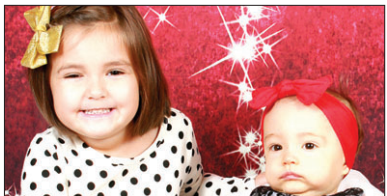


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Vol. 47, Issue 2

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A FREE PRESS NEWSPAPER

Criminal justice reform bill heads to governor

Wilmington Chief says bill is bad news for local law enforcement

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

A criminal justice omnibus bill is headed to the desk of Gov. JB Pritzker, after it passed the Illinois Senate and House last week during the lame duck session.

But local law enforcement has taken issue with part of that bill, saying that the legislation, an initiative of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus, will impose restrictions on police officers and municipalities.

"I don't know what legislator

would even want this," Wilmington Police Chief Phil Arnold told members of the Police and ESDA committee on Jan. 12, prior to the passage of the bill.

Arnold took issue with the portion of the bill that addresses pretrial detention. Once signed into law, cash bail will be eliminated as of Jan. 1, 2023. All bail bonds and conditions of bail will be replaced by a system of pretrial release to be developed by the Illinois courts based on a detainee's alleged crime, their risk of not appearing for their court date, and the threat or danger they may pose to the community if released.

"It's going to open up crime to a new level I think, from everything we can see. Taking off cash bonds, basically whatever you arrest someone for, it doesn't matter, they don't have to post any bond, they're released

with a promise to come to court," Arnold said.

The original version of the bill abolished cash bail effective immediately, but that was extended by two years to accommodate the transition and allow for uniform standards to be developed, state lawmakers said.

Another portion of the bill that Arnold said carries local consequences is a provision that would have ended qualified immunity for officers, eliminating their protection from liability in civil suits if they violated rights guaranteed in the Illinois Constitution.

However, the legislation instead creates a yearlong Task Force on Constitutional Rights and Remedies, an 18-member body that will investigate and develop procedures to protect constitutional rights and remedies should those rights be violated.

The task force will specifically look at qualified immunity as enjoyed by law enforcement.

A report with policy recommendations must be submitted to the governor's office and the General Assembly by May, with the task force being dissolved by the legislation at the start of the new year.

Arnold said if the abolishment of qualified immunity were to pass, it would hurt the ability of departments to recruit and keep officers.

"The removal of qualified immunity would open them up and their families up to frivolous lawsuits that they would have to fight on their own. It's going to be tough to keep people," he said.

The bill also requires the statewide establishment of use-of-force standards by 2022 while making changes to what are acceptable and

unacceptable uses of force in Illinois statute.

The bill provides that use of force is permissible only when an officer has determined it is necessary to defend either themselves or others from bodily harm when making an arrest. When a suspect is attempting to escape, officers would not be permitted to use deadly force to stop them, unless that person cannot be apprehended at a later date and is likely to harm others.

The law prohibits certain uses of force. Chokeholds and restraints above the shoulders that can restrict breathing are banned, unless explicitly used as deadly force. It also prohibits using force as a punishment or in retaliation when it is not author-

SEE CRIME BILL, PAGE 2

Will County remains under Tier 3 mitigations

STAFF REPORT

Nine of the state's 11 regions saw their resurgence mitigation requirements to battle the novel coronavirus rolled back at the beginning of this week.

But, Will County was not among those areas where guidelines were relaxed.

Will County and Kankakee County make up Region 7, one of only two regions in the state that remain in Tier 3 mitigations. Region 4, the St. Louis metro east area, also remains in Tier 3.

Regions 1, 2, and 6 are now in Tier 1 mitigations. This includes Grundy County which is part of Region 2.

Regions 8, 9, 10, and 11 are now in Tier 2 mitigations. This includes Chicago and suburban Cook County.

Regions 3 and 5, western and southern Illinois, are no longer under any resurgence mitigations.

In Tier 3 resurgence mitigations, bars and restaurants continue to be restricted from offering indoor service. Additional mitigations include capacity limits at grocery stores and pharmacies of 50%, funerals are limited to 10 guests, and all other meetings/gatherings, including weddings and private parties, are prohibited.

Additionally, health and fitness centers, personal care services, malls, and retail stores outside of grocery stores or pharmacies are limited to 25% capacity.

Masks and social distancing remain mandatory in all public spaces.

The changes mean that indoor service at bars and restaurants in Grundy County is permitted at 25% capacity, but is still not allowed in Will County.

Although indoor bar service is allowed under Tier 1, it remains suspended unless food is being served at the establishment.

SEE COVID, PAGE 3



Photo by Marney Simon

THE PARKING LOTS AT Children's Memorial Park are public lots, under the jurisdiction of the Wilmington Park District. The park district said people who park their vehicles in the lot for an extended period of time risk being ticketed, as the city has an ordinance in place which prohibits long term parking in public lots.

Long term parking not allowed at Children's Memorial Park

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

Some residents of Northcrest said they were frustrated to find that when the first snowfall came through the area over the Christmas weekend, they ended up with tickets on their cars.

Alderman Kevin Kirwin brought the ticketing issue to the attention of the City Council on Jan. 5. Kirwin said people who lived near Children's Memorial Park moved their cars off the street to the parking lot by Riley's Garden when the snow rolled in, because they don't have off street parking of their own.

"They were using that for years. If they had some type of baseball game or whatever they would move their vehicles out of the parking lot. But, evidently, they were issued citations because they were parking there," Kirwin said. "The people who live there don't have driveways or anything like that, and they just want to get their cars off the street."

The issue, though, is that the park no longer belongs to the city.

"That's out of our hands, so they'd have to deal with the park district on that," Mayor Roy Strong said. "We can't step in there."

Wilmington Park District Superintendent of Recreation Andrew Liaromatis said there have been multiple

complaints of people leaving their vehicles in the Children's Memorial Park parking lot overnight since the city transferred the park to the park district.

"To answer these complaints, the board requested that the Wilmington Police Department enforce the public parking ordinance of Wilmington for these lots," Liaromatis said. "If homeowners were ticketed recently, my guess is that other residents in the area called the police and complained, resulting in the ticketing. If homeowners have any questions, I'd be happy to go over the public parking ordinance with them and invite them to voice their concerns at our next scheduled board meeting on Jan. 28."

The city's parking ordinance states that no person shall park or store any vehicle on any public street, alley, or public way for more than 48 successive hours. As the lot is owned by the Wilmington Park District, a public taxing body, it is also a public way.

Violations can result in tickets of \$25 to \$50, or further penalties if an owner fails to pay the citation in a reasonable amount of time.

Members of the City Council did say they were surprised to learn that any of the homes in Northcrest had no off-street parking, and they would work to contact the owners of any homes without parking to see if the property owners have a way to create a driveway for residents.

Report: Nearly 60% of water undocumented in December

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

The city of Wilmington remains unable to account for much of the water that's processed and leaves the water plant.

On Jan. 13, Bob Bland, water and sewer superintendent for the city of Wilmington, told members of the Water, Sewer, Streets and Alleys committee that the amount of "undocumented" water that the water plant had produced was back on the rise, increasing each month from September through December 2020.

"We're creeping up on our

undocumented water, I believe that's because of everybody running their faucets at a low flow to keep the lines from freezing, and our old meters don't pick up on that low flow. Plus, we metered a lot less water last month," Bland told the committee.

Undocumented water is the water that the city sends out, but cannot account for via any metering and/or utility billing. In essence, it's water lost and no one knows where it went.

In December, of the water sent out by the city, 58.27% of it was undocumented, accord-

SEE WATER, PAGE 2

WPD range project moving along, slowly

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

The Wilmington Police Department had plans to do some work out at the practice range this year. But much of those plans had to be put on hold due to the limits of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

But now, Police Chief Phil Arnold said things are slowly moving forward again.

Arnold gave an update of the project as part of his monthly report to the city's Police and ESDA committee, which met remotely on Jan. 12.

"Our range project that we've been working on, and that kind of slowed down when COVID started this past spring, but we did have [Local 150] come out with a team of apprentices and they were able to spread out some of those grindings that we had sitting there. They got those spread out for us."

Arnold said the grindings were from local roadwork projects, and there is more to

come.

"We're still hoping with the projects that will come up this spring, we'll get more grindings to increase that and maybe improve the road back there," he said.

Arnold added that the improvements at the range were made possible in part by a grant.

"We got a \$10,000 grant from BNSF to improve the range and do some projects," Arnold said. "We haven't spent any of that money yet, so hopefully in the spring... we can get that project going. Despite the project not being finished, we did have a really good year at the range."

Arnold added that despite the pandemic, the department was able to get in training at the range completed, and saw improvement in officers' scores.



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Crime Bill

ized; using non-lethal projectiles like tasers and rubber bullets on someone's head, groin area or back; firing rubber or any type of round into a crowd; and using tear gas and pepper spray without first allowing a crowd to disperse after being warned.

"If you're trying to arrest somebody, you can't touch them above their shoulders, so you can't touch their face, their head, their neck," Arnold said. "So, it's basically arms, torso and legs is all you can touch. So, it doesn't matter where they're hitting you, it doesn't matter, you can only touch them below the shoulders."

Before officers can use deadly force, they must make a reasonable effort to identify themselves as law enforcement and warn that they are about to use deadly force. Law enforcement can no longer use deadly force against someone for committing a property crime, unless that crime is tied to terrorism or to another crime or action where deadly force is permitted.

Officers are also restricted from using deadly force against a person who poses a danger to themselves but does not pose an imminent threat to the officer or another person.

Arnold also balked at the way the bill was introduced, arguing that it was pushed through without input from local law enforcement.

In a statement issued n Jan. 9, the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police broadly condemned the legislation, calling the a "defund the police" bill.

"Supporters of this bill must believe that the police

are villains and adversaries of the 12.5 million Illinoisans they are sworn to protect and serve," ILACP Executive Director Ed Wojcicki posted to the organization's website. "The truth is, most of those millions of Illinoisans are largely supportive of their local police and sheriffs' departments. So it is disappointing to see that anyone would propose legislation that is so divisive in times when we all need to come together for the betterment of our communities and our state."

State Senator Sue Rezin, R-Morris, who voted against the bill, issued a statement following its passage, calling the bill an "extreme proposal" that will empower criminals while endangering law enforcement efforts.

"I stand with the men and women who take to the streets day-after-day to serve and protect," Rezin said. "I am utterly disappointed in both the outcome of this vote and the process that it came about. A bill of this magnitude should not be rammed through the General Assembly in the middle of the night of lame duck session. The citizens of Illinois should have been given a chance to provide their input... What we just witnessed is no way to conduct business."

One provision of the bill did earn the Wilmington chief's stamp of approval.

A police certification provision backed by the attorney general's office was also added to the bill. It gives the state more power over who can be a member of law enforcement and makes it easier to decertify and terminate the employment of problematic officers.

"Right now, police officers are certified by the state by the training board, but there's no real process to decertify them," Arnold said. "They're

going to make it a more step by step process to decertify them, and the Illinois Chiefs are not opposed to that.

"Certainly there are bad police officers who are out there doing bad things in certain areas that should have been decertified," he continued. "Something that happens often is that if something happens and an officer is going to be fired from one department, they're able to make a deal that allows them to resign instead of being terminated, then they go to another police department that either doesn't do a background investigation properly or don't care because they're trying to fill open positions with somebody who has been through the police academy and save some money, so these bad apples are turning up over and over in different places.

"So, trying to weed that all out would not be a bad thing," Arnold concluded.

Before this legislation, the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board (ILETSB) could decertify an officer only if they were convicted of a felony or a limited set of misdemeanors such as offering a bribe, prostitution or criminal sex abuse.

The criminal justice omnibus bill grants ILETSB greater discretion to decertify officers based on whether a Certification Review Board determines they violated conduct guidelines.

The legislation also requires all law enforcement agencies to utilize body cameras by 2025, and expands rights of people who are taken into custody by police. Suspects in custody must be able to make three phone calls within three hours of being taken into police custody.

Capitol News Illinois contributed to this report.

Coffee & Newspapers

One wakes you up
One opens your eyes

Wesley Township special meeting for resolution to sell 2-acre site

PUBLIC NOTICE

**SPECIAL TOWNSHIP BOARD MEETING
NOTICE AND AGENDA
WESLEY TOWNSHIP, WILL COUNTY, IL
SPECIAL MEETING OF
THE TOWNSHIP BOARD**
February 9, 2021 at 6:30 PM
21333 W. Ballou Road
Wilmington, IL 60481

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a Special Township Board Meeting of the Wesley Township Board, Will County, Illinois will be held on February 9, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. in accordance with Section 80-10 (b) of the Illinois Township Code, 60 ILCS 1/80-10 (b). Said meeting has been called by Supervisor Michael Medlin. The meeting will be held at the Wesley Township Hall, 21333 W. Ballou Road, Wilmington, IL 60481, for purposes of considering the following agenda:

I. Call to Order
II. Selection of Moderator
III. Pledge of Allegiance
IV. Introductory Remarks by Supervisor Medlin regarding the purpose of the meeting
V. Consideration of and action on a Resolution authorizing the Township to sell property located at Elevator Road PIN # 08-25-18-200-017-0000 and giving the Township Supervisor, Clerk and Board the power to effectuate said sale of the property
VI. Public Comment
VII. Adjournment
Dated: January 12, 2021
Michael Medlin
Wesley Township Supervisor
Published in The Free Press Advocate Jan. 20, 2021.

