsinger, chairwoman, Bill Mincey, vice chairman.

—Park Board: Dan Greggain, chairman, CJ Lauterbur, vice chairman.

—Finance Committee: CJ Lauterbur, chairman, Pam Noffsinger, vice chairwoman.

—Public Health & Safety: Dave Togliatti, chairman, Pam Noffsinger, vice chairwoman.

—Water & Sewer: Ross Bradley, chairman, Dan Greggain, vice chairman.

—Streets & Alleys: Bill Mincey, chairman, Dave Togliatti, vice chairman.

The mayor also appointed Nick Doerfler, deputy chief at the Coal City Fire Protection District, to the village's Fire & Police Board. Doerfler will serve a three-year term.



The Coal City Courant

USPS No. 120-060

Published weekly, 52 times a year, on Wednesdays by G-W COMMUNICATIONS, INC., 271 S. Broadway St. Coal City, IL 60416

Periodicals postage paid at Coal City, Illinois

Postmaster:

Send address changes to: Free Press Newspapers; 111 S. Water St.; Wilmington, IL 60481

Subscription rates: \$46 Grundy & Will counties; \$53 other Illinois counties and \$60 out of state

G.W. Communications, Inc publishes the weekly subscription newspapers named The Free Press Advocate, The Braidwood Journal and The Coal City Courant.

Advertising and Business Offices:

• 111 South Water St., Wilmington, IL 60481 (815) 476-7966
• 271 South Broadway, Coal City, IL 60416 (815) 634-0315

Deadline for The Free Press Advocate, Braidwood Journal and Coal City Courant

Display Advertising: Friday, noon
News and Classified Advertising: Monday, noon

E-mail: News & News Photos: news@fpnusa.com

Ads & Artwork: graphics@fpnusa.com

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Published in the Coal City Courant on Wednesday, Aug. 12, 19, and 26, 2026.

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815-942-0594
Published in the Coal City Courant on Aug. 19, 26 and Sept. 2, 2026.

Hometown Storage to dispose of property

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Notice of Lien
Hometown Storage, 2920 E. Division St., Diamond, IL 60416, 815-634-3333 hereby is asserting a Possessory Lien in pursuant to your contract and the State of Illinois Self-Service Facility Act.

Tenant: Zackery Mcelfresh 16 W. Washington Dr. Diamond, IL 60416. If unpaid rental charges, late fees and associated charges are not paid for in full by August 31, 2026, the property within Unit D12 will be sold to satisfy the lien.
Published in the Coal City Courant on August 19 and 26, 2026.

CCHS has largest group of AP scholars yet

Coal City High School is celebrating another record-breaking year for Advanced Placement achievement.

In the 2025-2026 school year, students enrolled in AP courses—administered by the College Entrance Examination Board—completed a total of 341 tests.

“We have the largest number of AP Scholars in Coal City history,” said Jennifer Kenney, the district’s director of curriculum and instruction.

Students have the opportunity to enroll in Advanced Placement [AP] courses — rigorous, college-level classes. A passing exam score of three or higher can earn students valuable college credit, demonstrating to admissions teams that they are motivated and better prepared for college.

AP success not only saves families on college costs, but can also allow students to bypass introductory courses, opening doors to more specialized study, and even pave the way for early graduation. Any student who scores a three or higher receives college credit in the state of Illinois.

Of the 341 AP exams administered in spring 2026, 260 earned scores of three or higher, resulting in a pass rate of 83 percent — yet another record-breaking achievement.

“Once again, our students are performing at high levels, and we are extremely proud of their



Photo courtesy Coal City District 1

COAL CITY HIGH School is celebrating another record-breaking year for Advanced Placement achievement. To start the new school year, the school administration recognized students earning the honor of AP Scholar at its opening day assembly. The most prestigious award given is AP Scholar with Distinction which is granted to students who receive an average score of at least 3.5 on all AP Exams taken and scores of 3 or higher on five or more of these exams. Earning the honor in the Class of 2027 were (from left) Logan Natyshok, Aidan Meister, Vana Liberman, Max Kramer, AJ Kenney and Body D’Orazio.

hard work,” said Kenney. “Our AP teachers have worked hard to prepare them to obtain higher levels in these college prep courses.”

Out of all tests taken, 48 were scored at a five, 113 earned a four and 99 earned a score of three.

To start the new school year, Coal City High School recognized students earning the honor of AP Scholar at its opening day assembly. AP Scholars are recognized in three categories—AP Scholar, AP Scholar with Honor and AP Scholar with Distinction. At 62 students this is the largest number of AP

Scholars in school history.

The most prestigious award given is AP Scholar with Distinction which is granted to students who receive an average score of at least 3.5 on all AP Exams taken and scores of 3 or higher on five or more of these exams. The average score for Coalers in this category is 3.96.

AP Scholars with Distinction from the class of 2027 includes Body D’Orazio, AJ Kenney, Maxx Kramer, Vana Liberman, Aidan Meister and Logan Natyshok. Achieving the honor from the Class of 2026 were—Jacob Cimino, Rowan Fitzpatrick, Nathan

- Statistics
- US History
- World History

Foster, Carter Gill, Austin Harding, Kamryn Hansen, Noah Houston, Aidan Kenney, Mackenzie Lovell, Lance Perino, Cade Poyner, Liam Seeley, Rhaina Vanek, Sam Vota and Evelyn Wills.

The second level of recognition is AP Scholar with Honor, awarded to students who receive an average score of at least 3.25 on all AP Exams taken and scores of 3 or higher on four or more exams. The average score among this group of honorees was 3.53.

AP Scholars with Honor from the Class of 2027 include Dahilliah Anderson, Alex Carlson,

Madelyn Castle, Kellan Forsythe, Kinley Lowe, Avery Murphy, Liz Nadess, Anastasia Papach, Sophie Smith, and Olivia Vota. The following students in the class of 2026 received the AP Scholar with Honor Award too—Kyla Kohler, Lana Larson, Layla Miller, Dane Noffsinger, Jordan Olson, Hunter Pedigo, Nicholas Votta, Olivia Weatherbee, and Winter Wills.

Coal City has 22 students who earned AP Scholar recognition for scores of 3 or higher on three or more AP Exams. The average score achieved by Coalers taking

AP tests was 2.98.

Students in the class of 2027 earning AP Scholar recognition include Lilliana Aguirre, Sean Bergin, Keaton Berta, Dominick Chellino, Courtney Elberts, Theo Fritz, Brian Manering, Laynah Pierard, Adia Sarna, and Gabby VanDuyne. From the Class of 2026—Gavin Berger, Adrian Dames, Cambree Davidson, Hayden Francisco, Keirsten Gabehart, Colton Lemmons, Devon McVey, Julian Micetich, Martin Ramirez, and Colin Schimandle.

During the opening day assembly, 16 current Coalers were recognized for scoring a five on at least one exam. Those students were Liam Allen, Brody D’Orazio, Cameron Haas, Tess Jeschke, A.J. Kenney, Jaiden Leman, Vanna Lieberman, Aidan Meister, Liz Nadess, Logan Natyshok, Anastasia Papach, Abi Rose, Sophie Smith, Olivia Vota, and Ethan Wences.

AP Courses offered to Coal City students and areas tested during the 2025-2026 school year were—World History, US History, US Government, Spanish, Human Geography, English: Literature and Composition, English Language and Composition, Calculus, Statistics, Physics, Chemistry, Music Theory, 3-D and 2-D Art, and Drawing.

Murder on the Ragin' Canal was not uncommon

Today visit Ottawa and Joliet, two of the many towns on the Illinois Michigan Canal. Out of necessity boatmen on the Canal spent several days, if not a week, away from home. Rarely did the family of boatmen come with, there just wasn’t that much room. The result of that situation was the two murders that we look at today. Well, that, and that green-eyed monster - jealousy.

The first story comes from July, 1858 in the Joliet Signal but occurred in Ottawa. “Last Sunday morning, between nine and ten o’clock, our usually quiet city was suddenly thrown into intense excitement by the report that a brutal murder had just been committed. Crowds were rapidly hastening towards the scene of the murder which proved to be a small house on the side cut near the lock, occupied by Mrs. Martha A. Randall.”

“The name of the murderer was Wesley A. Fisher, a boatman on the canal, the victim, his wife, Clarrissa, daughter of Mrs. Randall. Fisher had known Clarrissa from her youth up; some four months ago, they were married. It appears lately Fisher had become haunted with the suspicion that his wife was unfaithful, and unwilling to leave her at Ottawa while passing to and fro on his boat, he tried to persuade her to live on the



Sandy Vasko

boat with him.”

“This she refused to do, but went to live with her mother. Whether there was just grounds for his suspicions or not is not apparent. He seems however to have been fully persuaded there were, and coming to town on Friday night, he stopped at a hotel, and on Saturday appears to have occupied himself in preparations for the deed on Sunday morning. He went around town and paid whatever small bills he owed, purchased a double-barreled pistol, and threw out dark hints as to the use he intended it for.”

“Early on Sunday morning he went to the house of Mrs. Randall, but his courage appears to have failed him. He was gloomy and distant, but remained only a few minutes. Between nine and ten o’clock, however, he returned, and walking into the house, without a word drew a pistol on his wife. She screamed and ran out the back way, while he was seized by her mother and sister.”

“He finally disengaged himself from them, and got outside just as his wife was passing out of the front gate. She either stumbled and fell, or was knocked down, when he seized her and turning her face upwards, fired both barrels in her breast. Exclaiming “Oh God, you have shot me: Lord have mercy!” she died. Fisher then ran into the canal, swam out on the other side, where a moment afterwards he have himself up to deputy Sheriff Grow, who took him off to jail”

Our next story takes place in Joliet. “The body of a man was found floating on the river basin last Thursday morning, and on being brought to shore proved to be that of Geo. Crawford, steersman on the canal boat Rosencransz commanded by Capt. Clark. A deep gash in the throat and a stab in the shoulder were marks on the bade that at once indicated foul play. Acting coroner Wilcox was called and a jury was summoned.

“Under their direction

a post mortem examination was made. This examination disclosed the following facts. The body could not have been in the water above 36 hours as no signs of decomposition were visible.”

“None of the wounds were of a fatal character. Internally the examination disclosed that the lungs were free of water and had not died of drowning. The appearance of the features was not that of a drowned person. Death had ensued before his immersion into the water. Nearly every rib was broken and the chest crushed in. Dr. Campbell testified at a subsequent session of the jury that these last injuries must have followed after death, a there had been no effusion of blood within. It would seem as if the body had been ground between the boat and the bank, causing no abrasion of the skin. The physicians freely admitted that during all their experience they had never been at such a loss to determine the cause of death.”

“The examination showed Crawford to be a man of great strength and complete health. His stomach was full of undigested food, proving that he had eaten heartily less than four hours and probably not over two hours before death. His stomach was not that of a whiskey drinker’s.”

“Clark, captain of the boat, testified before the jury to the effect the deceased was a sober, reliable man. He last saw him alive at about 3 o’clock Tuesday afternoon.

“The deceased asked permission to go to Lockport, stating that he owed a dollar there, and that he desired to pay it. Clark refused to grant the request. At night he noticed Crawford’s absence, and inferred he had gone to Lockport in spite of his prohibition. His dead body was the first announcement to him of his tragic end, but had no idea ow he came to it.”

“Officer Schwarz and Long testified to having heard screams proceeding

apparently from the direction of the river at about 2 o’clock Tuesday night. C. Q. Osbourne who lives on Joliet street testified that he heard a piercing shriek at the same hour. The jury after holding several sessions adjourned for one week, in the hope of arriving at something more conclusive.”

“Crawford was about 57 years of age, and came to this state from Canada, his relatives living near Toronto. His taking off is of the most mysterious kind, exciting much speculation. The secret apparently lies buried with him.”

One week later, “Last Friday evening the coroner’s jury in the case of Geo. Crawford, again met for further action and returned a verdict, which consigned Capt. Clark, of the canal boat Rosencranz, his wife and Thos. McKeegan to the county jail, to await the action of the grand jury now in session.”

I don’t know the end of the story, but I wish I did.

Federal grand jury indicts Diamond man on child pornography charges

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

A Diamond man is facing multiple federal child exploitation charges after a grand jury in Chicago returned an indictment alleging he persuaded two minors to engage in sexually explicit conduct and received videos depicting child sexual abuse.

The indictment, unsealed Thursday in U.S. District Court, charges Duane DeMichele, 45, of the 100 block of Kevin Drive, with two counts of production of child pornography and five counts of receipt of child pornography.

According to federal prosecutors, DeMichele allegedly persuaded and induced two minors in Feb. 2026 to engage in sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of video recording. The indictment further alleges that DeMichele received numerous video files containing child pornography during February and March 2026.

DeMichele was arrested June 30 and remains in federal custody pending trial. His arraignment was held Aug. 18 in Chicago.

The charges were announced by Andrew S. Boutros, U.S Attorney for the Northern District of

Illinois, and Ryan Whalen, acting special agent in charge of the FBI’s Chicago Field Office.

Authorities said the investigation received assistance from the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office Investigations Bureau Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force.

A conviction for pro-

duction of child pornography carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 15 years in federal prison and a maximum of 30 years. Receipt of child pornography carries a mandatory minimum sentence of five years and a maximum of 20 years.

DeMichele is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial, dur-

ing which prosecutors must prove the charges beyond a reasonable doubt.

Anyone who believes they may be a victim of sexual exploitation can contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1-800-843-5678 or visit missingkids.com for assistance.

Coal City Public Library calendar

Check online event calendar at ccpld.org for a description of the events and to register.

In-Person Adult Exercise, Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays 9-10 a.m. First half hour is cardio and the second half is weights, resistance band and strength training.

Thursday, Aug. 20

Lori Bonarek Realty Educational Seminar, 6 p.m. financial Wellness Workshop with Andrew Dunbar, financial advisor. Please register.

Painted Dormat, 6 p.m.

Friday, Aug. 21

Teen Take and Makes

Bingo, 1 p.m.

Gamer’s Guild, 3:30 p.m.

Monday, Aug. 24

Terrific Tots - Children 2 & 3 years old and their caregiver can attend this fun and interactive class. Each week we will focus on a different letter of the alphabet through stories, songs, a craft, and a nursery rhyme. 10 a.m.

Preschool Storytime, 11 a.m. Register

your 3-5 year old who is ready to attend class on their own. Each week we will focus on a different letter of the alphabet through stories, songs, a craft, and a nursery rhyme. Child must be CCPLD cardholder, if not please see youth services.

Eager Readers Homeschool, 1 p.m. Register your Kdg.-2nd grader for some book themed activities and fun.

Epic Quest Homeschool Group, 1 p.m. Register your 3rd-6th grader for some book themed activities and fun.

Eager Readers, 4 p.m. Register your Kdg.-3rd grader for some book themed activities and fun.

CCPLD Policy Committee Meeting, 4 p.m.

Family Lapsit, 6 p.m. Newborn up to 3 years old and their caregiver can join us for stories, sensory activities, and songs with each week focusing on a different theme each month.

Preschool Storytime. 6 p.m.

Tuesday, Aug. 25

Paper & More, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.



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Start paying attention

WILMINGTON— For those who live in denial, avoiding the daily unhinged events happening daily, who just "don't have time for that stuff, the everyone is does it crowd." Better start paying attention, this War thing is rapidly evolving into America is screwed for a full year or more without escalating this Distraction War with American boots on the ground. Even he isn't that stupid with midterms coming quickly and his poll numbers are atrocious at best. Independents moderate Republicans and Gen X are realizing he has showed his priorities, his senility and age and his old schtick is over. Better start thinking for yourself and your family. His last gasp is obviously "this election is rigged" bs coming from him and his cronies, as they micro-monitor every possible bs accusation every day. Just vote, strength in overwhelming numbers aren't lying.

Dumb vs smart states

SHADOW LAKES— I am reading in a magazine that the red states by contrast has the smallest increase in spending on education with Mississippi ranked number one in the nation with reading and math scores. So why is it people in Illinois and blue states put out under-achieving students while people in red states put out smart students. Can anyone answer me that? Dan Hill

Poor spoiled brat

BRACEVILLE— If Trump read the SoundOff we would no longer be able to have it. Everyone that writes in hurts his little feelings. The poor little spoiled brat.

You're a whimp

SHADOW LAKES— Watching Channel 5 News about how people can cope with stress over severe storms. It's very simple, you're a wimp. Grow up, accept it and believe in God. C'mon people. Sheri Michaels also needs to wake up. Thank you.

He is in those files

WILMINGTON—Donald J. Trump sues everyone, sues anything, sues for any reason. Reason being, you can drag it out

in court appealing and reappealing to a higher court taking sometimes years for a final outcome. Funny how thousands of people have called him a rapist and a pedophile. He won't dare sue them. Why? I know why, you know why, but I'm not afraid to say it. He is guilty of doing terrible things to innocent children repeatedly for years. He won't release those files, he is those files. Say a prayer for Trump's victims when you hypocritically go to church.

Conned again

WILMINGTON—Attention all you Trump lovers, the self-promoting World's Greatest Businessman just had the July 2026 budget results posted. In just July it has a deficit of \$432 billion, one month. America is broke and nothing to help it is coming. Can't thank you guys enough for being so foolish to be conned again. Fools use the nonsense words like communist, socialism, radical, Islam and immigrants to scare but the most frightening thing, is that Epstein pal monster currently running the destroyed White House.

Going to cut SS

WILMINGTON—Speaker of the House leader Mike Johnson is repeating his desire to cut Social Security by 20-22% across the board more and more often than ever before. If you collect \$1,000 per month new number as low as \$780. What would you do to live? Collect \$2,500 per month, new number \$1,950, what could you cut out of life at 70-years-old? This is what the Republican Party is openly saying on camera. They aren't BS'ing. They use new term entitlements instead of Social Security to fool you. Don't continue being stupid out of old habits, save yourself, help yourselves. Quit voting for a party that doesn't give a **** about your life. Enjoy whatever time you have left. Republican politicians are all about power, themselves and keeping billionaires happy for political donations.

Finally, we've been heard

BRAIDWOOD—For years, Braidwood citizens have asked for more events for our youth and families. It is wonderful to see that the city council has listened and is taking action. Thank you to everyone who volunteered to join the newly formed



Events Committee. The list of possible events sounds exciting, and I look forward to seeing these ideas become a reality. It is great to see our community coming together to create more fun and positive activities for our children and families. I can't wait to see what the Events Committee brings to Braidwood this year. Thank you to the council and all the volunteers for investing in our community and, most importantly, our youth.

Trump never served

The commander-in-chief of all U.S. military branches showed his concern for the welfare of sailors and Marines by saying that their nine uninterrupted months aboard the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln is "not nearly long enough." Coming from a man who never served his country and who has been branded as a five-time draft-dodger, I suppose that is to be expected. After all, he chastised the late John McCain, whose fighter jet was shot down over Hanoi, and for 5 1/2 years was a captive, beaten and tortured in a North Vietnamese prison. The man who thought that he knew Trump well, the late Lindsey Graham, once questioned Trump's fitness to be commander-in-chief saying that attending a military high school was no substitute for the military service that Trump avoided. "He doesn't represent my party and he doesn't represent the values that the men and women in uniform are fighting for." Trump didn't then and he obviously doesn't now.