Attorney Fisher files Tinges estate notice

PUBLIC NOTICE

**STATE OF ILLINOIS
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE
TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
IN PROBATE**

In the Matter of the Estate of Michael J. Tinges, Deceased. Case No.: 20 P 1020.

CLAIM NOTICE
Notice is given of the death of Michael J. Tinges, Deceased. Letters of Office were issued on January 15, 2021 to Mary Ellen Hendron as Independent Administrator.

The estate will be administered without court supervision, unless under Section 28-4 of the Probate Act any interested person terminates independent administration at any time by mailing or delivering a petition to terminate to the clerk.

Claims against the estate may be filed in the Office of the Clerk of the Court at Will County Court House, 14 West Jefferson Street, Joliet, Illinois 60432, or with the representative, or both, within 6 months from the first publication date of this Notice, which is on or before July 20, 2021, or if mailing or delivery of this notice from the personal representative is required by Sec. 18.3 of the Probate Act of 1995, the date stated in that Notice. Any claim not filed on or before that date is barred. Copies of a claim filed with the Clerk must be mailed or delivered to the representative and to the attorney within 10 days after it has been filed.

E-filing is now mandatory for documents in civil cases with limited exemptions. To e-file, you must first create an account with an e-filing service provider.

Visit <https://efile.illinoiscourts.gov/service-providers.htm> to learn more and to select a service provider.

Jeffrey L. Fisher, Attorney at Law, Law Offices of Jeffrey L. Fisher, Attorney No.: 06184265, 207 S. Water Street, Wilmington, IL 60481. (815) 476-7635. Email: jeff@jeffisherlaw.com

Irvin L. Masching, Attorney at Law, 105 E. Chippewa Street, P.O. Box 247, Dwight, IL 60420. (815) 584-1700. Email: imasching@maschinglaw.com

Published in The Free Press Advocate Newspaper on Jan. 13, 20, and 27, 2021.

Kicking off a new year



Photo by Eric Fisher

THE WILMINGTON CHAMBER of Commerce held its annual kickoff night Thursday at Tuffy's Lounge and Patio where members socially distanced and wore masks until it was time to eat or speak. Approximately 20 business owners attended to renew their membership, vote for 2021 officers and review a list of accomplishments during the past year. Steve Evans (not pictured), re-elected President of the organization, thanked the membership for efforts made during the pandemic to help promote the town. Among the successes were the approval of a second \$1,000 scholarship for a WHS senior, the purchase of benches and signage in the downtown district thanks to merchant donations, the Hometown Heroes banner program recognizing Wilmington veterans, painting and Christmas decorating at Claire's Corner, and much more. As part of the city's accomplishments, Mayor Roy Strong (standing) and alderman Ben Dietz (right) spoke on behalf of city government. The Chamber has opened up the Hometown Heroes program for new candidates, and for new membership by visiting www.wilmingtonilchamber.org.

Water

ing to the report submitted to the committee.

From January through May of last year, the monthly water loss was around 50%, but slowly began to fall over the summer, hitting a low of 37.55% in September.

But, the water loss grew steadily after that, hitting 44.64% in October, 45.98% in November, and close to 60% in December.

Tracking the water loss started last spring. In April, the city paid \$10,750 to M.E. Simpson Company, Inc., of Indiana, for an updated water survey to look for leaks along 50 miles of the supply system, the first such survey conducted in nine years.

That survey revealed a significant leak in the water main at Main Street and Chicago Street.

Attorney Fisher files Ziller estate notice

PUBLIC NOTICE

**STATE OF ILLINOIS
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE
TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
IN PROBATE**

In the Matter of the Estate of Alice I. Ziller, Deceased. Case No. 20 P 1019.

CLAIM NOTICE
Notice is given of the death of Alice I. Ziller of Wilmington, Illinois. Letters of Office were issued on January 15, 2021 to Veronica M. Orr as Independent Executor.

The estate will be administered without court supervision, unless under Section 28-4 of the Probate Act any interested person terminates independent administration at any time by mailing or delivering a petition to terminate to the clerk.

Claims against the estate may be filed in the Office of the Clerk of the Court at Will County Court House, 14 West Jefferson Street, Joliet, Illinois 60432, or with the representative, or both, within 6 months from the first publication date of this Notice, which is on or before July 20, 2021, or if mailing or delivery of this notice from the personal representative is required by Sec. 18.3 of the Probate Act of 1995, the date stated in that Notice. Any claim not filed on or before that date is barred. Copies of a claim filed with the Clerk must be mailed or delivered to the representative and to the attorney within 10 days after it has been filed.

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were losing 70,560 gallons/day."

The report notes that a hole as small as one-quarter inch can result in a loss of 14,950 gallons per day.

According to the city, there are multiple reasons behind all the lost water, including broken or incorrectly installed meters.

Whether any water loss can be attributed to commercial properties on Davy Lane and how much they are paying in monthly water bills is an issue dropped by the city, after bills were produced for public inspection over the summer.

Meanwhile, the pandemic has hindered the city's ability to install new water meters.

Bland told the committee last week that his department did not install any meters in the month of December.

"With metering, we didn't go into any buildings that did not have a COVID-19 policy in place which they enforced, and that somewhat limited what we were able to do," he said.

Production/Consumption Water Loss Report

Time Period	Water Loss
2019	49.61%
1/2020	53.39%
2/2020	52.35%
3/2020	53.63%
4/2020	53.58%
5/2020	54.34%
6/2020	40.38%
7/2020	47.00%
8/2020	45.94%
9/2020	37.55%
10/2020	44.64%
11/2020	45.98%
12/2020	58.27%

Source - Final report for Jan. 13, 2021 as submitted to the Water, Sewer, Streets and Alleys Committee

The water loss summary report also showed that M.E. Simpson discovered 24 leaks while conducting the survey. Two leaks were main line leaks, four were service line leaks, one was a valve packing leak, 16 were hydrant leaks, and the last was classified as other.

According to the report submitted to the committee, M.E. Simpson "estimated we

Seeing eye to eye comes from meeting face to face.



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Eric D. Fisher, publisher
Marney Simon, editor

Electing a President in crisis time, Abraham Lincoln



TIME WAS....
Sandy Vasko

Our nation has been through many times of crisis, wars, epidemics, economic depression and civil unrest. To compare any of them is not really fair, as so many factors weigh in to what could be called the worst of times. But I keep going back to the election of 1860 to see what hope it can offer us today.

The years leading up to the election were marked by the slavery issue. The Underground Railroad was in full swing, escorting escaped slaves to their freedom in Canada. There were bands of roving slave catchers trying to intercept them. In Wilmington Col. Peter Stewart was doing his part in the abolition movement, but he was getting older.

As far as the Republicans were concerned, Abe Lincoln was just one of several thought of as a Presidential runner. The Democrats had Stephen Douglas, a small man, but a mighty speaker who could sway his audience.

After Lincoln was nominated Cal Zarley, of the Joliet Signal wrote, "When the tidings of Abraham Lincoln's

nomination were received in Joliet, no demonstration of joy whatever were exhibited. Indeed, the Republicans looked as though they were attending a funeral, for two or three days thereafter. You could scarcely get one of them to smile. They wanted Seward nominated; and to have him beaten by such a man as Lincoln, was almost too much for them to bear."

"But how was it when the news of the nomination of Douglas came flashing over the wires. Let those who heard the shouts and witnessed the joyous demonstrations of satisfaction throughout our city, as soon as the stars and stripes were unfurled from the windows of this office, answer. The city from that hour until twelve o'clock at night was a scene of joy and excitement. Cheers for Douglas and democracy rent the air in every quarter. We must say that we never witnessed so much hearty enthusiasm in our city before on any occasion. It struck terror into the ranks of the already disheartened Republicans."

In Wilmington a rally was held for Douglas. The 78-year old Peter Stewart was in the crowd. Stewart's politics were described this way, "Col. Stewart has been a Republican from the first organization of the Republican Party, and before that time was an uncompromising Whig."

Judge Randall tried to rally the crowd for Douglas, the Democrat, when he spotted Stewart in the crowd. He



THIS WAS THE cartoon version for the election between Abe Lincoln and Stephen Douglas back in 1860.

addressed him personally talking about the time when Stewart first came to the prairie in 1836. Randall asked, "Suppose, at that day, that Stephen A. Douglas had come along here and said, 'If you will make me President of the United States, I will put a railroad through this dreary prairie, and in ten years have it settled up, as you now see it settled. Col. Stewart, would you have made him President?'"

"Caught by the earnestness of the question, and deeply absorbed in the thought of those internal improvements, which have been the pride and glory of his life, the old colonel impulsively answered, 'I would have helped him all I could!'" The

effect was electrical. A loud shout went up to the skies from the multitude, at the impulsive honesty of the veteran pioneer of this region."

Despite the old man's enthusiasm at the moment, Col. Stewart remained loyal to Lincoln until his death in 1868.

The predictions of what would happen if Lincoln were to be elected were enumerated in the Joliet Signal. "Among the consequences of Lincoln's election to the Presidency we would call the attention of our readers to a few which will be certain to come home to everyman's door before the fourth of July next."

"There will no longer be any confidence in the public credit; State stock will cease to be of any value; bank notes will



THE "OFFICIAL" LITHO of the candidates for the 1860 president election.

not be worth the paper on which they are printed and in the consequent panic the laboring classes will be involved in one common ruin."

"We would advise all who have any quantity of bank bills on hand to get rid of them as quick as possible, in the event of Lincoln's election. Let them either exchange for gold, or pay their honest debts with them."

"Real estate will not realize more than a mere nominal value for some years to come, if Lincoln should be elected. It would therefore perhaps be as well for people who have payments still to make on their farms to calculate whether it will not be the wisest course to rest content with the loss of the money already paid and not

risk anymore in investments in a country and under a government which, at best, must, be, for years, unstable and unsettled."

"If Lincoln be elected the South will immediately discontinue her supply of cotton to the Northern factories and put stops to every branch of commerce between the two sections. The consequence of this will be to withdraw the gold and silver of the country from circulation, and to deprive millions of the working classes of employment."

It can be seen that a certain portion of the population was fearful of what the future would bring. I can relate to that. Next time we look at what happened after the election.

Chamber elves raise \$4,600 for CHA



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Chick-A-Dee Restaurant



NORA & VIVIAN CHERNEY
AJ's Hot Dogs & Gyros



BRYCEN BOERSMA
Minut Mart Gas

THANKS TO THE generosity of parents and the general public, over \$4,600 was raised this year during the annual Christmas Elf Contest sponsored by the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce. Elf boxes were placed at 33 Wilmington businesses with hopes that customers would deposit their change during the holiday season. Each penny counted as a vote and the more votes the better to help the Christian Help Association in their efforts to help families less fortunate with foods, clothing and toys. Youngsters pictured on the elf boxes who earned the most votes were Lincoln & Finn Mitchell whose box was located at the Chick-a-Dee Restaurant, Norah & Vivian Cherney located at AJ's Hot Dogs & Gyros and Brycen Boersma at Minut Mart Gas. The Christian Help Association and the Chamber expressed their appreciation to everyone who contributed during a time of pandemic, it shows there are several good-hearted people in the community. The children receive Chamber gift certificates as prizes, which can be spent in nearly any Chamber member business.

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Covid

According to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), in order for Region 7 to move to Tier 2, it must experience less than 12% test positivity rate (seven-day rolling average) for three consecutive days, and greater than or equal to 20% percent available intensive care unit (ICU) and medical/surgical bed availability (seven-day rolling average) for three consecutive days, and a decline in the number of COVID-19 patients in the hospital (seven-day rolling average) in seven out of the last 10 days.

Region 7 has met two of those three metrics.

The region's test positivity rate is 7.5% as of Jan. 16. The region has remained under the 12% threshold for 31 consecutive days.

Hospital bed availability has been greater or equal to 20% for 19 consecutive days.

But the region has yet to meet the threshold for a decline in hospitalizations. While there have been patient decreases in the past month,

there have only been decreases in four of the past 10 days, falling short of the metric to move to Tier 2.

As of Jan. 18, there are 146 people hospitalized for COVID-19 in Region 7.

According to IDPH, the positivity rate in Will County is 8.2% as of Jan. 16.

Prior to Monday, eight of the state's 11 mitigation regions remained under Tier 3 restrictions.

"Hospital leaders have made clear the importance of staffing in their continued response to this pandemic and conveyed that staffing contracts will be extraordinarily valuable in their ability to meet the needs of their communities," IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike said in a news release.

The statewide seven-day rolling case positivity rate was 5.7% as of Tuesday, and has been steadily decreasing for more than a week. The rolling positivity rate was 7.6% at the beginning of last week.

On Tuesday, IDPH reported 4,318 new confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19, and 33 additional deaths.

In zip code 60481, which

includes Wilmington, Shadow Lakes, Symerton, and surrounding areas, the total number of cases of COVID-19 recorded since the start of the pandemic is 1,049.

In the 60408 zip code, Braidwood, total cases are 476.

In total, the state has reported 1,076,532 COVID-19 cases, including 18,291 deaths across the state's 102 counties since the pandemic began.

The entire state will move into Phase 1B of vaccine distribution starting Jan. 25, although some counties have already entered this phase.

Most of the state is only distributing the vaccine under Phase 1A, which includes health care workers and long-term care facility residents. Counties that have substantially completed the first phase have started Phase 1B, which includes non-health care essential workers, residents 65 years or older and inmates.

As of Monday night, a total of 1,085,950 vaccines were delivered to the state of Illinois. In Will County, 23,783 vaccines have been administered.