David Kahn. Cashiers, NC

No more pork chops?

WILMINGTON—Think about this all the Muslims that are running for office are

all Democrats. No more hot dogs, no more pork chops, or bacon, no more freedom for females. Vote wisely, it's your kids and grandchildren's future.

Pizza burger, anyone?

Getting tired of all the people in SoundOff talking about politics. Can we talk about something else? How about a pizza burger?

Sue the robot surgeons

SHADOW LAKES—There was an article in the paper about robots performing surgery. There were some things that were missed. One was how do you sterilize a robot to prevent infections on patients? And what will happen if the hand of the robot shakes while cutting or if the robot cuts the wrong thing? People will sue the robot for and the hospital will say it's not their fault. You don't have to be a doctor to perform surgery, so why are they getting paid so much money? And what will happen to all the doctors in the future?

Mindless, spineless

WILMINGTON—I'm not worried about the Democratic Socialist Party. I am very worried about the mindless, spineless do-nothing Mega-Republicans who haven't passed one bill to help people with their health insurance and to help people who are barely making a living trying to survive raising a family.

JoAnn

Thanks for the veggies

BRACEVILLE—This is a little late but thanks to whoever put out a table full of vegetables on the south side of Braceville Road last year for the people who can't get out to do gardening any more.

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Interior/Exterior



SHAKE, RATTLE AND FLASH — A powerful lightning strike lights up the night sky northeast of Wilmington along Peotone Road in this dramatic photo captured by Carrie Anderson around 10 p.m. Thursday. The bolt was one of many that rattled homes as a strong thunderstorm moved through the area, producing lightning strikes so loud and powerful they shook windows. The storm arrived just two days after the National Weather Service confirmed an EF1 tornado caused damage in Wilmington on Tuesday. While Thursday night's storm was not as threatening, Mother Nature still put on a loud—and brilliant—show.

IDOT approves Route 53 bridge for controversial NorthPoint expansion

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

A major hurdle for the controversial NorthPoint Development project has been cleared after the Illinois Department of Transportation approved construction of a bridge over Illinois Route 53 in the area of Breen Road in Joliet, paving the way for a significant expansion of the logistics and warehouse development in southern Will County.

The bridge will span Route 53 and connect portions of NorthPoint's sprawling property east and west of the highway. The structure is considered critical to the company's long-term plans to develop between 20 million and 30 million square feet of additional warehouse and logistics space on thousands of acres near Joliet and Elwood.

The approval allows NorthPoint to move forward with site work, including mass grading operations, following upcoming zoning proceedings.

NorthPoint will fund the estimated \$14 million project and will be responsible for its ongoing maintenance.

The bridge has been a central component of NorthPoint's vision for the property for years. The developer has argued that the crossing would keep truck traffic associated with the logistics park off Route 53, allowing vehicles to move between facilities without entering the state highway.

NorthPoint's plans have generated intense debate across Will County for nearly a decade. Residents, environmental advocates, and local officials opposed to the project have repeatedly raised concerns about increased truck traffic, air pollution, noise, road congestion and the loss of agricultural land.

The opposition move-

ment, often organized under the banner "Say No to NorthPoint," drew large crowds to public meetings throughout the approval process.

Portions of the development have already been constructed west of Route 53, where several large industrial buildings are in operation. The newly approved bridge is expected to unlock future development east of the highway and accelerate buildout of what could become one of the largest logistics parks in the Midwest.

Supporters of the project have long pointed to the potential for job creation and increased tax revenue, while critics maintain that the long-term impacts on transportation infrastructure and nearby communities remain unresolved.

With IDOT's approval now secured, attention is expected to shift to local zoning decisions and the next phase of construction planning.

Gas prices creeping ever-so-slightly higher

Average gasoline prices in Illinois have risen 7.5 cents per gallon in the last week, averaging \$4.28/g, according to GasBuddy's survey of 4,378 stations in Illinois.

In Wilmington, gas prices range from \$3.88/g at Mohsen, up to \$4.09/g at Shell.

Braidwood's gas stations are at \$4.19/g, and Coal City is charging \$3.99/g across the board.

In Morris, expect to pay anywhere from \$3.89/g (cash) at BP, up to \$4.24/g at Amoco.

Finally, Bourbonnais Gulf is charging \$4.06/g up to \$4.59/g at Kroger.

"Average gasoline prices climbed back above \$4 per gallon over the last week, with prices rising in slightly more states than they fell, as rebounding oil prices driven by the continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz and ongoing Ukrainian attacks on Russian oil refineries kept upward pressure on the market," said Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy.

"Diesel felt the pressure even more acutely, rising in all but a few states, as Ukraine's attacks on Russian refining infrastructure continue to impact refined product prices more than crude oil itself. While the seasonal transition to cheaper winter-blend gasoline in the coming month could bring some relief, the two dominant challenges facing motorists — the closed Strait and the ongoing refinery strikes — show no signs of resolving anytime soon. Until they do, the path for gas and diesel prices remains tilted to the upside."

The lowest price in the state Sunday was \$3.76/g while the highest was \$5.99/g, a difference of \$2.23/g.

Prices in Illinois are 12.8 cents per gallon higher than a month ago and stand 89.7 cents per gallon higher than a year ago.

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OBITUARIES

Donna Calhoun

BRAIDWOOD—Donna Jean Calhoun, 70, of Braidwood, formerly of Braceville, passed away Friday, Aug. 14, 2026, at the University of Chicago Medical Center.

Born Feb. 18, 1956, in Joliet, Donna was the daughter of Mae (Reynolds) Byerley and the late Charles Byerley. She was raised in Braceville and graduated from Gardner South Wilmington High School with the class of 1974. On March 6, 1976, Donna married Michael William Calhoun at Braceville United Methodist Church. Together, they made their home in Braceville before moving to Braidwood, where they raised their daughters.

Donna was a lifelong and devoted member of Braceville United Methodist Church, and her faith was of deep importance to her. She worked for several years at Jemco before gaining employment with Hollywood Casino, where she spent 25 years as a Quality Assurance Technician. Donna demonstrated her love through acts of service, whether volunteering at Kuzma Care Cottage in Wilmington or sharing handmade gifts with those she loved. She enjoyed baking, gardening, and crocheting and often used those talents as another way to care for others. Donna was also a die-hard Chicago Cubs fan and faithfully followed and supported her team until the very end.

Though she struggled with her health these past few years, she attended to every challenge with poise, quiet grace, and faith. Donna demonstrated her determination on a regular basis to live her life to the fullest, and being present as a loving and devoted mother, daughter, Nana, sister, and aunt to her family. The family wants to extend their deepest gratitude to all of the family members and friends who helped make the final chapter of Donna's life as full as it could be.



Survivors include her mother, Mae Byerley and three daughters: Pam (Bill) Raber, Katie (Branden) Johnson, and Samantha (Nick) Montgomery; three grandchildren: Bobby (Miki) Raber, Amelia Johnson, and Everett Montgomery; one brother and three sisters: Linda (Mike) Schott, Charles Byerley, Patricia (the late Fred) Wood, and Sharon O'Donnell; two sisters-in-law, Susie Byerley Flowers and Juanita (Manuel) Yeates; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Donna was preceded in death by her father, Charles Byerley, and her husband, Michael W. Calhoun; two brothers, Robert and Clyde Byerley; and two brothers-in-law, John Mack and John Yeates.

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

The family will receive friends for a memorial visitation at Baskerville Funeral Home, 700 E. Kahler Road, in Wilmington on Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2026 from 4 to 7 p.m. Funeral services will follow at Braceville United Methodist Church, 106 W. Gould Street, on Thursday, Aug. 20, 2026 at 12 p.m. Inurnment will follow at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood, where Donna will be laid to rest with her husband, Michael.

Preferred memorials may be made as gifts in Donna's memory to Braceville United Methodist Church, 106 W. Gould St., Braceville, IL 60407, or Kuzma Care Cottage, 635 S. Main Street, Wilmington, IL 60481.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the online guest book, upload photographs, and share Donna'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.

Thomas R. Buban



GODLEY—Thomas R. Buban, 85, of Godley, passed away Sunday, Aug. 16, 2026 at Lightways Inpatient Hospice in Joliet.

Born March 30, 1941, in Chicago, Thomas Richard was the son of Thomas and Anne (Hajcak) Buban. He moved with his family from Chicago to Godley at an early age, attended Saint Rose Parochial High School with the class of 1959. Following high school, Tom attended Winona State University in Minnesota before entering the United States Marine Corps. He proudly served from June 1961 until his honorable discharge in June 1964.

On July 13, 1968, Tom married Linnea Hudziak during a Mass celebrated by Father Burns at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Braidwood. Together, Tom and Linnea made their home in Godley, where they raised their family and shared more than 56 years of marriage.

A devoted Catholic, Tom was formerly a parishioner of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Braidwood and was currently a member of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Coal City, where he enjoyed serving at Mass.

Following his service in the Marines, Tom began a career with United Parcel Service. Starting as a delivery driver, he worked his way into management before taking an early retirement. He later worked for the Godley Park District and was always willing to lend his skills as a handyman to friends and neighbors. Tom also served his community as Mayor of Godley.

Farming remained an important part of Tom's life for nearly all of his years. In more recent years, he devoted much of himself to caring for his wife, Linnea, a role he took on with steadfast love and dedication.

Tom was a hardworking, straightforward man who knew what he liked and was rarely persuaded otherwise. He had a wonderful sense of humor, a willingness to



help those around him, and above all, a deep love for his family. He will be remembered for the life he built, the people he helped, and the family he loved.

Survivors include his children, Lisa (Steve) Pitts, of Wilmington and Tom Buban, of Chicago; grandchildren: Devin Pitts and Abby Pitts; nephews: John and Michael Slanicky and niece, Rosanne Whyte.

Tom was preceded in death by his parents, wife, Linnea on March 30, 2024 and his sister, Theresa Slanicky.

The family will receive friends for a visitation at Reeves Funeral Home, 75 N. Broadway (one block north of Illinois Route 113) in Coal City on Thursday, Aug. 20, 2026 from 4 p.m. until time of time of memory sharing and recitation of the Holy Rosary at 7:30 p.m.

Funeral services will follow Friday morning, Aug. 21, 2026 at 11 a.m. in Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church, 215 S. Kankakee St. in Coal City. A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated with Reverend Josh Miller presiding and Deacon William Dunn assisting. A memorial luncheon will be provided in the Berst Hall of Assumption Parish at the conclusion of the Mass, and burial with full military honors will be held at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood at 2:30 p.m. Tom will be laid to rest with his late wife, Linnea.

Preferred memorials may be made as Masses in Tom's memory or to Lightways Hospice, 250 Waterstone Circle, Joliet, IL 60431.

Family and friends are encouraged to log onto www.ReevesFuneral.com to sign the guest book, upload photographs and share Tom's memorial page online through social media.

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

U.S. corn crop ratings decline two weeks in a row

BY DANIEL GRANT
FARMWEEK

US corn condition ratings dipped another 2 points to 61% in the good-to-excellent category in USDA's latest crop progress report released Aug. 3.

It marks two straight weeks of declines following a 4-point drop in the July 27 crop progress report. The portion of the corn crop rated good to excellent is now 12 points below the same time last year.

The rest of the corn crop is currently rated 25% fair and 14% poor to very poor nationwide.

The portion of soybeans rated good to excellent Aug. 3 was unchanged from the previous week, at 63%, but down 6 points compared to the same time last year. The remaining US bean crop is currently rated 28% fair and 9% poor to very poor.

"Right now, we're at a transition point for these crops," Rich Nelson, chief

strategist at Allendale Inc. in McHenry, told FarmWeek. "If the weather forecast (of more regular rain showers) holds true, it could be a strong finish and could repair some of the earlier (crop) damage."

So, how much weight do the sinking crop ratings have on the market, particularly ahead of USDA's much-anticipated crop production report Aug. 12?

"Crop ratings are not exactly the best measurement for final yields, but there is a relationship there and they do a good job predicting what direction USDA may go (in its first yield estimates of the year Aug. 12 using farmer survey data)," Nelson said.

"If you use the ratings by themselves, our numbers would imply we could see a 1.9% yield hit, with an average yield of 179.6 (bushels per acre nationwide for corn)," he continued. "But our weather data would imply a yield closer to 181.5."

USDA's initial yield

estimates heading into the August report pegged national average yields at 183 bushels per acre for corn and 53 for soybeans.

"There's a lot of questions still ahead," Nelson said. "The markets are not trading that (yield) number (implied by lower crop conditions). The market is trading slightly above trend yield."

Commodity firm StoneX on Aug. 4 estimated US corn production at 16.16 billion bushels with an average yield of 184.8 bushels per acre, well above USDA's estimate, with an average soybean yield of 53 bushels. Allendale Inc. will conduct its annual farmer survey about crop expectations Aug. 17-28 and results will be announced the first week of September.

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

Diana D. Vestal

MORRIS—Diana D. Vestal, 50, of Morris, passed away on Monday, Aug. 10, 2026 at Lightways Hospice in Joliet, surrounded by her loved ones.

She was born on July 27, 1976 in Chicago to Dallas and Mary (nee Hager) Napier. She grew up in the Channahon and Minooka areas, graduating with Minooka High School class of 1994. Diana married the love of her life, Jacob Vestal, on Dec. 5, 2003 at The Mansion in Dwight. Together, they made their home in Morris and Coal City and raised their two sons.

A true entrepreneur, Diana was a partnered owner of Distinct Visions and Salon Trends as a beautician, Boutique Clothing stores in Coal City and Morris and Digital Design Vinyl and Print. She was a devoted BMX Racing mom and enjoyed traveling to her son's competitions, volunteering to make banners and stickers and photo-



graphing the riders. There was no end to Diana's creativity and her passion. She found great joy in her businesses and with her family. She also counted many friendships along the way in her life.

She is survived by her husband of 22 years, Jake and their two sons, Damen and Gaven. Several aunts and cousins also survive.

She was preceded in death by her parents.

Visitation was held Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 at the Ferrari Funeral Chapel in Coal City.

Cremation rites were accorded following the visitation.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the online guestbook at www.ferrari-funeral.com.

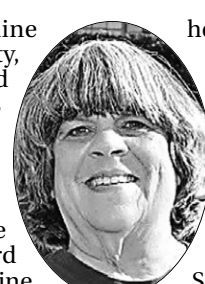
Ferrari Funeral Services of Coal City were entrusted with arrangements.

Jeanine Congalton

FULLERTON, CA—K. Jeanine Congalton, formerly of Coal City, currently of Fullerton, CA, passed away unexpectedly earlier this month, she would have turned 70 later this month. Raised in Coal City, where she was an honor student, she completed her undergraduate degree at Illinois State and still counted her Redbird friends in her closest circle. Jeanine earned her M.A. at North Dakota State where she briefly taught early in her career before completing her Ph.D. at the University of Utah, where she created her strongest personal and academic relationships.

After three years at California State University-Fresno, Jeanine spent the bulk of her career at California State University, Fullerton, where she became an institution, for many years coaching their successful forensics program. Her forensics service was vast, having served as District/Chair of the American Forensics Association's National Individual Events Tournament, where she was a fixture on the tournament tabulation staff and was bestowed with their Distinguished Service Award in 1997. She was a favorite judge on the National Debate Tournament circuit and coached numerous students to national tournaments. She was an officer in the International Forensics Association for a decade and worked in tabulation rooms at hundreds of forensics contests at all levels.

Jeanine was the unsung hero of the Human Communication Studies department at California State University, Fullerton, serving perpetually on personnel, graduate, and search committees copiously combing through hundreds of files, and meticulously reviewing adjunct and graduate student instructors. Despite all her dedicated service, her clear legacy was her students. She was a devoted teacher, paying special attention to those students with extra challenges, creating in them a sense of self-confidence and success. During the pandemic she would drive to her campus parking lot to connect to university wi-fi, teaching classes from



her car. She followed the careers of generations of her students, even if that meant showing up at an 8 a.m. convention panel or drafting volumes of thoughtful letters of recommendation. Many, if not nearly all, institutions in southern California likely have at least one instructor who was trained and mentored by Jeanine. Scores of her students comment that she's the role model for how they conduct their lives, both professionally and personally. Her idea of work/life balance was taking a stack of papers to grade on the grounds of her beloved Disneyland, where she valued and regularly used her annual pass. Jeanine was a lifelong fan of the Chicago Cubs, Bears, and Blackhawks, and a season ticket holder to CSUF Titan baseball, where her second home was Goodwin Field.

She was a dedicated aunt, attending countless soccer, lacrosse, and baseball games of her nieces and nephews. The U.S. Postal Service has been kept solvent by her mailing greeting cards for every known occasion, always including a dollar bill, to her sphere of friends, mere acquaintances, their families and extended networks. Nearly everyone she met made it into her address book. Jeanine was generous to a fault, always being the first to "treat" whoever she was visiting.

She is survived by her sister, Donna (Roger) Hanley, of Tampa; sister-in-law, Kris DiPaolo, 10 nieces and nephews, numerous great-nieces and nephews and a wide circle of friends who remain in shock at her unanticipated passing.

Jeanine was preceded in death by her parents, Pete and Catherine (Kay) DiPaolo, formerly of Coal City and brother, David, of Corona, CA.

A celebration of life will be hosted on Saturday, Sept. 19, 2026 at 3 p.m. in room CBE/SGMH 1502 at California State University, Fullerton, where she leaves many saddened colleagues and associates. Memorials can be made to the CSU, Fullerton Jeanine Congalton Scholarship already established in her honor.

Fossil Ridge Library News

Children & Toddler Programs

Tuesday, Aug. 25
Play-Doh Playdates, 10:30-11 a.m. Play-Doh workshop. Display your creativity using our Play-Doh and tools. For Children ages 2-6.

Thursday, Aug. 27
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, registration is required

Braidwood blood drive scheduled for September 17

The City of Braidwood will host its next community blood drive on Thursday, Sept. 17, from 2 to 6 p.m. in the meeting room at Braidwood City Hall, 141 W. Main Street.

Pre-registration is highly recommended, although walk-in donors will also be accepted.

To register, please visit the online registration link provided by the city or contact Blood Drive Coordinator Josh Bolatto at

(815) 458-2342 between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

As part of Versiti's September donor promotion, individuals who donate blood will be entered into the Fire Up Your Team Sweepstakes for a chance to win a Chicago Fire FC VIP Team Experience. Participants must be at least 18-years-old to be eligible for the sweepstakes.



Photo by Catrina Rawson of FarmWeek

US CORN CROP ratings declined each of the past two weeks, just ahead of USDA's crop production report Aug. 12.

Symerton Homecoming 2026

Tues, August 18 Elwood vs. Symerton—16" Softball game @ 6 pm
Weds, August 19 Manhattan vs. Symerton— 16" Softball game @ 6 pm
Thurs, August 20 Manhattan vs. Elwood —16" Softball game @ 6 pm
Car/Vintage Tractor Show 4:30-7:30 pm (WEATHER PERMITTING)
Fri, August 21 The Southside Social Club Live Band on the patio—7:00 pm
Sat, August 22 "The Equals" Live Band @ 7:00-10:00 pm on the patio
Volley Ball Tournament Reg. 10am - Start 10:30
Sun, August 23 Tractor Pull @ noon North side of the park
Kiddie Pedal Pull—Register @ 1 pm/pull starts @ 2 pm
Ice Cream Truck 12 noon—2 pm and "Ice Ice Baby" icees
Billy Gray Music—3:00 pm

Sunday: All day long: Kids activities, face painting & games, animal petting zoo and show, 50/50 raffle and drinks and food at Symerton Tap and Grill.