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Exposing America

WILMINGTON—If Biden does what he said he would do, such as take down the border wall, this will let more illegals in which will result in more drugs pouring into the country as well as terrorists and MS13 gangs causing more murder and crime resulting in more sanctuary cities and states. Caravans are now forming at the border. Also, he wants to give them free healthcare, drivers license, food stamps, and the right to vote in our elections giving them amnesty and citizenship. He wants to forgive college debt which many have paid or are paying now. All of this funded by the American taxpayer—YOU! Biden and company will defund the police, get rid of the border patrol and abolish ICE. Be careful what you wish for!

Antifa?

Neither side of the aisle condoned in any way the actions of the protesters, or should I say the small group of antagonists, planted within the protesters. Ninety-nine percent of the people who showed up at the Capitol on Jan. 6 were there to protest an election process that they felt was rigid in favor of Democrats. They have every right to do that. But just as we have seen during the past four years, a small group of well organized left-wing radicals pushed the otherwise peaceful protest into a national disgrace. That group was once again Antifa. It has been substantiated that Antifa members were present at the protest and inside the Capitol. They were taking advantage of the situation to embarrass not only President Trump but the Republican party and did a damn good job. So what is going to happen after Biden and Kamala (can't wait for Biden to resign) take office on Jan. 20? The liberals have not been able to bring themselves to formally label Antifa as a terrorist group because Antifa has been doing all the dirty work for the liberals allowing them to keep their hands clean and make everything look like president Trump's fault. But that will all change on Jan. 20. It will be interesting to see how the liberals deal with their dirty little secret. I wouldn't be surprised to see Antifa members appointed to positions within the Biden/Harris administration. Why not. They deserve it after all the work they have done for the Democratic party.

Stop the stupidity

WILMINGTON—I want the mayor and police department to do their job and enforce the mask mandate that has been put into place by the state of Illinois to protect the citizens of our town. I shouldn't have to tell people to "get away from me" or to "put a mask on" while out getting essentials. Almost 400,000 Americans are dead because of the stupidity of Donald Trump and his followers and Republican supporters in congress! This situation has been handled very poorly and it cost people their lives. It's overwhelmingly obvious this man is deeply out of touch with reality and incompetent to be the President of The United States. Also, I want anyone displaying a Confederate flag be made to take it down! It represents hate and racism. It belongs in a museum for history facts only, not displayed in a state that fought against it! The Confederate states lost the war for a reason. It's disgusting to see it hanging on a house as soon as you drive into the city of Wilmington. Take it DOWN!!! It's really sad to see so many people in this town look and act so unintelligently. I studied Micro Biology (germs/viruses) and I know this virus is very serious. You can die from it at any age or race. I am so angry! It's embarrassing! Think of all the revenue the city would of made issuing fines to all the idiots not following the mandate. The definition of mandate means mandatory. It was put into place to keep you safe from a deadly virus.

Country over Party

BRAIDWOOD—I just wanted to say thank you to Adam Kinzinger our representative. He chose country over party and we appreciate it. I just wish more people would, thank you.

New flavor

WILMINGTON—I heard Ben & Jerry are going to introduce a new flavor. It's a combination of peach ice cream and orange sherbet. They're gonna call it Impeachy.

Silencing Americans

SHADOW LAKES—The big tech companies are shutting down certain things on the internet because they seem to be afraid that Americans will see just how much corruption is really involved in the communication industry. They're going to try to do everything possible to silence any person who complains about how they want control over its citizens' thought process. We should remind any person who knows about history that these same type of things occurred in Europe which brought about the USA to enter a conflict that prevented freedom that had a cost of many lives to bring free choice back to many European nations. History does have a tendency to repeat itself. It seems to be being pushed into reality by the people that are trying to control independence and freedom.

Want complete control

WILMINGTON—Well, it looks like the corrupt, hateful, deranged, radical, Socialist Democratic party will occupy the White House and Congress. This Democratic party is worse than the "Nazis". They want complete power and control over this country and the people

and will do anything to get it and I mean anything. They will destroy this country and the American way of life. They have no respect for American values, or the patriotic American citizens who have fought for our freedom, the law, or the Constitution! You stupid pin-headed brain idiots who voted these deranged, maniacal, cockroaches into power will be responsible for the downfall of this country.

Believer of free speech

WILMINGTON—In April we will be holding our city elections in Wilmington and every year around this time I call in my same comment to Sound Off. I am a firm believer of free speech and I invite all the candidates that are running to feel free to leave a sign in my yard. The three candidates that are running for mayor, you are welcome to leave a sign in my yard. The people that are running for the school board, the library board and any other offices are more than welcome to put a sign in my yard because I do believe in free speech. I hope if the candidates do decide to put in my yard that other people will respect my decision to allow this and not be tearing up the candidates' yard signs, destroying them or throwing them away. Whether you support the sign in my yard or you don't support it, yard signs cost a lot of money, I know that first hand. So once again I invite any candidate for city offices to feel free to put a sign in my yard. Sherri Michaels

Neither did Manson

WILMINGTON—The Republicans are saying that Trump isn't responsible for the violence at the Capitol. Well Manson didn't kill anybody.

Not surprising

WILMINGTON—Trump says he won't pay Rudy for legal services. Honestly, Rudy should've seen that coming.

The Swamp is back

SHADOW LAKES—Let us take a look at the news for this year so far. Nancy Pelosi is screaming to impeach our president. The crowds are yelling, "crucify him." People asked, "China Joe isn't it time to forget and forgive?" Didn't we see this act played out 2000 years ago? What was China Joe's response? "...that is up to the senate." He just stated, "it is time to unify the country." Vaccine, vaccine, where is the vaccine? The companies state they have shipped over one million doses. But where are they? They can't figure out how to distribute them. I know you heard by now in Washington state they are saying workers over 50 that work for Amazon should have the vaccine, because they are front line workers. Sounds fair to me. Maybe you saw the article on the tube about New York's governor and what he did with the vaccine. They can't dispense a vaccine in a timely manner, and these are the people who want to run, Medicare for all? My God helps us. Why is it the problems always seem to stem from states run by the Left? I hope you are all enjoying, what we will lose next, freedom of speech. How long will it take before your emails are censored? How long will it be before pro-trump articles in this paper will be censored? Do think it can not happen! Remember Big Brother is watching, you. No. 4, is one of my personal favorites. De-Fund the police. I don't have to explain what this is all about. You see just how well this is working in Portland. Now we have Illinois House Bill 163. Isn't that great? I am sure this is really going to help that one county, where most of the violence is. They can not control it now! Here is the other side of the coin, Washington D.C. We must arm the city to the teeth, to protect the politicians. I do not condone violence, in any form. Maybe instead of de-funding the police, maybe we should defund the politicians. After all, what do they really do for us? Not much! What has China Joe done for this county in 47 years? Sadly not much. As you can see, The Swamp is back...always Margot Lane

Wealthy politicians

ESSEX—Throughout the next two years the Democrat leadership will impose things upon the American citizens whether you are a Democrat or a Republican. They will have every American citizen suffer. The people that wanted the Democrat leadership and financed their election are very wealthy people that only want more money for their wallets. And in their opinion, the American citizens want too much money for their survival when they can go on welfare and stand in line at a food pantry if they want to eat and they can live in tents. Because the wealthy want cheap foreign labor that they will help take over the American citizens employment just to show that they can control the USA and not the laws of the USA.

Brainwash Americans

SHADOW LAKES—Congress is once again holding impeachment procedures against Donald Trump so he will never be able to hold a government office again because they do not want any more of their activities to be shown to the public. Even though the Democrat party has allowed crime to escalate in various cities and no one has been held accountable, they're also going to try to control every aspect of the our lives by pretending that they are looking out for us while they use the news and social media to decide which information is allowed to be shown to the public. They believe that the American citizens are a bunch of dunder heads not capable to understand anything and they do not care if the American citizen is a Democrat or a Republican. Since all they want to do is brainwash people into believing that whatever they say is gospel and no one better question their authority, even if they state "trees are not made of wood".

Gamemanship

WILMINGTON—I'm not being hyperbolic when I claim my vocabulary is better then the Sound Off editor.

Editor's note: Congratulations and pat yourself on the back. Didn't know there was a contest. But hey, if that



makes you feel good, we're flattered.

When cities burned

COAL CITY—Do as I say not as I do, is a phrase that has been used many times. Now our new congress is stating that the constitution and the rule of law must be honored. But where was this rule of law when the various cities being controlled by Democrat party were being burned during riots and our new vice president made sure all rioters were bailed out of jail to continue to riot. When there was evidence of illegal activity involved in the election process, with censorship and the altering of election laws without legislatures approval or having deceased individuals vote casting their ballots in the election. They have the nerve to state that they always obey the law.

USA or California?

On Jan. 20 you can say good-bye to the country formally known as the United States of America and welcome to the country now known as California. Let me introduce you to your new country. First of all, illegal immigrants are not only welcome but encouraged to wade across the Rio Grande illegally. Once here, they are granted more rights, privileges and social programs than legal citizens are given. Next, the highest taxes in history. Hey, socialism is expensive and you don't think wealthy people are going to flip the bill? If you consider yourself middle class right now, welcome to poverty. Don't worry, there will be plenty of social programs where you can stand in line and lose whatever dignity you might have. Socialists frown on people with dignity or people who are self-sufficient. You need to learn that the government will take care of all your needs from here on out. Just sit back and swallow whatever pride you have. You won't need it in Socialist America. You are not smart enough to make your own decisions. The bureaucrats will do it for you. Get ready for a whole bunch of homeless people. The state of California loves homeless people. They have taken over large areas of Los Angeles, San Francisco and other California municipalities. Do you like to walk down the sidewalk and tip-toe around human feces? Then you will feel right at home. Californians love to take a crap on public sidewalks. Forget about that 401k, the government needs that to support all the social programs that you don't qualify for because you still have a job. You have to keep working and hand over all your hard earned money to support people who think you're stupid for working. Let's see, what else can you expect: Skyrocketing property taxes, more regulations that will kill the economy, gas prices will go through the roof, political correctness will make a big comeback, freedom of speech will be regulated, get ready too turn your guns over, get used to elections being rigged in favor of liberal democrats, more planes full of cash sent to Iran to support their terrorist network and finally liberal politicians going to countries around the world apologizing for being an American and then giving them planes full of cash.

Over 42 million

BRAIDWOOD—A new report astonishingly shows that nearly 42% of all deaths worldwide last year were from abortion—more than 42 million. It was not only the leading cause of death but was almost more than all other causes combined. Think about that.

Bottom line

COAL CITY—Considering the vicious nature of events descending upon us lately, it might be a relief to ponder a recent humorous news report circulating the country regarding Princess Ivanka and how lucky we are to finally be rid of her. Apparently the first daughter can't bear to have Secret Service agents, who are poor people of the lower classes, invade her beautiful home which the agents are risking their lives to protect. Can't she spare one of her seven bathrooms for these brave men to relieve themselves? No, taxpayers must foot the bill for a \$3,000-a-month apartment costing a total of more than \$100,000 to date essentially for the use of a toilet. And it has nothing to do with COVID-19 because this has been going on since 2017. Of course, Ivanka denies these allegations, but the reality is that she does not let them in for bathroom privileges. Anyway, the bottom line is: Who would be so gullible as to believe a Trump? Kurt K.

Lipstick on a pig

CUSTER PARK—The election was rigged, say Trump supporters. It certainly was. It was harder for blacks to vote because Republican officials throughout the country did their best to stop them. Months before the election, Trump installed his stooge as postmaster general to thwart mail-in ballots. After the election, Trump filed 62 lawsuits although no fraud was found and even Supreme Court justices refused to hear Trump's case because it was a waste of their time. Then Trump pressured Georgia's secretary of state to fabricate votes in Trump's

favor and if that wasn't criminal enough, Trump incited his goons to storm Capitol Hill where the election was being finalized in Congress. Finally, the My Pillow guy was seen meeting Trump in the West Wing with notes urging him to declare martial law. With several days to go, who knows what Trump will come up with next. Yes, all these are tactics to steal the election as Trump tries to put lipstick on a pig. Gary W.

We will see

SHADOW LAKES—Let's see if the main stream media goes after Biden like it did Trump? If not, it's not the news that's taking sides and that is by definition is propaganda. Eddie

Senseless idea

SHADOW LAKES—Gendered Language: Has anybody seen the Orwellian push to change the words we use, for example, eliminating "gendered language." This may seem very trivial to you at this time. But will end up having a big impact on our society. Nancy P. is the pusher of this language to be used in the House of Representatives. You will not be able to say, mother, father, son, daughter, cousin, or etc. Here is how it works, you may say, "am the father of two sons." If Nancy has her way, here is how it will have to be spoken. "I am the parent of two siblings." This is to make language non-binary. Do you know any non-binary people?" The answer is no because there are none. This is just more from the left, and you just keep voting them back in office over and over. Always, Margot Lane

The sore loser

WILMINGTON—What a sore loser, President Trump will never admit defeat. He has filed bankruptcy five times and refuses to pay his lawyers. I wonder why no one wants to defend him. Maybe DH can help pay his legal fees.

White Terror

WILMINGTON—These comments will be as popular as a cockroach's carcass but they need to be said. The siege of Capitol Hill is an example of unjustified white rage rationalized by white privilege incited by gluttonous desire for power. The palefaces of America need to get over themselves and their expectations of insatiable domination. From the nation's beginning, white colonists seized this land and all its riches from native Americans by cruel trickery transgressing New Testament Scripture. And now that same venomous serpent raises its head once more with a poisonous strike never before so vicious against justice in our beloved land. Are we a Christian nation or not? Doug L.