⇒ Mr. K's Chuckwagon (Serving Saturday from 11 am—8 pm & Sunday 11 am—6 pm)



Presented by:
The Village of Symerton



Photo by Eric Fisher
A SECTION OF the rooftop at Tire Tracks, 507 W. Baltimore St, was lifted away by 100 mph wind or possible tornado on Tuesday around 11 a.m. Nearby buildings were mostly spared as debris from the powerful blast fell across two parking lots to the east.

Berkot's power restored after storm, Tire Tracks faces a longer recovery

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

The severe storms and tornado activity that swept through the area Aug. 11 left their mark across Will County, forcing temporary closures at several local establishments.

Among the larger businesses affected were Berkot's Super Foods locations in Braidwood, Wilmington, and Peotone, all of which lost power during the storm. Company officials said the closures were caused by electrical outages rather than structural damage to the stores.

Teamwork saves the day

The Wilmington Berkot's location reopened Aug. 13 at 2 p.m. after power was restored and employees completed extensive food safety and recovery procedures.

"We are fully open, fully operational now," said Assistant Manager Madeline Evans. "We had a massive recovery team, spectacular employees that helped us make sure that we took care of all of our freezer items, our cold items, dairy, meat department. We did everything by the book, taking care of our food to make sure we lost as little as possible and kept everything safe and healthy for our customers."

Evans said employees worked through an enormous amount of recovery

work to prepare the store for reopening.

"I had come in for my shift and then volunteered the following day to help with getting everything back how it's supposed to be," she said. "We had to follow our guidelines. Basically the same way that we get our freezer items in is how we have to get them right back."

She credited employees across the store for stepping up during the crisis.

"Please ensure that you put in how grateful we are for all of our employees," Evans said. "I cannot stress that enough. We've had people working jobs they've never worked before, going above and beyond. We are just so grateful for everyone who's helped."

Safe evacuation, no injuries reported

A spokesperson at the Braidwood Berkot's said the store regained power late Aug. 13 and immediately began restocking shelves and inspecting inventory.

"We just got power back late last night (Aug. 13), so we're in the process of getting the store restocked," he said.

The Braidwood store has since reopened.

The spokesperson was working when the outage occurred and said customers were inside the store when power was lost.

Fortunately, everyone exited safely and no injuries were reported.

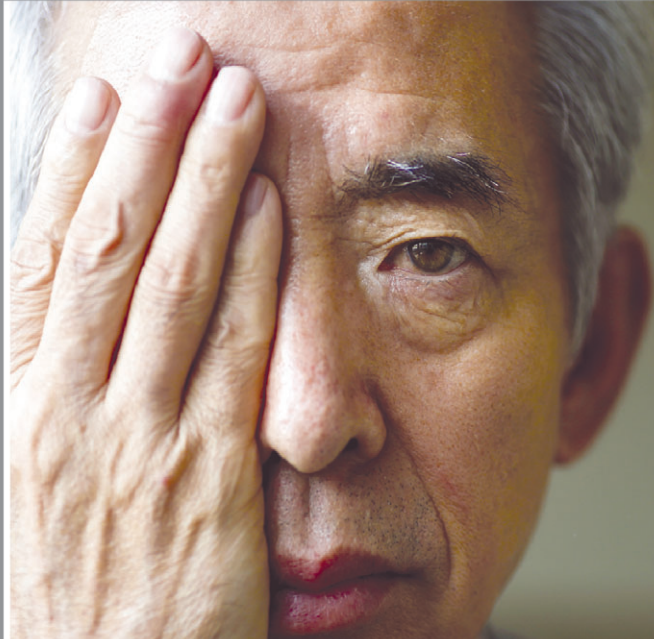
One of the hardest-hit commercial properties was Tire Tracks Auto Care at 507 W. Baltimore St. in Wilmington. According to the National Weather Service, the auto repair shop was the precise point where an EF-1 tornado first touched down Tuesday morning.

The tornado, with estimated peak winds of 90 mph, ripped away a substantial portion of the building's roof and scattered debris into a neighboring strip mall, causing additional damage. Witnesses described the scene as resembling a "war zone" in the hours after the storm.

Despite the destruction, Tire Tracks' parent company, GreatWater 360 Auto Care, said all employees escaped without injury.

"It's been a tough week for our shop and the community," the company said in a public statement. "We were hit hard by Mother Nature, and while our building sustained significant damage, we're incredibly grateful to share that everyone is safe."

The Wilmington Tire Tracks location remains closed while company officials evaluate repairs and reconstruction options. Customers with appointments have been directed to the company's Bradley and Manteno locations.



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August 19, 2026

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Wilmington EST. 1924
THE ISLAND CITY, ILLINOIS

Nobody in Springfield is automatically entitled to a decade at the top

After Michael J. Madigan's 36 years as Illinois House Speaker, a ten-year term limit on current and future speakers doesn't seem like a lot of time in the big chair. Except it is.



CAPITOL FACTS

Rich Miller

Nobody prior to Madigan had ever served ten years as speaker in this state going back to when Illinois became a state in 1818. The only person who came close was Republican Warren Wood, who held the position for eight years in the 1950s.

Most of the rest served single terms or two terms. Democrat Paul Powell, served six years, including two years before Speaker Wood and four years after. Powell became infamous for stashing cash in shoe boxes at his Springfield hotel residence and died with an estimated fortune of \$4.6 million. But I digress.

Another Democrat, Bill Redmond, also held the gavel for six years, although the future Speaker Madigan held quite a bit of sway over him in the late 1970s.

Two Republicans served as speaker for six years each in the early

1900s. But that's about it.

Republican George Ryan was speaker for two years before he was tapped to be Gov. Jim Thompson's running mate. In the 1930s, four different members (three Democrats and one Republican)

held the gavel for just two years each. 47 out of 70 House Speakers served two years or less (four days in the case of George Ryan's Majority Leader Art Telcser).

What I'm getting at is ten years is actually a long time. More importantly, though, the ten-year ceiling has also somehow become a floor — an expected decade-long entitlement.

House Speaker Chris Welch has obviously fully intended to serve the full decade since he was first elected to the chamber's top job for a two-year term in 2021. You may have noticed that a couple of his members who spoke out early about his mishandling of the Harry Benton sexual harassment matter suddenly went silent. That was no coincidence.

Pressure is being exerted on the rank and file. His team wants those ten years.

But a decade with the gavel is not only historically unique, it's also longer than the average service time for House Democratic members, which is currently 8.4 years. That's up a bit from a six-year average in 2020, according to the Statehouse's unofficial honorary historian (title I just made up) John Amdor. But it's still below the ten-year House Speaker term limit.

Starting in the final two decades of the previous century, the Senate has a history of electing Senate Presidents to multiple terms. Democrat Phil Rock held the Senate's gavel for 14 years. Then, Republican Pate Philip served ten years before the Democrats won the right to draw the new district map in 2001.

Democrat Emil Jones was the chamber's top person for six years, and was replaced by Democrat John Cullerton for 11 years. Current Senate President Don Harmon was first elevated in 2020, but he's eligible to serve until 2031 because that first year after Cullerton resigned mid-term doesn't count toward the chamber's ten-year term limit.

Before Phil Rock, most Senate Presidents served just two to six years, except for the ten years that Republican Sen. Art Bidwell held the gavel from

1955-1965,

One of the reasons that House Speakers and Senate Presidents served such short stints was that party dominance wasn't assured like it has been for the past several decades. Partisan majorities flipped back and forth much more before the advent of computer-driven redistricting.

Republicans and Downstate Democrats would also occasionally scheme to prevent Chicago from holding power in their chambers (which is how Paul Powell was first elected speaker).

I'm not advocating here for reducing the term limits to six years or whatever. But what I am saying is that Illinois government will not crash and burn if Speaker Welch and Senate President Harmon don't serve their full five two-year General Assemblies as their chambers' leaders.

They should both have to earn each and every one of their two-year terms. A ten-year stint should not be considered the minimum length of service. If their members want both of them to stick around, that's their decision, as long as they recognize that nobody is automatically entitled to a decade at the top.

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

New law requires all pharmacies to display 988 Crisis Lifeline information

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

A new Illinois law sponsored by State Rep. Jackie Haas is aimed at making life-saving mental health resources more visible by requiring pharmacies across the state to display information about the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. This bipartisan measure will help those most in need by requiring pharmacies to display signs with information about the lifeline.

House Bill 4982 was recently signed into law by Gov. JB Pritzker following bipartisan approval in the Illinois General Assembly. The legislation requires pharmacies to post signs with information about the statewide 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, along with other mental health awareness and assistance

resources.

Haas said the measure is designed to connect more Illinois residents with help during a mental health crisis.

"On Friday (July 31), House Bill 4982 was signed into law," Haas said in a statement. "This bipartisan measure will help those most in need by requiring pharmacies to display signs with information about the statewide 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, as well as other awareness and assistance information. This will ensure more Illinoisans are aware of the important, life-saving resources our state offers."

She also thanked lawmakers from both parties for supporting the legislation.

"I am incredibly thankful for the bipartisan support this bill received, and look forward to continuing my work on this important issue," Haas said.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline provides free, confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for people experiencing mental health crises, suicidal thoughts, or emotional distress. The service also offers assistance to individuals concerned about a loved one.

Supporters of the legislation say pharmacies are

well-positioned to help raise awareness because they serve people of all ages and often interact with individuals managing both physical and mental health conditions.

By placing 988 information in a highly visible location, the law aims to make it easier for people to find help when they need it most.

DAR prospective member workshop

The Kankakee Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution is hosting a free workshop Saturday, Aug. 29 from 9:30 a.m. to noon at the Bradley Public Library where experienced genealogists from our State Lineage Team will be available to help trace your family's history and determine your eligibility for Daughters of the American Revolution membership.

Attendees should bring any genealogy records they have on paper or computer. If you are 18 years or older and believe your lineage can be traced to a patriot who supported the cause of American independence, we hope to see you there.

For additional information, contact Lee Ann Hollenbeck, (815) 592-4058, Registrar, Kankakee Chapter, NSDAR.

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REAL ESTATE

SHERIFF'S SALE OF REAL ESTATE of **319 N KANKAKEE ST, WILMINGTON, IL 60481** (not applicable). On the 27th day of August, 2026 to be held at 12:00 noon, at the Will County Courthouse, 100 W. Jefferson Street, Room 1001, Joliet, IL 60432, under Case Title: **NEWREZ LLC D/B/A SHELLPOINT MORTGAGE SERVICING Plaintiff V. MARC OSMANSON; BREANNE OSMANSON; PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS; STATE OF ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE; CHICAGO TITLE LAND TRUST COMPANY D/B/A THE LAND TRUST COMPANY, AS TRUSTEE; SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT; UNKNOWN OWNERS AND NON-RECORD CLAIMANTS;** Defendant. Case No. **25 FC 1093** in the Circuit Court of the Twelfth Judicial Circuit, Will County, Illinois. Terms of Sale: ten percent (10%) at the time of sale and the balance within twenty-four (24) hours. No judicial sale fee shall be paid by the mortgagee acquiring the residential real estate pursuant to its credit bid at the sale or by any mortgagee, judgment creditor, or other lienor acquiring the residential real estate whose rights in and to the residential real estate arose prior to the sale. All payments shall be made in cash or certified funds payable to the Sheriff of Will County. In the event the property is a condominium, in accordance with 735 ILCS 5/15-1507(c)(1)-(H-1) and (H-2), 765 ILCS 605/9(g)(5), and 765 ILCS 605/18.5(g)-1), you are hereby notified that the purchaser of the unit, other than a mortgagee, shall pay the assessments and legal fees required by subdivisions (g)(1) and (g)(4) of Section 9 and the assessments required by subsection (g)-1) of Section 18.5 of the Illinois Condominium Property Act. Pursuant to Local Court Rule 11.03 (J) if there is a surplus following application of the proceeds of sale, then the plaintiff shall send written notice pursuant to 735 ILCS 5/15-1512(d) to all parties to the proceeding advising them of the amount of the surplus and that the surplus will be held until a party obtains a court order for its distribution or, in the absence of an order, until the surplus is forfeited to the State. For Information Please Contact: **ANSELMO LINDBERG OLIVER LLC, 1771 W. Diehl Rd. Suite 120 NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS 60563 P: 630-453-6960 F: 630-428-4620** PURSUANT TO THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT YOU ARE ADVISED THAT THIS LAW FIRM IS DEEMED TO BE A DEBT COLLECTOR ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE. Published in the Free Press Newspapers on Wed., Aug. 5, 12, and 19, 2026

Climate change and wine production

Dear EarthTalk: Has climate change already had any significant impacts on wine production around the world?
-Wendy Baumgarten, Dubuque, Iowa

EARTH TALK

Questions & Answers About Our Environment

Eight out of the ten hottest years on record have occurred in the past decade. Thus, it is no surprise that rising global temperatures have had a significant impact on wine production.

One study by the University of British Columbia (UBC) found that temperatures during the wine growing season have drastically increased around the world. "That kind of change can affect harvest times, grape ripening, and thus the taste of the wine," reports UBC's Elizabeth Wolkovich, one of the study authors.

One aspect of wine production that climate change has affected is the growing cycle. Warmer temperatures lead to the growing cycle happening earlier. In fact, budding, flowering, fruit-set, veraison

(when the grapes begin to ripen and change color), and harvest all take place around ten days to two weeks sooner than normal. This leads to higher alcohol levels, lower acidity levels, and less refined tannins, all of which affect taste.

Hot temperatures during the growing season also make it more difficult for those who grow wine to achieve balance in the fruit. During the winter, mild temperatures lead to vines coming out of dormancy quicker and becoming more vulnerable to frost as a result.

Global warming has also increased weather disasters. As vines are one of the most weather-sensitive agricultural crops, weather catastrophes can be detrimental. Smoke from wildfires can easily cover vineyards and ruin wines, a phenomenon that has already occurred in the U.S., Australia, and South Africa. A shortage of rainwater can decrease the fruitfulness of wine production, while hail can be extremely destructive.

Droughts and wildfires, both of which have become more common due to climate change, have therefore negatively affected the quality of harvests.

Amid this crisis, one study published in the

journal Nature Reviews Earth and Environment shows that around 90 percent of coastal and low-altitude regions in California may be unable to produce good wine if global warming exceeds +2°C, reducing the growable surface area of wine.

With increasing temperatures reducing grape crops and the quality of wine, researchers estimate that up to 70 percent of the world's suitable wine regions will become too warm for production by the end of the century. That said, a warmer climate is expected to boost production in 25 percent of current wine regions.

Winemakers have begun taking adaptive measures. For instance, new grape varieties are being used as they are better suited to climate change. Growers can also plant on differently oriented slopes that receive less sun and more wind, or slopes at higher altitudes to mitigate temperature increases.

While these measures may come at high costs, they are now crucial to preserving the prosperity of wine production worldwide.

EarthTalk® a 501(c)3 nonprofit EarthTalk. Send questions to: question@earthtalk.org

Things your family should know in a medical emergency

Ten things every family should know in a medical emergency.

- Learn CPR before you need it.
- Call 911 immediately. Don't wait to "see if they get better."
- Put your phone on speaker. This lets you keep both hands free while following the dispatcher's instructions.
- Unlock the front door before EMS arrives and send someone outside to meet first responders.
- Know where the nearest Automated External Defibrillator (AED) is. Many schools, gyms, churches, airports, community centers, and office buildings have them.

- Create a family emergency plan. Decide in advance who will call 911, meet first responders outside, gather medications and medical information, and care for children or pets.
- Make sure your house numbers are visible at night.
- Teach everyone in the family where emergency medications are stored.
- Talk with older relatives about their medical history and wishes before an emergency happens.
- Keep a current list of medications, allergies, and medical conditions in an easy-to-find place.

Culligan - Help Wanted - Route Driver

*Responsible for delivering any of our products directly to our customers. The following is a general list, though you may be asked to deliver additional items not listed.

* 5 gal. water * 3 gal. water * 80# & 50# bags of salt * 5 gal. peroxide * Coolers * Cased Water

- A route driver must be able to routinely lift up to 80 lbs.

- Responsibilities include organizing your route in an efficient manner; operating a forklift; maintaining load manifests and any other vehicle documents.

- The following are mandatory requirements the route driver must pass and maintain:

*Must maintain a class C driver's license with an excellent driving record.

*Ability to pass and maintain the motor vehicle background check, the criminal history background check and routine and random drug tests.

Building a strong relationship with customers is a vital function of this position.

Apply within: Culligan, 75 W. Chestnut St. Coal City

Juster earns dean's list

Carthage College in Wisconsin recognizes Chase Juster from Wilmington, for his academic achievement and being named to the Spring 2026 Dean's List.

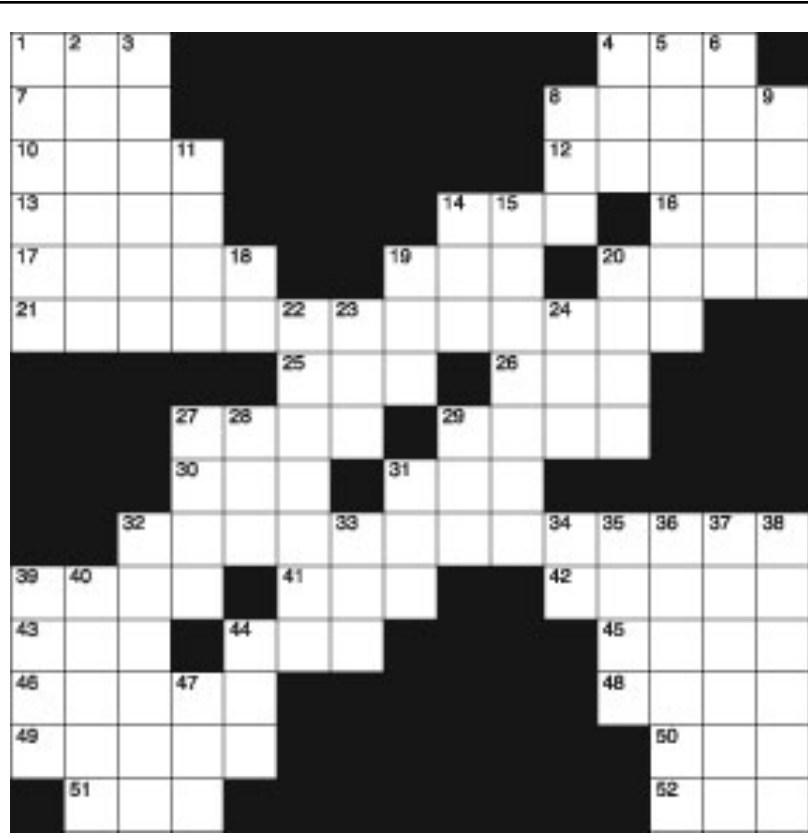
Dean's List honors are accorded to Carthage students who achieve a minimum 3.5 grade-point average.