Four short years

WILMINGTON—Consider this. Dr. Fauci needs a security bodyguard as does his entire family since the Trump presidency. He has worked for five different presidents and has never felt endangered before. But that's the Trump effect and Dr. Fauci is not the only one suffering from it. Many congressional Republicans admit that they support Trump out of fear because otherwise their families' safety is at stake from local thugs. Congressional Democrats receive constant death threats directed at themselves and their children and the Michigan governor's kidnapping plot is proof of this. Furthermore, Trump's minions promise to carry out Trump's threats after Trump is gone from Washington. What do we do? The entire floor of the Capitol is covered by the National Guard but too bad it's a week late. Should we station soldiers throughout the land indefinitely like third-world countries? What does this say about President Trump? During the four short years of his presidency, America seems to have become a terrorist state. Irene D.

Thank goodness

GARDNER—Thank God we have grownups back in the White House. No more lies, bullying, or melodrama. No tweets. No more reality TV show - just the hard work of getting us out of the huge mess left for us. Sabotaging the new administration at every turn thinking it will make you look good. How stupid you are? No sane person will ever forget what you've done to this country and what traitors you are. The blood of almost 400,000 people and the ones killed on the Jan. 6 are on your hands. Anyone who enabled these creatures is responsible for everything they've done. A lot of you will be going to jail, including the traitor/grifter-in-chief. Have fun. Good bye and good riddance. And to good old Dan, your guy has been stealing from the soldiers, vets and the taxpayers this whole time. He's been a grifter all his life and will be one until the day he dies. His last grift is the election fraud. The only fraud is him and his lie. Once he knew you all would send him money, he kept it going. It's not going into any fund, it's going in his pocket.

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Commentary

Slight relief from our predatory government

BY RICHARD PORTER

Among all the bad policy coming out of Springfield, Ill., let's celebrate the occasional glimmer of good sense.

But first, some background: Illinois' legislature passed legislation on policing and related matters last week in the dead of night. The 764-page bill passed the state Senate at 4:49 a.m. after being introduced and distributed to the members at 3:04 a.m. Only a few legislative insiders could have possibly known what was in the bill before voting; the rest of the legislature, first seeing the measure upon its introduction, voted blind.

Only after the Democrat majority passed the bill are we learning what's in it — and there's little that's good.

The legislation has been assailed as radical and anti-police for good reason. Consider, for example, this nugget from page 50: Under current law, a complaint filed against a police officer is required to be supported by a sworn affidavit from the person filing the complaint and provides that anyone filing false information shall be referred for prosecution. The bill eliminates both the requirement for the sworn affidavit and the referral for prosecution for false complaints.

This and other provisions declare open season on law enforcement. Weakening law enforcement further in a state already riven by soaring crime rates unleashed by lax prosecution of basic criminal laws will make Illinois a more dangerous and less attractive place to live.

But, one provision in this bill reflects an idea that needs to be constantly reinforced: Government should help its citizens, not hurt them.

I have argued elsewhere that Illinois government has become predatory — that

it focuses on raising money to serve the people in government instead of focusing on serving the general public. A predatory government weighs heaviest on those who earn the least. Examples of predatory policies include the myriad fees, fines, rules and gotchas imposed — and the absurd penalties applied for minor infractions of this web of rules.

A young friend of mine, a high school graduate working his way into a skilled trade, would drive to visit his girlfriend. He earned about \$13 an hour. Sometimes, he didn't have money in his pocket for tolls and he didn't have credit to get the transponder that would cut his toll costs in half.

Let's pause for a moment: People with credit (i.e., those with more money) pay lower tolls on the highway than people with poor credit (i.e., those with less money). Why not charge folks who need to stop and pay cash the same amount as the folks who can drive through the toll with transponders?

Back to my story: My friend did not pay about \$30 in tolls. Shame on him -- but note that the tolls that are small for many were more than he could afford on a daily basis. His minor infraction, which he ignored because he didn't have the money anyway, turned into \$2,500 in fines, as well as a suspended license — which led to the loss of his job — before I got involved.

While the Illinois Tollway authority has since then significantly reduced some of its penalties, government for people with low to moderate incomes is often Kafkaesque: a small mistake in dealing with government or error in judgment leads to cascading consequences that bear no proportion to the original mistake.

While not unique to Illinois, this is

particularly true there because of the state's financial crisis. Making government work for ordinary citizens is a secondary concern for leaders obsessed with finding money to fund the over-promised, under-funded public pensions.

The folks running our government, who campaign on imposing a \$15 minimum wage on small businesses, have legislated a system of taxes, tolls, fees and fines that lower income residents can't afford. And, as in the case of my friend and others, our government routinely forces people into debt and out of jobs in its search for revenue.

Is "safety" a reason or just a rationale for red light camera tickets? Are high highway tolls and gas taxes fair to those who make less? These and other petty revenue collection devices that then require enforcement hammer the less well-off. A bankrupt state that forces its own citizens into bankruptcy is a predatory state.

The good news in this bad bill is that motorists would no longer lose their licenses as a consequence of unpaid red light and speed camera tickets. That's a small but important win for the people of Illinois, but what of the tickets themselves and the exorbitant penalties and fees that accompany this policy? Why not abolish these as well?

We need a thorough rethinking of all aspects of our government. We need leaders looking for ways to help people rise instead of holding them down or shaking them down.

PS: The young friend of mine I mentioned above recently moved to Texas. Why? He aspires to start his own business some day and he believes it's easier to do that in Texas than in Illinois.

Richard Porter is a lawyer in Chicago and Illinois's national committeeman to the Republican National Committee.

Sound-off, continued from page 4

ets for all the lawsuits coming his way. He has never been as rich as he said he was and is always conning his way through deals. The big deal maker hasn't made a deal in four years. He owes other countries millions of dollars, too, so your money will go for that. The bank he was laundering money through for Putin for years won't work with him anymore, so I don't know how Putin will feel about that. I'm sure they'll work out something, though. Not only is Trump the leading cause of death in this country, but he's also the biggest national security threat. He'll give away our secrets for a happy meal. He just can't help being a crook. That's all he knows. So if you're OK with that and every other disgusting thing he's done to this country, shame on you. You've believed all his lies no matter how unbelievable or just plain stupid they were. You're OK with it because you all hate the same people. You are no patriot, sir. Trump said he wondered how Jim Jones got his people to drink the Kool Aid, but said he finally figured it out. Divide and keep spewing lies to vulnerable people until they believe it. It's worked since the days of Hitler. We will never be a dictatorship. If you want one, go live in Russia or China, or any of the other countries that are run that way for awhile and see how you like it. Watch what you wish for, though. Also, see how many of you will be able to have your guns there. This is a democracy and we will fight to keep it that way. The Republican party is now the party of white nationalists, militias, racists, proud boys, boogaloo boys, and any other murderous creatures that have crawled out from under the rocks these past four years. You must be so proud. There used to be some good ones. I miss John McCain. Of course, Captain Bone Spurs said he's not a hero. Such garbage spewed from white trash. The stench he came with will never leave him or his enablers. God bless this country and God bless our troops.

850 smiles

GARDNER—I just wanted to thank the Coal City second grade class for helping us out with our Christmas Card Project at Sacred Heart Church in Kinsman. Between them, the parishioners, the Sacred Heart CCD class, the kids at MVK, and my granddaughter we had over 850 cards. We were able to deliver them to the LaSalle, Quincy, and Manteno Veterans' Homes, Park Pointe Assisted Living, The Memory Gardens and The Regency in Morris, and both homes in Dwight. It was awesome. Such a great project. Couldn't have done it without everybody's help. Can't wait to do it again and hoping we can have the kids deliver them in person next time. Donna Gabehart

A big zero

GARDNER—How many of Trump's (common man) supporters do you think he would let into his private golf resorts or at Mar-A-Lago? Probably about the same number he would shake hands with at his super spreader

rallies. I think the number is a big zero. He said the virus was a good thing because he didn't have to shake those disgusting people's hands anymore. Ah, the man for the little guy. You terrorists from the Jan. 6 incident want pardons? He's selling them for about \$2 million a pop. Good luck.

Highway speeding

WILMINGTON—When is something going to get done to slow down the vehicles coming in from the west? You have semis coming in at over 50 mph, not to mention people in the morning who are running late for work and run the red light at First Street. What's it going to take? Someone getting killed before something gets done?

Weren't from Harvard

COAL CITY—During the recent riot at the Capitol you may have noticed a new symbol of the Republican party. Gone is the stodgy old elephant that has symbolized our country's faithful conservatives for more than a century. The new face of the party is a bare-chested misfit with tattoos and a painted face who is wearing coyote skins and a bison horn on his head. This 32-year-old goon was kicked out of the Navy and lives with his mother in Arizona. He and the rest of the mob are the culmination of years of lies spread by Fox News and other propaganda outlets. They are the result of those who enable the Trump Circus and didn't have the guts to stand up to his craziness. Trump demonized those who opposed him, encouraged violence, promoted racism and glorified stupidity with his dumb comments on climate change and the deadly virus. If you look closely at the Trump Storm Troopers who attacked the capital you saw that most of them did not look like graduate students from Harvard. Rather, they were a scruffy gang who looked like they spent the last week in a cave. These brain washed terrorists now control the Republican Party and are out to destroy our country. If you think I'm wrong I hope you heard the remarks of the Illinois Republican Congresswoman who told the crowd about the things Hitler got right. Our tax dollars should not be spent repairing or guarding the capitol. Send the bill to the Trump campaign.

Going against God

SHADOW LAKES—The Bible states that homosexuality is not to be tolerated, but yet Democrats wish to tolerate it. They are not Christians in my book. Anyone who tolerates homosexuals goes against God. God does not tolerate homosexuals. It is written in the Bible. Dan Hill

Correction

This is another sound-off correction. I said Trump lost the popular vote twice but due to an arcane holdover of slavery called the electoral college he still won the 2016 election, the point being he never had the support of the majority of Americans. Penny Lane

Local students earn honors at Mizzou

The University of Missouri has recognized the academic achievement of five area students by naming them to the fall 2020 dean's list.

Local students earning a grade point average of 3.25 or higher during the fall semester were included.

Earning the academic honor were Joshua J. Michalak, a freshman arts and science major, from Diamond.

Wilmington residents Rhianna Ellen Kay Brown, a freshman journalism major, and Lillian Solt, a junior majoring in health professions.

Maggie Christina Meyr, of Essex, who is majoring in health professions and Madyson Nicole Schuck, a sophomore journalism major, from Braceville.

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Lame duck session was a failure by Pritzker administration

"The legislature is going to be a check on the executive branch," newly-elected House Speaker Chris Welch flatly declared to me during an interview the other day.

Welch was responding to a question I posed to him about his Jan. 13th inaugural address, when he asked not-so-rhetorically, "Why is it difficult to ensure that families' unemployment checks continue unabated and arrive on time so struggling families can feed their children? Why is that hard to grasp?"

Welch's predecessor, Speaker Michael Madigan, stayed completely mum about Gov. JB Pritzker's handling of the COVID-19 crisis and resulting mass unemployment, even though Pritzker occasionally took verbal shots at Madigan and called on him to resign if he refused to answer questions about the ComEd investigation.

Not a single House committee hearing has been held about the backlog at the Illinois Department of Employment Security, or, for that matter, all the other migraine headaches that legislators have been dealing with as desperate constituents have turned to them for assistance when they couldn't get through to a state agency. That could very well change.

Rep. Fred Crespo (D-Hoffman Estates) warned the governor via the Center Square publication last week that the

House could "hold up some of these funds, even federal dollars," to IDES if members don't start getting answers to their questions. Crespo was instrumental in corralling votes for Welch and has been the chair of the House General Services Appropriations Committee. "It's not a threat, I think it's more, I think it's an education," Crespo told the outlet. "They're new and make sure they understand the process."

"I'm going to have an open and ongoing relationship with the governor to express what I'm hearing from our members," Welch told me. He didn't come right out and say it, but what he's hearing from his members about the governor ain't all that great these days, as Rep. Crespo could attest.

The Pritzker administration appears to have gotten a taste of what may come later this year during the just-concluded lame duck session when both of the governor's top priorities failed to pass.

A bill to decouple the state from federal business tax breaks (depending whom you talk to) worth between \$400 million to \$1 billion to state coffers received just 50 votes in the wee hours of last



Rich Miller

Wednesday morning. Nine Black Caucus members did not vote for the bill.

Most either voted "Present" or took a walk, but Rep. Debbie Meyers-Martin (D-Olympia Fields) voted "No." Black Caucus members are usually reliable votes for revenue increases. Not that day.

Welch himself didn't vote on the decoupling bill, either. He explained early Wednesday morning that he was "distracted" (even though the roll call was held open for quite a long while) and would vote for it again when the time came, but that time never came.

The Senate played games with the governor's must-have cannabis cleanup bill, waiting until almost 2 o'clock Wednesday morning to pass it pretty much as the governor wanted. But, by then, it was too late for the House to act.

The Senate seemed to many to be deliberately slow-walking important bills for the governor and for others during the last couple days of session. "I'm pretty sure this bill that we're debating right now was sent to us about six hours ago from the House," grumbled one Senator at 5:37 Wednesday morning.