HELP FOR VETERANS



BE THE ONE is the suicide prevention part of the American Legion. Vets can call: 779-206-8391, The Wilmington Help Line to talk with a Veteran who has had PTSD. There is help, only a phone call away.

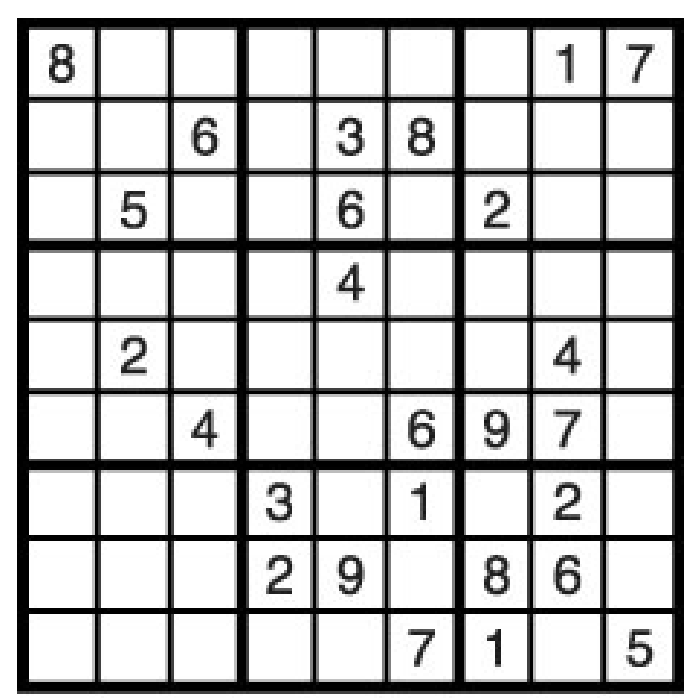
In an emergency call the Veterans CRISIS LINE 988 THEN PRESS 1



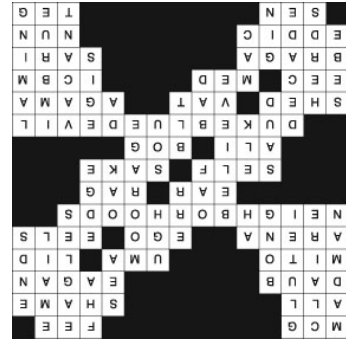
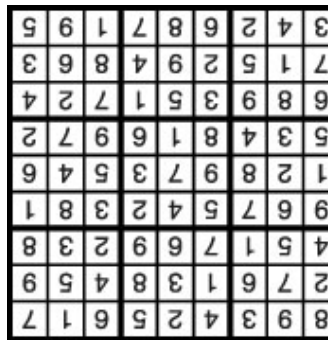
- CLUES ACROSS**
 1. Microgram
 4. Fixed charge
 7. Each
 8. Feeling of humiliation
 10. Coat with sticky substance
 12. Powerful "Severance" family
 13. Japanese city
 14. "Pulp Fiction" actress Thurman
 16. Hat
 17. Place where rockers work
19. Psyche
 20. Snakelike fishes
 21. Where people live
 25. Body part
 26. Old towel
 27. One's essential being
 29. Japanese alcoholic beverage
 30. Boxing's GOAT
 31. Wet muddy ground
 32. Christian Laettner is one
 39. A place to store lawn tools

41. Large tub for liquid
42. Old World lizard
43. One-time European member group
44. Healing student
45. Nuclear weapon
46. "Kiss of the Spider Woman" actress Sonia
48. Silk garment
49. About some Norse poems
50. Woman religious community member
51. Congressman (abbr.)
52. Two-year-old sheep

- CLUES DOWN**
 1. An insane person
 2. "Homeland" actress Danes
 3. Buttock muscles
 4. US federal agency
 5. Birds of prey
 6. Electronic communication
 8. Ocean
 9. Terminates
 11. Low-pitched sound from a bell
 14. Exclamation: yuck!
 15. A place to attach a boat
 18. Exclamation of surprise
 19. Make a mistake
 20. Border line
 22. Have religious faith
 23. Klutz
 24. Large tree
 27. House of ___ rulers
 28. Red deer
 29. Small coin (French)
 31. Popular sandwich
 32. 10-year period
 33. Not good
 34. Government lawyer
 35. Egypt's intelligence agency
 36. Without an occupant or incumbent
 37. Stain with one's hands
 38. Crippling
 39. One point east of southeast
 40. Large, united groups
 44. ___ and cheese
 47. Alcoholic beverage



Level: Intermediate



Expectations remain high for Coalers

BY JIM SHELTON
SPORTS CORRESPONDENT

Year in and year out, the Coal City football team is a formidable opponent. Throughout the last 48 years, they've had a winning record 41 times.

The last three seasons, they have won multiple playoff games only to fall to the eventual state champion.

With the senior duo of quarterback Connor Henline and running back Logan Natyshok returning, the rest of the Illinois Central Eight conference will be having nightmares all season long.

The two combined for 59 touchdowns last season and 3,910 total yards.

"We want to maximize our opportunities and take the next step in those big games. The guys are well aware of the games that we came up short in," said head coach Francis Loughran. "They are the ones that said in the offseason they have high expectations and want to be able to do what they can to be successful in those tougher games."

Henline completed 107 of 204 passes for 2,035 yards, 29 touchdowns and only four interceptions helping the Coalers offense average a stout 40.5 points per game.

"Henline is almost like a coach on the field right now. He knows the offense. He knows how to lead. He's a positive role model and holds a high standard for those guys. That's one aspect that I think he does excellent at."

"He's a talented passer, but he's also extremely talented at taking care of the football, which I think sometimes gets overlooked. You look at all the passing numbers and touchdowns, but he does a great job of making smart decisions. With our option offense, he knows when to give, when to throw, things of that nature."

The other half of the dynamic duo is Natyshok who took his opportunity and ran with it, pun intended. He accounted for 121 carries for 1,277 yards and 23 touchdowns

and also caught 24 passes for an eye-popping 598 yards and seven touchdowns.

"As a running back, I feel like it took me a few weeks last season to really find my identity as a ball carrier. This year I know my abilities and how to utilize them in the best ways to lead our team to success," said Natyshok. Loughran expects him to be a workhorse for the Coalers this season.

"We have other guys that are going to carry the ball, but we're going to try to get him the ball, whether it's handing it off or in the passing game, and then on top of that, he's going to play some defense this year. We're just trying to use his athleticism and his strength as much as we can for the team."

Senior offensive/defensive lineman Emmett Easton is entering his fourth year on varsity and brings a wealth of experience. He recorded 66 tackles, eight for loss and six sacks last season. The trio of Easton, Henline and Natyshok figure to be the main leaders on both sides of the ball.

"Even last year I saw myself as a leader by example, but this year it is much more vocal and real. Me and Henline have extreme confidence in our abilities running the offense and our teammates are able to leach off of that energy," said Natyshok.

Other top returning players are seniors Aiden Scrogam (running back/linebacker), Brody D'Orazio (offensive/defensive lineman), Sean Bergin (offensive/defensive lineman), Ty Christopher (tight end/defensive lineman) and Tyler Phillips (running back/linebacker).

"Scrogam had a great year last year on offense, carrying the ball and in the passing game. He was able to make a number of catches. This year, he's going to be a force on defense, playing linebacker," said Loughran.

"D'Orazio has been starting since he was a sophomore and has done a great job for two years, played a lot of games, and is the leader of the offen-

sive line. He's really physical and he's going to also be another guy that goes both ways."

"Bergen is another lineman who is a big strong kid that started last year for us. Christopher started all last year at defensive end and will do the same this year while getting some snaps on the o-line. Phillips is a returning linebacker so there's a number of guys that have a lot of experience that we are going to lean on a bit."

Some guys that got a lot of time last year but weren't necessarily starting are seniors Cooper Morris (running back/defensive back), Kole Carpenter (running back/defensive back) and Theo Fritz (running back/linebacker).

"I'm excited for Morris in the secondary. He has already stepped up and had a great summer and is taking on a bigger role, same thing with Carpenter. He got some looks last year and offensively, he was able to get in the mix running the ball. Fritz got a lot of reps last year but will be taking on a bigger role at linebacker."

Among the new guys, sophomore Maddox Meents and junior Tyce Farrell will play wide receiver and defensive back.

The Coalers open on the road at Pontiac who they defeated 40-14 in the opener last year, before welcoming Morris back to town for the home opener in Week 2.

"Pontiac returns a lot and we have to go to their place so that's going to be a tough opponent and then Morris lost some guys but always seems to reload."

"Those first two weeks are going to show us exactly where we're at, what we need to improve on, what's working well, and really get us prepared for conference play."

The conference figures once again to come down to Coal City and Wilmington.

"We know Week 9 against Wilmington is a big game. They always reload and return Brysen Meents, Hunter Kaitschuck and Declan Moran, to name a



Photo by Amy Walker

DOUBLE DEFENSE—Coalers Meents and Ospavicius make a tackle during the football scrimmage on Friday night.

few."

"I think Peotone is going to be tough this year. They return quite a bit. They were pretty young last year, and so that's going to be a benefit for them. They're always physical. They always play us tough, no matter what the records are. So that that'll be a tough one."

"Manteno, they seem like they're back, with program numbers and talent, especially the skill positions. I know they return a lot in the offensive line, so they'll reload themselves."

"Reed-Custer's on the

rise. I really think that they showed last year that they took a step, kind of back in the right direction, as far as being able to pull out some close games, and they return a number of guys. Herscher was pretty senior heavy last year, but they showed some talent at the lower levels."

A change to this year's schedule is the IHSA expanding the playoffs, adding 128 teams, 16 in each class. The top 16 teams will receive a first-round bye. The season is also starting one week earlier which limits practice

time before Week 1.

"Anytime you implement a new system, you have to try to find the best way to navigate that. Our guys have adapted well. They have had a very good summer and have done a great job of being focused whether it's on the field or in the weight room."

"Football is such a regimented sport, like a routine sport that I wonder how that bye is going to be. It's a giant unknown and it will be interesting to see how it plays out."



Photo by Amy Walker

READY TO TAKE the court for the 2026 season is the varsity volleyball team. The Coal City squad travels to Prairie Central Aug. 24 for the season opener before hosting Morris on Aug. 27.



Photo by Amy Walker

STRIKE UP THE BAND! The next opportunity Coaler fans will get to tap their feet to music of the Coal City Marching Band will be Friday, Aug. 28 during the first home football game against Morris.

CCHS Fall sports schedules

VARSITY FOOTBALL

Aug. 21 ...@Pontiac.....	7 p.m.
Aug. 28 ...host Morris.....	7 p.m.
Sept. 4 ...@Lisle.....	7 p.m.
Sept. 11 ...host Streator.....	7 p.m.
Sept. 18 ...@Reed-Custer.....	7 p.m.
Sept. 25 ...host Manteno.....	7 p.m.
Oct. 2 ...host Peotone Homecoming.....	7 p.m.
Oct. 9 ...@Herscher.....	7 p.m.
Oct. 16 ...host Wilmington.....	7 p.m.

FRESHMEN FOOTBALL

Aug. 21 ...@Pontiac.....	5 p.m.
Aug. 28 ...host Morris.....	5 p.m.
Sept. 14 ...host Lincoln Way West.....	5:30 p.m.
Sept. 21 ...host Yorkville.....	5:30 p.m.
Sept. 28 ...host Sandwich.....	5:30 p.m.
Oct. 5 ...@Nazareth Academy.....	5:30 p.m.
Oct. 12 ...@Herscher.....	10:30 a.m.
Oct. 19 ...host Wilmington.....	5:30 p.m.

VARSITY VOLLEYBALL

Aug. 24 ...@Prairie Central.....	7 p.m.
Aug. 27 ...host Morris.....	6 p.m.
Aug. 29 ...@Ottawa Invite.....	8:30 a.m.
Sept. 1 ...@Lisle.....	6 p.m.
Sept. 3 ...host Streator.....	6 p.m.
Sept. 4-5 ...@Willowbrook Tourn.....	TBA
Sept. 8 ...@Reed Custer.....	6 p.m.
Sept. 10 ...host Manteno.....	6 p.m.
Sept. 15 ...@El Paso-Gridley.....	7 p.m.
Sept. 17 ...host Peotone.....	6 p.m.
Sept. 19 ...@Manteno Invite.....	TBA
Sept. 22 ...@Herscher.....	6 p.m.
Sept. 24 ...host Wilmington.....	6 p.m.
Sept. 29 ...host Lisle.....	6 p.m.
Oct. 1 ...@Streator.....	6 p.m.
Oct. 6 ...host Reed-Custer.....	6 p.m.
Oct. 8 ...@Manteno.....	6 p.m.
Oct. 13 ...@Peotone.....	7 p.m.
Oct. 14 ...@Beecher.....	6 p.m.
Oct. 15 ...host Herscher.....	6 p.m.
Oct. 20 ...@Wilmington.....	6 p.m.

FRESHMAN VOLLEYBALL

Aug. 24 ...@Prairie Central.....	5 p.m.
Aug. 27 ...host Morris.....	5 p.m.
Sept. 1 ...@Lisle.....	5 p.m.
Sept. 3 ...host Streator.....	5 p.m.
Sept. 5 ...@Boiler Invite Bradley/Bourb.....	TBA
Sept. 8 ...@Reed-Custer.....	5 p.m.
Sept. 10 ...host Manteno.....	5 p.m.
Sept. 15 ...@El Paso-Gridley.....	5 p.m.
Sept. 17 ...host Peotone.....	5 p.m.
Sept. 19 ...@Ottawa Freshman Invite.....	TBA
Sept. 22 ...@Herscher.....	5 p.m.
Sept. 24 ...host Wilmington.....	5 p.m.
Sept. 29 ...host Lisle.....	5 p.m.
Oct. 1 ...@Streator.....	5 p.m.
Oct. 6 ...host Reed-Custer.....	5 p.m.
Oct. 8 ...@Manteno.....	5 p.m.
Oct. 13 ...@Peotone.....	5 p.m.
Oct. 15 ...host Herscher.....	5 p.m.
Oct. 20 ...@Wilmington.....	5 p.m.

BOYS GOLF

Aug. 17 ...@Bill Breedren Classic-Kankakee Elks CC.....	1 p.m.
Aug. 18 ...host Lisle Cinder Ridge.....	4:15 p.m.
Aug. 20 ...host Herscher Cinder Ridge.....	4:15 p.m.
Aug. 24 ...@Seneca Invite - The Creek.....	1 p.m.
Aug. 26 ...@Morris-The Creek w/Seneca.....	4 p.m.
Aug. 27 ...host Wilmington Cinder R.....	4:15 p.m.
Aug. 31 ...@Prairie Central-Indian Creek.....	4 p.m.
Sept. 1 ...@Manteno.....	4:15 p.m.
Sept. 8 ...host Streator Cinder Ridge.....	4:15 p.m.
Sept. 10 ...host Reed-Custer Cinder R.....	4:15 p.m.
Sept. 15 ...@Peotone-Green Gardens.....	4:15 p.m.

Sept. 17 ...@Livingston County Invite @Wolf Creek GC.....	1 p.m.
Sept. 21 ...ICE Conf. Tn @Wolf Creek.....	10 a.m.
Sept. 24 ...Pontiac Indians Scramble @Oaks Rivers Edge GC.....	1 p.m.

BOYS JV GOLF

Aug. 18 ...host Lisle-Cinder Ridge.....	4:15 p.m.
Aug. 20 ...host Herscher-Cinder Ridge.....	4:15 p.m.
Aug. 26 ...@Morris The Creek w/Seneca.....	4 p.m.
Aug. 27 ...host Wilmington Cinder R.....	4:15 p.m.
Sept. 1 ...@Manteno.....	4:15 p.m.
Sept. 8 ...host Streator-Cinder Ridge.....	4:15 p.m.
Sept. 10 ...host Reed-Custer-Cinder R.....	4:15 p.m.

BOYS SOCCER

Aug. 27 ...host Serena.....	6 p.m.
Aug. 29 ...Coalers Soccer Shootout.....	9 a.m.
Aug. 31 ...@Lisle.....	6:30 p.m.
Sept. 3 ...host Streator.....	6:45 p.m.
Sept. 9 ...@Beecher.....	4:30 p.m.
Sept. 15 ...@Reed Custer.....	6 p.m.
Sept. 17 ...host Manteno.....	7 p.m.
Sept. 19 ...host Morris.....	11:30 a.m.
Sept. 21, 22, 23, 24, 26 ...host Rivals Cup.....	TBA
Sept. 29 ...host Peotone.....	7 p.m.
Oct. 1 ...@Herscher.....	6:15 p.m.
Oct. 13 ...host Grant Park.....	6 p.m.
Oct. 15 ...@Plainfield South.....	4:30 p.m.

GIRLS GOLF

Aug. 24 ...@Seneca Invite-The Creek.....	1 p.m.
Aug. 25 ...@Pontiac Invite Wolf Creek.....	1 p.m.
Aug. 27 ...host Wilmington Cinder R.....	4:15 p.m.
Sept. 1 ...@Manteno.....	4:15 p.m.
Sept. 3 ...Pontiac Indians Scramble @Oaks at Rivers Edge GC.....	1 p.m.
Sept. 10 ...host Reed-Custer-Cinder R.....	4:15 p.m.
Sept. 16 ...host Ottawa/Cinder Ridge.....	4:30 p.m.
Sept. 17 ...Livingston County Invite @Wolf Creek Golf Course.....	1 p.m.
Sept. 21 ...ICE Conference Tournament @Wolf Creek Golf Course.....	10 a.m.
Sept. 23 ...Ottawa Girls Golf Invite @Deer Park Golf Club.....	1 p.m.

GIRLS TENNIS

Aug. 24 ...host Morris.....	4:30 p.m.
Aug. 25 ...@Joliet West.....	4:30 p.m.
Aug. 26 ...host Bradley-Bourbonnais.....	4:30 p.m.
Aug. 28 ...@LaSalle Peru Complex.....	3 p.m.
Aug. 29 ...@LaSalle Peru Complex.....	8:30 a.m.
Sept. 1 ...host Streator.....	4:30 p.m.
Sept. 2 ...@Bishop Mac.....	4:30 p.m.
Sept. 5 ...host Coal City Quad.....	8 a.m.
Sept. 9 ...@Plainfield South.....	4:30 p.m.
Sept. 14 ...@Providence Catholic.....	4:30 p.m.
Sept. 16 ...@Yorkville.....	4:30 p.m.
Sept. 17 ...host Mendota.....	4:30 p.m.
Sept. 21 ...@Joliet Catholic Academy.....	4:30 p.m.
Sept. 23 ...@Plainfield Central.....	4:30 p.m.
Sept. 26 ...@Lincoln-Way West Invite.....	8 a.m.
Sept. 28 ...@St. Bede.....	4:30 p.m.
Sept. 29 ...@Princeton.....	4:30 p.m.
Oct. 6 ...@Lasalle Peru w/Ottawa and Pontiac.....	4:30 p.m.
Oct. 8 ...host Lisle.....	4:30 p.m.
Oct. 10 ...@Mendota Invite.....	8 a.m.
Oct. 13 ...host Pontiac.....	4:30 p.m.

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