The House Democrats

were heavily distracted by their election of a new Speaker and some white northern suburban Democrats were prepared to go "on strike" if the cannabis bill was passed without allowing their dispensaries to move to better locations, which was a deal-killer for the Black Caucus.

In the end, . Yes, there were tons of extenuating circumstances. But they knew ever since veto session was canceled in November that a lame duck session was a distinct probability. They had two months to prepare and now have precious little to show for it except for the Black Caucus agenda that they weren't in charge of.

Pritzker's huge legislative success in 2019 was an aberration. It was a legislative expression of joy and relief at having a governor who wanted to work with them to get big things done after 12 years of gubernatorial ineptitude and outright hostility toward the General Assembly. But if they don't address whatever issues there are with Harmon, woo the new Speaker and start tending to member egos, they're in for a very rough spring.

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

Welter starts third term in Illinois House

SPRINGFIELD—State Rep. David Allen Welter, R-Morris, was sworn in to his third full term on Jan. 13 with a focus on emerging from the pandemic and economic opportunity for families and students.

Welter joined all 118 members of the Illinois House of Representatives for the inauguration of the 102nd General Assembly held at the Bank of Springfield Center. Welter has represented Illinois' 75th District since July 2016.

"Democrats and Republicans need to work together to position Illinois to effectively distribute COVID-19 vaccines and assist our economy to bounce back from the ravaging effects of the pandemic," Welter said. "We need to make policy changes that will create jobs, strengthen schools and enact meaningful and lasting property tax relief. Illinois presently ranks second in the nation for people leaving for lower taxes and better opportunities elsewhere. Our priority in 2021, in tandem with overcoming the pandemic, must be to reverse this trend



Courtesy photo

STATE REPRESENTATIVE DAVID Welter, R-Morris, was sworn in for his third full term serving the 75th District in the Illinois House

by making Illinois more competitive for job creators and more affordable for families and seniors.

"Too many of our best and

brightest students leave Illinois after graduation. We need to work together to give recent graduates more reasons and opportunities to stay here.

Cairns named to dean's list

The University of Utah has named Luke Cairns, of Coal City to its fall 2020 dean's list. He was among 9,700 students who achieved a grade point average of 3.5 or higher in at least 12 graded credit hours in the term.

Cairns, the son of Shannon and Ben Baer of Coal City and John Cairns of Wilmington, is majoring in pre-computer science with an emphasis on game design. He is a 2020 Coal City High School graduate enrolled in the university's honors program.

Opposition to potential Illinois income tax hike mounting

BY KEVIN BESSLER
THE CENTER SQUARE

With Illinois facing a nearly \$4 billion budget shortfall this year, some are fearful of a possible state income tax increase in the near future, possibly while lawmakers conduct business in Springfield this week.

The support for raising the state income tax comes after voters rejected the graduated income tax amendment in November's election. Gov. J.B. Pritzker said the change in tax code would have raised an estimated \$3 billion a year in revenue, so now what?

Last September, Illinois Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton warned of a 20 percent across-the-board income tax hike if voters didn't approve the progressive tax amendment in November.

"To adequately address the budget crisis under our current tax system, lawmakers

will be forced to consider raising income taxes for all Illinois residents by at least 20 percent," Stratton said.

Brian Costin, state director of Americans for Prosperity, said now is a terrible time to raise taxes.

"Tax hikes are not working. It is not turning around the economy of Illinois, it is making it worse," Costin said. "People are making huge sacrifices during the COVID-19 pandemic. They shouldn't be asking for more money from the taxpayers during this very difficult time."

The last tax hike was just over 3 years ago. On July 6, 2017, the Illinois General Assembly voted to override then-Gov. Bruce Rauner's veto of a record-setting income tax hike. Personal income tax rates rose 32% to 4.95%, while corporate income taxes rose 33% to 7%.

Democratic Rep. Lashawn Ford would support an

income tax hike only if Republicans were on board.

"It has to be bipartisan because we have to make sure that we are fair about the taxes and have input from Republicans as well as Democrats as it relates to spending of the revenue," Ford said.

Pritzker's office has asked state agencies to prepare for the possibility of budget cuts reaching up to 10 percent by fiscal year 2022. He has already announced over \$711 million in cuts for this fiscal year, but details of those cuts remain unclear.

Costin is keeping an eye on the proceedings in Springfield during the General Assembly session.

"It is quite clear that the legislature is not willing to reform government spending, so we are very fearful that they will try to raise taxes," he said.

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Take yourself back to the beach with a Diamond Head

The calendar has turned to a new year, and more than likely plenty of friends, co-workers, and marketing emails have already wished you a happy New Year! If nobody has wished you a happy Wave Season yet, let me be the first to do so.

What, and when is Wave Season? Wave Season starts right about now and runs through early March, think of it as a "Black Friday" for the cruise industry. In a "normal" year, this is the time of year when the best deals on cruise packages to top destinations can be found online.

You see, the cruise industry knows that you are over shoveling snow and adding layers of clothing to stay warm once the Holidays are over. They take advantage of cabin fever by showing you pics and videos of tropical destinations until you finally book your dream vacation. This year, during a global pandemic, I have no idea what cruising, or vacationing in general looks like. I did not take a vacation last year, here's hoping that I can take one late this year.

Many would be travelers use Wave Season as an opportunity to pour their first tropical drink of the year. For this year's Wave Season, I chose the Diamond Head cocktail for two reasons. First, it is named after a popular tropical tourist destination. Second, the drink was created by Hawaiian bartending legend Harry Yee who at the time of printing is 102 years young.

That's right, Harry has been a fixture on Waikiki's bar

scene since before Hawaii became our 50th state. Following 30 years as head bartender at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, he taught bartending in and around Honolulu. Harry was born in 1918, which means that he is one of the few people on planet earth that has lived during both the Spanish Flu pandemic and COVID-19.

Harry is an innovator, with several iconic drinks to his credit. He could literally come up with new drinks on the spot, in part because he had to. Think about the early years of statehood for Hawaii. The islands hosted maybe 100,000 visitors annually in the 1950s, growing into the nearly 7,000,000 annual visitors of recent years. Tourists would come to Hawaii, sit down at Harry's bar, and order a "Hawaiian" drink. There was a problem: there were no Hawaiian drinks. They simply didn't exist.

Harry had to invent the drinks, and think of names for them, often on the fly. A few iconic drinks credited to Harry Yee are the Blue Hawaii, Hawaiian Eye, Tropical Itch, The Chimp in Orbit, and the Banana Daiquiri. He is also attributed with being the first bartender to use those little umbrellas in tropical drinks.

On to the cocktail, in this case, Diamond Head. This is another case of Harry coming



THE SUNDAY COCKTAIL
Brian Rung

up with something "Hawaiian" and naming it after a local landmark. The Diamond Head cocktail is gin-based, with the pleasant fruit notes of apricot brandy. Harry created the occasional rum drink, but was not a fan of rum. Harry preferred cognac, perhaps he still does.

The gin behind Harry's bar around the time that the Diamond Head cocktail was created would have been a standard London dry gin, something like the current Beefeater or Gordon's offerings. Gin serves as an excellent base for tropical drinks as the right gin is light and refreshing with complex floral notes and botanicals.

Once upon a time apricot brandy was a mainstay of mixology, especially in the time between the end of prohibition and the late 1970s. Apricot brandy remains a popular ingredient behind tiki and tropical bars, but has become less common behind other commercial bars.

Your local spirits retailer may have only one or two apricot brandy options, reach for Bol's if that is one of the options.

Since most of us are imbibing at home these days, seems like the perfect opportunity to go the extra mile for fresh fruit juice. Yes, juicing a pineapple is labor intensive. Your efforts will be rewarded as

the addition of fresh pineapple juice to the Diamond Head, or any other pineapple cocktail will take the drink to another level.

If you prefer to go the canned pineapple route, reach for Dole unsweetened pineapple juice. Keep the 6 oz. cans in your home bar and you will always have pineapple juice.

Preparation of the Diamond Head cocktail is simple, fast, and straightforward. It had to be. Harry and his staff had to build them five or ten at a time and serve them quickly. Fill a glass with crushed ice, add ingredients listed below, stir and serve. Don't let this one sit too long as the crushed ice will melt and cause the drink to dilute quickly.

The thought of a beach vacation seems like a dream under the current circumstances, but with any luck we'll turn a corner soon. I imagine that the travel and hospitality industries miss you as much as you miss them, make it a point to support them when you are safely able to do so.

The Diamond Head cocktail is built and served in a small vase-like glass, filled with crushed ice.

Fill glass with crushed ice, then add:

1 oz. gin
1/2 oz. apricot brandy
2 oz. pineapple juice
Stir, garnish with fresh pineapple

Until next week, enjoy responsibly.

Gas prices go up as demand shows renewed signs of recovery

Gasoline prices in Illinois have risen 3.8 cents per gallon in the past week, averaging \$2.46/g Monday, according to GasBuddy's daily survey of 4,378 stations in Illinois. This compares with the national average that has increased 4.2 cents per gallon versus last week to \$2.38/g, according to GasBuddy.

Average gasoline prices on January 18 in Illinois have ranged widely over the last five years: \$2.51/g in 2020, \$2.10/g in 2019, \$2.55/g in 2018, \$2.40/g in 2017 and \$1.85/g in 2016.

Including the change locally during the past week, prices yesterday were 5.3 cents per gallon lower than a year ago and are 20.8 cents per gallon higher than a month ago.

The national average has increased 15.6 cents per gallon during the last month and stands 17.4 cents per gallon

lower than a year ago.

"Gas prices have jumped to yet another multi-month high as crude oil price rise amidst perceived improvement in the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to pump prices up as demand shows renewed signs of recovery," said Patrick DeHaan, head of petroleum analysis for GasBuddy.

"In addition, with rumors swirling that President-elect Biden plans to cancel approval of the Keystone XL pipeline, which would cut off reliable Canadian oil to the U.S., oil prices may see additional pressure in the coming days. For now, the upward trend in gas prices may slow from the sharp rise in the last week, but motorists shouldn't expect much of a break from rising gas prices, which now stand less than twenty cents from their year-ago levels."

SIU-Carbondale dean's list

Southern Illinois University's Carbondale campus recently announced its dean's list for the fall 2020 semester, and more than one dozen area students have achieved academic honors.

Recognized by the university were Hannah Schwieler, a senior from Coal City and fellow seniors Joseph R. Horn, Stephen Lapinsky and Troy W. Mumma, of Wilmington.

Zachary Ridgley, a senior from Custer Park; Hallie J. Jeffries, a sophomore from Braidwood; Koby T. Smith, a senior from Braceville, and Gardner residents Marlana J. Ferrari, a senior, and sophomore Jack P. James.

Mumma achieved straight A's for the semester, as did Morris residents Hannah M. Brath, a freshman; Caitlin E. Mikula, a junior, and seniors Eli J. Gile, Matthew Jurak, Megan Jurak and Nicholas A. Wright.

How seniors can make their bathrooms safer

Dear Savvy Senior,

What tips can you recommend for making a bathroom senior-friendly? My 78-year-old mother has mobility problems and fell getting out of the bathtub last month. I'd like to modify her bathroom with some safety features that can help keep her safe.

Concerned Daughter

Dear Concerned,

Great question! Because more accidents and injuries happen in the bathroom than any other room in the house, this is a very important room to modify, especially for seniors with mobility or balance problems.

Depending on your mom's needs and budget, here are some simple tips and product recommendations that can make her bathroom safer and easier to use.

Floor: To avoid slipping, a simple fix is to get non-skid bath rugs for the floors. Or if you want to put in a new floor get slip-resistant tiles, rubber or vinyl flooring, or install wall-to-wall carpeting.

Lights: Good lighting is also very important, so install the highest wattage bulbs allowed for your mom's bathroom fixtures and get a plug-in nightlight that automatically turns on when the room gets dark.

Bathtub/shower: To make

bathing safer, purchase a rubber suction-grip mat, or put down adhesive nonskid tape on the tub/shower floor. And have a carpenter install grab bars in and around the tub/shower for support.

If your mom uses a shower curtain, install a screw or bolt-mounted curtain rod, versus a tension-mounted rod, so that if she loses her balance and grabs the shower curtain the rod won't spring loose.

For easier access and safer bathing, consider getting your mom a shower or bathtub chair so she can bathe from a seated position. In addition, you should also have a handheld, adjustable-height showerhead installed that makes chair bathing easier.

If your mom has the budget for it, another good option is to install a curb-less shower or a walk-in-bathtub. Curb-less showers have no threshold to step over, and come with a built-in seat, grab bars, slip resistant floors and an adjustable handheld showerhead. While walk-in tubs have a door in front that provides a much lower threshold to step over than a standard tub. They



SAVVY SENIOR
Jim Miller

also have a built-in seat, handrails and a slip resistant bottom, and some have therapeutic features like whirlpool water jets and/or bubble massage air jets.

Curb-less showers and walk-in-tubs run anywhere between \$2,500 and \$10,000

installed.

Toilet: Most standard toilets are around 15 inches high and can be an issue for taller seniors with arthritis, back, hip or knee problems. If your mom has trouble getting on or off the toilet, a simple solution is to purchase a raised toilet seat that clamps to the toilet bowl, and/or purchase toilet safety rails that sit on each side of the seat for support. Or, you can install a new ADA compliant "comfort height" toilet that is 16-to-19 inches high.

Faucets: If your mom has twist handles on the sink, bathtub or shower faucets, consider replacing them with lever handle faucets, or with a touch, motion or digital smart faucet. They're easier to operate, especially if she has hand arthritis or gripping problems. Also note that it only takes 130-degree water to scald some-

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OBITUARIES

Sonja Hicks Amell

KEMPTON— Sonja Hicks Amell, 48, of Kempton and formerly of Wilmington, passed away unexpectedly on Jan. 11, 2021.

Born Dec. 30, 1972 in Joliet, Sonja Renee was a daughter of Laverne and Shirley (Rogers) Nelson. She was raised and educated in Braidwood before moving to Iowa. An avid Steelers fan, Sonja enjoyed attending concerts, and took pleasure in traveling, especially to Tennessee.

Survivors include her husband, Don Amell; three children: Destiny Hicks, of Kempton; Devin Hicks, of Wilmington and Madison Amell, of Kempton; two sisters, Sheila Hicks, of Tennessee and Tina Persinger, of Ohio; one brother, Bruce (Gail) Nelson, of Louisiana; her mother-in-law, Kathy (the late Tom) Tulley, of Florida; sisters-in-law: Linda Nelson, of Minnesota; Lorie (Gerald) Urban, of Gardner and Lisa (Ben) Vlkjan, of Florida, and numerous nieces and nephews.

Sonja was preceded in death by her par-



ents, step-mother, Amy Nelson; son, James Sanders and one brother, Curtis Nelson.

A private family service was held Monday, Jan. 18, 2021 at Baskerville Funeral Home, 700 E. Kahler Rd. in Wilmington with Pastor Jeff Urban officiating.

Burial was in Oakwood Cemetery, Wilmington, where Sonja was laid to rest with her son, James.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests contributions be made to support the funeral fund, which has been established on Sonja's memorial page.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the guest book, upload photographs and share Sonja's memorial page online through social media by logging onto: www.BaskervilleFuneral.com/obituary/Sonja-HicksAmell

Funeral services and arrangements were made under the direction and care of Baskerville Funeral Home in Wilmington.

Hugh Earl Cooper

TEXAS—Hugh Earl Cooper, 91, of McKinney, TX, peacefully passed on Dec. 30, 2020.

Hugh influenced scores of people in his life, many more than he could imagine. From his early support of his country in the military, to his long career as a fair and trusted operations executive at Canal Barge; his compassion and trust brought out the best in people.

Raised in Hugo, OK, Hugh enrolled early in the Army to support his country and was stationed in California. Returning to Oklahoma after duty he received his high school degree and subsequently attended college at Murray State College in Tishomingo, OK.

In 1952 he married his true love, Ruth Haaser, and they raised five children who all have been successful in their own lives. His professional career provided the opportunity to live in many areas throughout the country



which allowed him to touch many people's lives. Hugh's quick wit and humorous personality provided happy memories for all.

Hugh was the beloved husband of Ruth Ann (Haaser) for 68 years and is survived by his children: Linda Weaver (Jeff), of Texas; Pam Brunk (Jamie), of Texas; Tina Nelson (Steve), of Wilmington; Brian Cooper (Annie), of Michigan; Randy Cooper (Lisa), of Georgia; 12 grandchildren: Jessica, Jill, Jaclyn, Tim, Oliva, Ryan, Aaron, Josh, Kelsey, Logan, Andrea, Kiefer and 6 great-grandchildren: Cooper, Maggie, Annabelle, Ryanne, Taylee, Ella.

The family asks donations to be made to assist those impacted by the current pandemic hardships.

To convey condolences or to sign an online registry, visit TJMfuneral.com.

Maura Dunn

WILMINGTON—Maura Dumont Dunn, "Peg," 87, of Wilmington, passed away peacefully on Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2021 at Sunny Hill Nursing Home in Joliet.

Born March 29, 1933 in Roberts, IL, Maura Jean was a daughter of Cecil R. and Laura J. (Campbell) Bryant. She worked for the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant, and later gained employment with Johnson & Johnson Personal Products. Peg was a member of St. Rose Catholic Church in Wilmington, and in addition to reading; playing bingo and scrabble, she also enjoyed playing cards and pressing her luck with the lottery. Peg took pleasure in writing poetry, often referencing her greatest hobby, which was family. Throughout the years, she cherished attending her grandchildren's activities.

Survivors include her children: Terry L. (Larry) Kunze, of Joliet; Dean M. Dumont, of Cambodia; Kathy (Steve) Hedrick, of Custer Park; Bonnie (Tim) Fox, of Joliet; Patrick J. (Barb) Dumont, of Elwood and Mary Ellen (John) Hedrick, of Custer Park; grandchildren: Aaron (Morgan) Kunze, Missy Kunze, Rebecca (Evan) Russell, Erica (Nick) Doerfler, Josh Hedrick, Jason Collett, Seth (Kyla) Hedrick, Brett (Phillipe Osorio) Hedrick, Brian Hedrick (fiance Jackie Flint), Maura Fox and Stephanie



Fox, Patrick and Blaise Doerfler, and great-grandchildren: Ben and Theo Kunze, Jordan and Christian Sieger and Charlie Russell, Cole Hedrick, Ben and Lucy Hedrick, Patrick and Blaise Doerfler, Noah Bagdon, and Melody and Hadley Collett.

Peg was preceded in death by her parents, first husband, Raymond Dumont; son, Tom Dumont; one brother, Bud (Ruth) and one sister, Mary Jo.

Private family services were held at Baskerville Funeral Home in Wilmington on Friday, Jan. 15, 2021 with Deacon Jay Plese from St. Rose Catholic Church in Wilmington presiding.

Burial was in Mount Olivet Catholic Cemetery in Wilmington.

Preferred memorials may be made as gifts in Peg's memory to Kuzma Care Cottage, 635 S. Main St., Wilmington, IL 60481.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the guest book, upload photographs and share Peg's memorial page online through social media by logging onto: www.BaskervilleFuneral.com/obituary/MauraPeg-Dunn

Funeral services and arrangements were made under the direction and care of Baskerville Funeral Home in Wilmington.

Wilfred Hall

BRAIWOOD—Wilfred Neil Hall, "Neil," 84, of Braidwood, passed away peacefully on Thursday, Jan. 14, 2021 at his home.

Born Nov. 15, 1936 in Carbon Hill, Neil was the son of Erned and Katie (Starks) Hall. He was raised in Carbon Hill and Braceville, until his family moved to Braidwood where he would graduate from Reed-Custer High School with the class of 1954. On June 21, 1958 Neil married Adeline Josephine Baber at the Custer Park Baptist Church. He worked on the family farm, and later owned and operated Hall Plumbing and Heating for over 20 years. Neil then gained employment with the Reed-Custer School District on the maintenance staff, and worked there until his retirement in 2000.

He was a member of the Braidwood Recreation Club where he served as a board member, and loved to camp there and other sites when his family would go on vacations. Neil also served as a school board member, and in his spare time loved to spend time in "Grandpa's Work Shop" woodworking. He had a talent for solving problems and figuring out how things work, or the ability to make what he needed to complete a project. Neil maintained a meticulous lawn and was always willing to help someone keep their yard looking neat. He was a proud owner of a 1989 Chevrolet Silverado that was his baby, and he kept it in near-mint condition.

Neil was a devoted family man who lived for spending time with his family. He was a loving husband, father, and grandfather, and leaves behind a legacy of dedication to those whom he loved.

Survivors include his wife of 62 years, Adeline Hall, of Braidwood; two children,



Douglas (Tammie) Hall and Vicky (Kenneth) Keith, both of Braidwood; daughter-in-law, Eva Hall, of Seneca; seven grandchildren: Amanda (Dale) Davidson, of Coal City; Matthew (Tricia) Hall, of Coal City; Neil (Kelsie) Hall, of Seneca; Ashley (Brian) Oest, of Rockford; Mackenzie (Ryan) Gregoire, of Springfield; Delanie (TJ) Giffin, of Boone, IA and Cameron Keith (Koltin Powell), of Coal City; 17 great-grandchildren: Kilen and Cambree Davidson, Caleb and Emersyn Hall, Grady, Atley, Waveland and Maxwell Hall; Bryson and Romi Oest, Brooks and Beckham Gregoire, Ryker, Bennett, Maddux and Remi Giffin, and Vivianne Keith-Powell and sister-in-law, Lois Hall.

Neil was preceded in death by his parents, his son, Gregory Dean Hall, as well as Patrick Clark, who was like a son to Neil, and his siblings: Ellwyn Duain Hall, Ronald Dean (Frances) Hall, Gordon Stephen Hall and Edna Ernadine (Dominic) Zandi.

A private family service was held Sunday, Jan. 17, 2021 at Baskerville Funeral Home, 700 E. Kahler Rd., in Wilmington with Pastor Nick Sandeno officiating.

Following the services, cremation rites will be accorded and Neil will be laid to rest at Braceville-Gardner Cemetery.

Preferred memorials may be made as gifts in Neil's memory to: Uplifted Care, 482 Main St. NW, Bourbonnais, IL 60914.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the online guest book, upload photographs, and share Neil's memorial page by logging onto: www.BaskervilleFuneral.com

Funeral services and cremation arrangements have been made under the direction and care of Baskerville Funeral Home in Wilmington.

Shirley Medlin

WILMINGTON—Shirley Ann Medlin, 84, of Wilmington, passed away Friday, Jan. 15, 2021 at Riverside Medical Center in Kankakee.

Born June 15, 1936 in Paducah, KY, Shirley was a daughter of T.J. and Annie (Thweatt) Whitby. She was raised and educated in Heath, KY, and graduated from Heath High School. On May 16, 1953, Shirley married Frankie D. Medlin in Corinth, MS.

Shirley and her husband founded the Prince of Peace Church in Joliet, where they served their community for 45 years. She was a musician at heart, and shared her gift not only with the members of Prince of Peace Church, but instilled a love of music and singing in her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Shirley had a lovely singing voice and always had a song for any little task or chore she was working on. She was a wonderful baker who loved to make pies, but her children agree that every dessert was her specialty. Ultimately, Shirley was a devoted wife, mother and grandmother whose legacy is defined by the love and care she had for all who knew her.

Survivors include her five children: Sharon



(Steve) Miliotti, of Rainbow City, AL; Frankie (Paula) Medlin, Mike (Brenda) Medlin and Karen (Jeff) Crisp, all of Wilmington and John (Lynette) Medlin, of Elwood; 11 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren; one sister, Carlyn (Carl) Medlin, of Kentucky and several nieces and nephews.

Shirley was preceded in death by her parents, her husband, Frankie, on Sept. 14, 2020; two grandsons, William and Samuel Medlin; and her brothers and sisters: Donnie Gene Allcock, Bill John (Ellen) Allcock, Aubrey Allcock, Linda Moss, Flo (Herbert) Hymarsh and Ruby (Scottie) Hale.

Private family services will be held and Shirley will be laid to rest with her husband at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the online guest book, upload photographs and share Shirley's memorial page on social media by logging onto: www.BaskervilleFuneral.com

Funeral services and arrangements have been made under the direction and care of Baskerville Funeral Home in Wilmington.

Marilyn J. Mollan

WILMINGTON— Marilyn J. Mollan, 95, of Wilmington, passed away Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2021.

Born Nov. 11, 1925 in Joliet, Marilyn Jayne was a daughter of Andy Guy and Ruth Glen (Hocking) Burt. She was raised and educated in Joliet; graduated from Joliet Township High School, and went on to marry James Mollan on May 4, 1944 in the Universalist Unitarian Church in Joliet.

Marilyn was a member of the First Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, belonged to the Wilmington Garden Club, and was a former resident of Stough Circle. Marilyn worked for Johnson & Johnson Personal Products for several years and she and her husband Jim were partners in the Joliet Yacht Club. In her free time, Marilyn enjoyed reading and sewing, and will be remembered for her artistry.

Survivors include her children, William Mollan, of Joliet and Dawn (Curtis) Fox and Jeffery Mollan (Kim Teague), both of Wilmington; grandchildren: Chad (Stacy) Fox, Kevin (Carly) Fox, Jeffrey Mollan and Jennifer Mollan, and great-grandchildren: Tyler, Teagan, Lincoln, Parker, Birdie, Caitlyn, Brianna, Ryan,



Scarlett, Adriana, Alexis, Cody, Katy, Amanda, McKinleigh and Ashley, as well as numerous nieces and nephews.

Marilyn was preceded in death by her parents, husband, James and one granddaughter, Riley; three sisters: Dollie (Al) Lindstrom, Dorothy (Bob) Stahl and Joyce (Ray) Zierman, and one brother, Bud Hocking.

Cremation rites have been accorded, and Marilyn will be laid to rest with her late husband Jim in Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood.

Preferred memorials may be made as gifts in Marilyn's memory to The Wilmington Garden Club.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the guest book, upload photographs and share Marilyn's memorial page online through social media by logging onto: www.BaskervilleFuneral.com/obituary/Marilyn-Mollan

Cremation services and memorial arrangements have been made under the direction and care of Baskerville Funeral Home in Wilmington.

Judith A. Plese

WILMINGTON—Judith A. Plese, 82, of Wilmington, passed away at her home early on the morning of Jan. 12, 2021.

Born in Kankakee on Aug. 13, 1938 to James and Ellen Benson, Judy lived first in Ashkum before moving to Wilmington in the mid 1940's. Possessing a sharp mind and an unfailing memory, Judy was a natural student who attended the Brookside School, St. Rose School and Booth Central before graduating in 1956 from Wilmington High School. Judy then went on to attend the University of Illinois for one year before beginning work at the Joliet Arsenal as a secretary.

On New Year's Eve 1957, fate stepped in and Judy attended a party where she would meet her future husband, Dean E. Plese. That evening, Judy and Dean began a love affair lasting more than 60 years. They married in Wilmington on Sept. 5, 1959. They raised their family first in Wilmington and later in Upstate New York when Dean's job moved the family there in 1984.

During their long and successful marriage, Dean was the breadwinner while Judy ran the house and primarily devoted herself to raising their six children. She was the ultimate supportive mother. Judy could almost always be found in the kitchen -- her "office" -- but she somehow always found the time to attend her children's school and sporting events and later her grandchildren's. She volunteered in support of St. Rose School, the parish as a whole and the Kuzma Care Cottage in addition to supporting almost anything involving her children's interests. She was never too busy for her family and she gave of herself unconditionally from the time she said "I do" on her wedding day.

When their children grew older, Judy began working in a series of administrative roles that included working for various legal offices, the U.S. Post Office as well as running the advertising department of a marketing firm in New York. Upon returning to Wilmington for good in 1999, Judy and Dean settled into a post-retire-



ment life of lovingly restoring and then maintaining her family's home, traveling the U.S. and abroad, and most especially visiting her children and grandchildren, all of whom she adored.

Judy was a woman of so many talents but she will be remembered most for her grace, abundance of kindness and the unwavering love and support she gave to her husband, her children and to her extended family and friends. Judy was a genuinely kind, nurturing, loving, patient soul, she was truly an angel among us. Without her beautiful light, the world is truly a little darker and colder. Her family's consolation is that she is once again reunited with her husband and son, both of whom she deeply mourned.

She is survived by her children: Dean (Stacy), of Wilmington; David (Angela), of Knoxville, TN; Martin (Maureen), of Wilmington; Maria, of Vineyard Haven, MA and Eric (Christine), of Poughkeepsie, NY; her son-in-law, Gabriel Rodriguez; her brothers, Joseph (the late Melanie) and Jim (Sue), her beloved grandchildren, her in-laws, as well as many nieces, nephews, and cousins all of whom she loved.

Judy was predeceased by her husband of 60 years, Dean E. Plese, in June 2020 and her son, Anthony in October 2020.

A private family Mass of Christian Burial was held on Monday, Jan. 18, 2021 at St. Rose Catholic Church in Wilmington.

Interment was private at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood immediately following the funeral.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that you please tell your loved ones what they mean to you. Donations in Judy's memory may be made to Kuzma Care Cottage at 635 S. Main St., Wilmington, IL 60481, an organization that Judy dearly loved and supported.

Funeral services and arrangements were made under the direction and care of Baskerville Funeral Home in Wilmington

David F. Sears Sr.

WILMINGTON— David F. Sears Sr., 77, of Wilmington, passed away peacefully Jan. 12, 2021 at his home surrounded by family.

Born May 31, 1943 in Albany, NY, David Franklin was a son of David Franklin and Margaret Julia (Pierce) Sears. He honorably served in the United States Navy, and on June 13, 1970 went on to marry MaryAnne Kelly.

One who enjoyed sports, David followed the Chicago Bears, as well as Notre Dame and the Chicago Cubs. He enjoyed nature, had nautical interests and just enjoyed being outdoors.

Survivors include his wife, Mary A. Sears; son, David Franklin Sears Jr. (Jennie); daughter, Christine Anne Sears-Williams (Clifton); granddaughter, Madison Alayah Williams; grandsons: Kordell Elijah Williams and Quintyn David Williams; one sister, Connie Schwartz and numerous nieces and nephews.

David was preceded in death by his parents, son, John Brian Sears; brother, Jack Sears



and brother-in-law, Phillip Schwartz.

Per David's wishes, cremation rites have been accorded.

The family will receive friends for a COVID observant memorial visitation at Reeves Funeral Home, 75 N. Broadway, one block north of IL Route 113 in Coal City on Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021 from 3 until 6 p.m. A memorial service will follow.

Those wishing to participate in the memorial service virtually are welcome to join the live stream on Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021 beginning at 6 p.m. A link for the event will be available on David's memorial page.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the guest book, upload photographs and share David's memorial page online through social media by logging onto: www.ReevesFuneral.com/obituary/David-SearsSr

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

Mayo Post to observe 75th anniversary

Malcolm J. Mayo VFW There will be food served from 1 - 5 p.m. for members observing its 75th anniversary and the public with entertainment with a party on Saturday, Jan. 20, 2021 from 8-11 p.m.

There will be prizes and

giveaways throughout the day. The VFW is located at 557 W. Baltimore St., Wilmington and is open to the public.

OBITUARIES

Edward Wilkins

ESSEX—Edward Eugene Wilkins, 67, of Essex, passed away Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2021 at Edwards Hospital in Naperville, IL.

Born July 31, 1953 in Richland Center, WI, he was a son of Edward Earl and Jean Marie (nee Himes) Wilkins. Edward graduated from Joliet West High School with the class of 1971. He retired from the Braidwood Nuclear Generating Station after 30 years of employment. Edward was a former elder at the Shepherd of Peace Lutheran Church in Braidwood and a current member of the River of Life Lutheran Church- Missouri-Synod in Channahon, IL.

He was an avid fisherman, duck hunter, and overall was a great outdoors man. After retirement he enjoyed working at the South Wilmington Sportsman Club and volunteering at the youth hunts and many other activities they offered.

Surviving are his beloved wife of 48 years, Barbara Leah (nee Rudd) Wilkins, of Essex, who he married July 15, 1972 at the St. Peters Lutheran Church in Joliet; three sons: Edward



M. (Jeanine) Wilkins, of Frankfort, IL; Patrick R. (Nicole) Wilkins, of Wheaton, IL and Clint (Elizabeth) Wilkins, of Braidwood; eight grandchildren: Eddie, Dakota, Skylar, Amber, Joshua, Elijah, Magdalyn and Nolan; three siblings: Robert (Gwen) Wilkins, of Zellwood, FL; Debra (Paul) Merzlock, of Joliet and Kirk (Sheila) Wilkins, of Braidwood and numerous nieces, nephews, and their families.

Funeral services were held at the R.W. Patterson Funeral Home and Crematory, Braidwood on Sunday, Jan. 17, 2021. Cremation rites were accorded following services.

Memorial donations in his name to the River of Life Lutheran Church or the American Cancer Society would be appreciated.

For more information and to visit his online guestbook, log on to www.rwpatterson-funeralhomes.com.

R.W. Patterson Funeral Home & Crematory, 401 E. Main St., Braidwood was in charge of arrangements.

Dora Wilson

BRAIDWOOD—Dora (Heck) Wilson, 80, of Braidwood, and formerly of Wilmington, passed away Friday, Jan. 8, 2021 at her home.

Born Jan. 19, 1940 in Wilmington, Dora Ellen was a daughter of Arthur J. and Alpha (Sitter) Heck. She was raised and educated in Wilmington and attended the Wilmington schools. Dora worked for many years as a school bus driver for the Gardner South Wilmington School District. She was a member of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Braidwood and enjoyed quilting and crocheting. In her free time, Dora took pleasure in tending to her vegetable garden, canning and fishing.

Survivors include her husband, Daniel Wilson, of Braidwood; four children: Tina Hendrex, of Coal City; Terry (the late Gerald) Champion, of Paducah, KY; Duane Hendrex, of Braidwood and Bryan (Lori) Hendrex, of Morris; seven grandchildren: Lee Heafner, Stacy Burt, Michael Esparza, Jeremy Esparza, Nathan Esparza, Renae Champion Mariner and Brandon Hendrex; numerous great-grandchildren, two brothers, Arthur (Carol) Heck, of Lafayette, IN and Larry Heck, of Wilmington; three sisters: Mary Ruth (the late Charles "Bud") Bullock and Betty Marlene (the late Herbert) Akins, both of Wilmington and Joanna (Glen) Schwartz, of Hiawatha, IA and sister-in-law, Sandy Heck, of Joliet, as well as numerous nieces and nephews.



Dora was preceded in death by her parents, son, Orman Heafner; sister, Anna Heck and brother, John Heck.

Cremation rites have been accorded and Dora will be laid to rest at Mount Olivet Catholic Cemetery in Wilmington with her parents.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the guest book, upload photographs and share Dora's memorial page online through social media by logging onto: www.BaskervilleFuneral.com/obituary/Dora-Wilson

Green flameless cremation services and memorial arrangements have been made under the direction and care of Baskerville Funeral Home in Wilmington.

COVID-19's positive impact on the flu

Low flu numbers due to safety precautions

As COVID-19 exploded last year, the seasonal flu did an about face, dropping off significantly compared to past years.

The numbers are telling. For example, in the third week of December 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) network of clinical labs reported 16.2% of almost 30,000 samples tested positive for influenza A. During the same period in 2020, only .3% tested positive.

In another example, during the last week of December 2019, the Winnebago County Health Department in Rockford, IL, reported 198 cases in Winnebago County. During that same time period in 2020, there was one case of influenza.

One of the major reasons is the number of flu vaccines being distributed. According to the CDC, 192.3 million doses of flu vaccine have been distributed as of Dec. 25. That's the highest number of flu doses distributed in the U.S. during a single influenza season.

"Flu cases have been significantly down this year. We anticipated that, but we prepared for the worst," said Dr. Syed Zaidi, of OSF HealthCare. "The important message of getting your vaccination for the flu was high priority in communities. The numbers that have been down have been largely due to the number of vaccinations through community healthcare systems and community pharma-

cies."

That's not all. While more people are vigilant about getting the flu vaccine this season, people are also washing their hands, social distancing, wearing masks and traveling less due to COVID-19 – all important factors in the drop in flu cases. Another contributing factor is children learning from home rather than the classroom. Flu typically starts with children.

"Typically immunization rates increase around November to December and that's been the case this year as well," said Zaidi. "However we see flu cases rise post-holiday season. Right when people are getting back from the holiday, family gatherings – January, February is when we're usually harder hit."

Flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and possibly death. The best way to prevent flu is by getting a flu vaccine.

"Typically, fevers, cough, colds, runny nose, are on our radar all the time now," said Zaidi. "I think the number of

testing might increase almost proportionate to COVID testing, but the number of positive cases come back for flu are unprecedentedly low. Have I seen flu cases in my office, yes? Would I say weekly, no? Perhaps on average once a month at least in one small office like mine."

Moving forward, Dr. Zaidi hopes the steps people are taking this flu season is a sign of things to come.

"When we start to value our health day to day and we start to worry about our vulnerable whether it's our children or our parents, we tend to make more sound, knowledgeable decisions and part of that decision is making sure your preventative care is met and that includes vaccinations."

Dr. Zaidi adds that this is no time to let our guard down.

"Flu season continues and we will see pattern of peak after the holiday season. It's the utmost importance that we continue to vaccinate and get your flu shot, typically the vulnerable – the younger and the elderly – and we all hope and pray that we will continue to be safe from whatever ails us as a society."

209-U lunch menu

Mon., Jan. 25: sweet & sour chicken, veggie rice, cookie, pineapple and choice of milk

Tues., Jan. 26: hot dog on bun, nacho & cheese, baby carrots, mandarin oranges in jell-o and choice of milk

Wed., Jan. 27: 2 tacos, refried beans, salsa, pears and

choice of milk

Thurs., Jan. 28: cheese tortellini, green beans, garlic toast, applesauce and choice of milk

Fri., Jan. 29: popcorn shrimp, corn, biscuit, pineapple and choice of milk

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Applications will be available to qualified candidates January 20th – February 22nd between the hours of 8:30am-4:30pm, Monday-Friday at Station #1, 501 N. Main Street, Wilmington, IL. \$30 non-refundable processing fee (Cash/check only) is due upon receipt of application.

A valid driver's license must be presented in order to obtain an application. Only one application per candidate will be given.

Completed application shall be returned to the above address no later than 4:30 pm on February 22, 2021. Failure to complete the application in its entirety shall be grounds for rejection from the process.

Applicants must attend the following:

- Orientation/Written Exam: February 24, 2021 at 6 pm Sharp (No one will be allowed in the room after 6 pm)
- Oral Interviews: March 8th and March 10th.
- Physical Ability: Must have a CPAT card with ladder climb issued no more than 365 days prior to conditional offer.

The Rules and Regulations of the Board of Fire Commissioners, Wilmington Fire Protection District, will govern all facets of the hiring process, a copy of which is available for viewing at the District's Station#1. If you have any questions please call (815)-476-6675.



Wilmington Fire Protection District
501 N. Main Street
Wilmington IL 60481



Coalers start practices Monday but Wildcats, Comets will have to wait

BY SHAWN LONG
SPORTS WRITER

The good news for Coal City High School is that their cheerleading, boys and girls basketball teams can start practicing on Monday.

The bad news is Wilmington and Reed-Custer still have to wait.

On Monday, Region 2 which includes Grundy County, dropped to Tier 1 mitigations while Reed-Custer and Wilmington, in Region 7, remain under tier 3 restrictions.

According to CCHS Athletic Director Dan Hutchings and Principal Chris Spencer, they'll be moving forward on Monday.

"Competitive cheer and competitive dance are allowed to start practicing immediately," said Hutchings. "Same thing for boys and girls basketball which is a higher risk sport. With parental consent they actually can go to close guarding and intrasquad scrimmaging but no competition as of yet. The dance and cheer teams can compete but the issue is Region 5 in southern Illinois is the only other region in Tier 1 so no competitions locally. Still, we're allowed to practice so we'll get our kids involved that way."

Starting Monday contact days for spring and summer sports can also begin.

"What that means for us is the basketball and cheer teams will get to have priority."

The spring sports now includes football, volleyball and boys soccer. The seasons will run from February 15 to May 1.

The summer sports consisting of baseball, softball, track & field, girls soccer and boys tennis (CC only) will be held from April 19 to June 26.

"The main thing for us is we get to open up our weight room again with the capacity of 25 after school and before school. So we'll get our kids back in there to give them the acclimation of getting back into shape for their sports."

Since Reed-Custer and Wilmington remain at Tier 3, nothing will begin.

Wilmington cheer coach Jeannine Bejlovec says her girls have been doing what they've been allowed to do and that hasn't been much.

"Since Nov. 20th, we have had a few virtual workouts prior to winter break," said Bejlovec. "And it's been one day per week with athletes coming in to tumble for 10 minutes each."

Bejlovec says that is a big change as the girls would normally be in practicing almost every day.

"We usually practice 5-6 days a week under normal circumstances so this has been tough," added Bejlovec. "Prior to that week, we had been practicing a couple days per week since summer and enjoying some fun games, activities and contests to keep up the team spirit and unity."

Bejlovec says the girls have been working hard and just want a chance to showcase their skills.

"The girls attended tumbling classes in the fall as well," commented Bejlovec. "They learned a ton of game material to be ready whenever those seasons take place."

As for Reed-Custer cheerleading coach Lexi Stewart, it's same story, different tune.

"We have been able to meet with an individual athlete for about 20-30 minutes at a time," said Stewart. "We've done some conditioning, stretching, jumps and tumbling. It's hard to do anything cheer related since we aren't able to practice as a team."

The frustration is setting in and she just wants Reed-Custer to get back to some type of normalcy. All this change is killing spirit.

"This season has been just so up and down with the rules and regulations," commented Stewart. "It has been so hard to keep up and some times to even stay motivated. I really feel for my athletes and all other athletes that just want to be able to compete and play the sports they love."

Both coaches will be tuned in on Wednesday, Jan. 27th for the board meeting when the Illinois High School Association will hopefully devise a schedule for the rest of the school year.

That will hopefully also clear a path for Wilmington and Reed-Custer

basketball teams, who are itching to get back on the court.

Right now, basketball teams within Tier 3 mitigations are not allowed to compete or practice.

Once the Wildcats and Comets move to Tier 2, they will be able to practice team training drills with no contact. Then, once they reach Tier 1 where Coal City is, they'll be allowed to practice and scrimmages. There will still be no contests or scrimmages against other schools.

Time is ticking for sports in Illinois. If the IHSA doesn't make a decision for a schedule next Wednesday, the chance for basketball might be unlikely.

"We realize there is a desire for finality on a sports schedule for 2020-21, however, we did not believe it would be prudent to lock ourselves into a schedule at a time when IHSA schools are unable to conduct any sports," commented executive director Craig Anderson. "...February seems like a realistic timeline to have sports resume statewide. We expect that the events of the next two weeks will go a long way toward informing our opinion on which scheduling option we decide to proceed with. We recognize that if no sports have resumed by February, season lengths could be impacted in certain sports, and that we may need to take a longer look at the likelihood of true seasons being conducted in high-risk sports this year."

A hashtag campaign on Twitter,

#HearOurVoiceIllinois' allows student-athletes the chance to make their voices heard by sending videos to the governor and other state officials, telling them what school their from, what sports they play and why sports are important to them.

A Reed-Custer High School mom Stacy Clement, who has three student-athletes, was encouraging all high school athletes to make videos. Reed-Custer sophomore Halie LaGrange and senior Maddie McPherson among other athletes, have been spreading the word in tweets on Twitter.

"I genuinely hope our governor realizes how much he has taken away from the students of Illinois," said McPherson in tweet. "The seniors have waited all these years to enjoy our last year of high school but we have to be more focused on keeping our masks above our nose rather than planning a bright future."

A Facebook group 'Illinois High School Sports Central' that was started by Kevin Dennis, will be holding a peaceful Let Us Play march in Springfield, IL on Saturday, Jan. 30 at 1:30 p.m.

Stacy tweeted about the rally this past Saturday inviting others: "Students, athletes, parents, fans & coaches, join us Jan. 30, 8 a.m. in Top Fuel parking lot at 275 S. Hickory St. to drive down to the rally in Springfield. Everyone is welcome #HearOurVoiceIllinois."

Wildcat dream team wrestlers would be tough to beat

BY SHAWN LONG
SPORTS WRITER

If a wrestling match of dream team opponents was held between Coal City, Wilmington and Reed-Custer, it would have to be held in a venue bigger than the Wilmington High School gym. Odds are fans from all three schools would result in an overflowing crowd.

But in this case, the stage for a dream team wrestling match is hypothetical as we pair many of the best wrestlers from all three schools on paper.

Wilmington wrestling coach Rob Murphy put together a lineup based on his strategy, featuring some of his top wrestlers in the history of the WHS program. The rest is based on the wrestler accomplishments.

The results are based on the actual achievements unless two wrestlers actually faced each other in the past.

Wilmington began the first of two dual team matches against Reed-Custer's dream team. This was a matchup that heavily favored the Wildcats even though the Comets would have a couple chances to win select weight classes.

Starting at 106, Murph put his trust in 1978 state champion Steve Marshall to take the mat against Reed-Custer's third place medalist and Coal City Middle School wrestling coach Brandon Petersen (34-8). Numbers suggest with his state championship, Marshall would beat Petersen. Murph agrees.

"He took first, second and second place in his three years wrestling in high school," said Murph. "He lost to one of the Reuttiger brothers--Mark Reuttiger. He's a really strong guy. He was tough as nails. If I had to choose, I'd say Steve would win against Petersen by decision."

At 113, Alex Jones (34-5) would square off against former teammate Trent Lyons (38-4). By the numbers, it's too close to call as they are both talented wrestlers with a lot of state success. Murph thinks it'd be a good match and Jones would pull it out.

"I think it'd be a good match," added Murph. "I think it'd be close. Alex Jones should have been a 2x state champ. The year he took second as a junior, the Class AA state champ dropped down and he was a 2x state champ at

the time so that's who Jones had to wrestle. Then, a kid from out of state, already had won two state titles in two other states so he came here and beat Jones in the finals and went to Iowa in his senior year, winning another state title there so Jones had some horrible luck."

At 120, a three-time state placer Jack Narine would go head-to-head with Reed-Custer's Steve Rosenberg, who was third at state in 2011 with a 35-7 record. Sinkular would win the match but Narine would keep it close.

"That'd be really close. I think it'd be a good match."

At 126, Murph sent four-time state placer and two-time state champion Johnny Van Duyne in to counter Reed-Custer's 2002 state qualifier Jacob Sinkular. Van Duyne was an amazing wrestler who only lost 10 matches at Wilmington. He'd beat Sinkular by his accomplishments and overall record.

Following Van Duyne's win, Murph would counter Reed-Custer's 1997 fourth place medalist Ron Housman (34-7) with 1990 state champion Stormy Tidmore at 132 pounds. Tidmore would beat Housman but with Housman being as tough as he was, it'd be neck-and-neck.

After Tidmore's clutch victory, 2007 state champion Vince Vercelli (45-2) would battle Don Hall (37-6) at 138. Vercelli would win but it'd be a close match as Hall won second place in 1996.

"That would be a great match for both of those two," added Murph.

At 145, Jake Murphy (40-6), who was a state champion, would take the mat against Donovan Marschner (37-3), a three-time state qualifier and 1993 runner-up. Murph would win this match but Marschner was really tough winning most of his matches by way of decision where he wore his opponents down.

At 152, Murph would use 2006 state champion Josh Peters (43-3) to counter Reed-Custer's Joey Spiker (37-3), who was a runner-up in 2000. Spiker was a tough wrestler but Peters was a three-time state qualifier and a two-time state placer so he'd win.

At 160, Rob Murphy Jr. (38-1) who won state in 2006, would battle Reed-Custer's first-ever state champion Jay Conley (37-3). While Conley was a state champion, Rob also



File Photo

WILMINGTON'S ALEX JONES would win one of two matches against Coal City and Reed-Custer's 113-pound wrestlers in dream team wrestling duals.

was. On top of that, he was the only Wildcat to ever capture nine state medals.

At 170, Wilmington's first state champion Chris Nugent (34-5) would take the mat against Reed-Custer's two-time state champion Billy Chancey, who compiled over 150 wins at Reed-Custer. Nugent was a tough wrestler but Chancey was a three-time placer so he gets the win in this match.

After Nugent, Steve Liaromatis (46-3), a third place medalist, would take the mat against Reed-Custer's Matt Kuchar, who qualified for state in 1997 with a 29-7 record. Liaromatis would beat Kuchar in a close match. Kuchar was a very tough wrestler, who battled a tough class of wrestlers.

At 195, Wilmington's 2013 third place medalist Dexter Fierro would square up with Reed-Custer's fourth place medalist Zach Boyer. This match would go right down to the wire. In the end, Fierro has the upper hand, having won his third place match.

Tony Vercelli, the undefeated state champion, would take the mat against Reed-Custer's Billy Waliczek. Tony Vercelli would handle Waliczek. Along with his state championship, Vercelli placed at state three times while Waliczek didn't even qualify.

In the heavyweight division, Wilmington's 2013 third place medalist Derrick Romano would take the mat against Reed-Custer's Matt Mathena (34-4), who placed

third in 1999. Mathena would win over Romano.

Reed-Custer's dream team would be easy compared to Coal City's dream team. Murph was not afraid about being underdogs in this hypothetical dream team match.

"Even without an all-star team, there was a four-year period when we lost only one dual to Class A and that was in the championship against Dakota the first year. We took second, first, first, first. After that loss in the championship match, the next three years not one Class A team beat us or didn't even get close."

In the first match, Wildcat Steve Marshall (38-3), who won state in 1978, would face Joey Rivera (43-4). In this match, they've both won a state title and both were three-time state placer so it would be right down to the wire.

After that, two-time runner-up Alex Jones (34-5) would battle Coal City's two-time state champion Todd Combes (38-0). Combes has the edge in this one.

At 120, Trent Lyons (38-4) who was a runner-up with Wilmington in 2012 would battle two-time state champion Cody Minnick. Minnick has had the better success at state and would win in a match against Lyons.

Next up was Wilmington's only four-time state placer and two-time state champion Johnny Van Duyne, who was 170-10 in high school against Corey Jurzak (44-1). Johnny would be the winner but Jurzak

was a three-time finalist so he'd make it close.

Wilmington's 2013 state champion Andy Rodawold (48-2), who was also a three-time state place winner, would battle four-time state placer and state champion Alex Friddle (53-0), who would win but not by a lot.

"That'd be a great match," added Murph. "Andy is as tough as can be and so is Friddle."

At 138, Murph's first state champion Brett Lockwood (40-1) took the mat against two-time state champion Mike Friddle (33-2-1), who would coax out a win over Lockwood.

At 145, 2008 state champion 1986 state champion Dave Gretz (36-1) would battle John Odeen (35-0). John Odeen would beat Gretz as he is a two-time state champ. Gretz would keep it close.

"Dave Gretz was probably one of the meanest wrestlers I've ever seen walk the face of the earth."

In the next match, Wilmington sent out 2007 state champion Josh Peters at 152 pounds to battle state champion Chase Odeen (39-1).

In the 160 pound matchup, the 2005 state champion Rob Murphy Jr. (38-1) has the edge over Drew Vickers (35-11) in a close match.

After that match was the battle of coach and assistant coach as Wilmington wrestling coach Rob Murphy Sr. (38-4) would go head-to-head with assistant wrestling coach Tom Fritz at 170 pounds. By the

numbers, Fritz (46-2) has this matchup but Murph noted he knows Fritz's weaknesses.

"Tom Fritz was the only Wilmington MVP of the state tournament. He's so flexible he's hard to wrestle but if I have the knowledge I have now, I know his weaknesses. He was a state champ. I was only third but I did win three national titles in college."

At 182 pounds, Coal City's Daniel Jezik (57-1) would get to go head-to-head with his former mentor Nick Dziuban. Murph strategically placed Dziuban in there to face Jezik because he knows everything about him.

Jezik says it'd be a quick and easy win against Dziuban, who placed third for Wilmington in 2006.

"I'm going Greco style with him and launching him into the stands," joked Jezik. "It'd be a first period pin."

When asked about their hypothetical match, Nick said Daniel would win.

"The only thing I was better at than Daniel was the work ethic," said Dziuban. "Everywhere else Daniel has got me."

At 195, Murph sent out Jeremy Bailey (42-3), the two-time placer, to battle 2016 state champion Riley Kauzlaric. Murph notes that would be a dangerous match.

"Those two both have got a chance of both getting kicked out of that match," joked Murph. "That should end up being a brawl. Those two would just go at it non stop. That'd be the match everyone would come to see."

At 220, Vercelli (35-0) would dismantle Gage Leake (41-8).

At 275, Jack Leffler (38-0) would battle Wilmington's Derrick Romano, who placed third in 2013. Leffler would win this match against Romano and Murph remembers just how good Leffler was.

"Leffler was good. He's really good. He wrestled around the same time as Bryan Flood did."

While it's fun to make decisions based on hypothetical matches, it'd be even more fun to see the real thing. As of now, high school wrestling has been moved to the summer season which starts April 19 for practices. What's unknown is if it will be considered a high risk sport and be delay or canceled due to the pandemic mitigation.

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