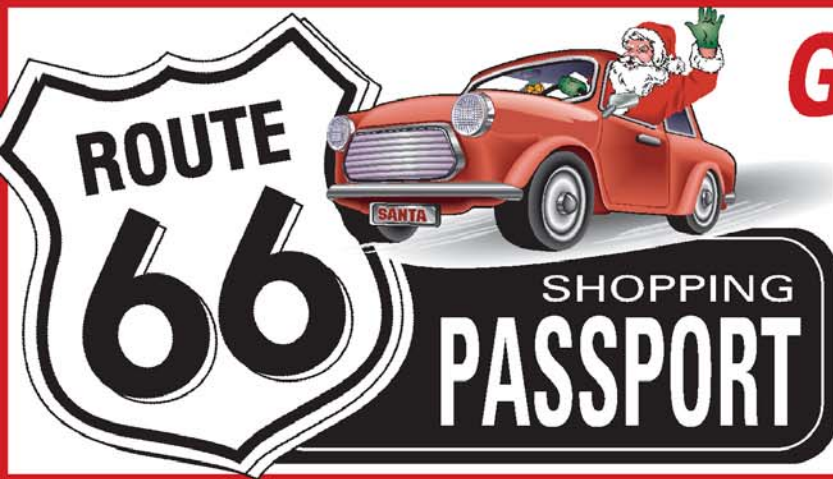




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School report card shows WHS is exemplary

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) released the 2023 Illinois Report Card this fall, with local schools showing strong progress three years after COVID-19 changed the face of education.

The annual report breaks down the academic performance of public schools in Illinois, both districtwide as well as for individual buildings.

In addition to student achievement, the report card also addresses student and teacher demographics, enrollment, college and career readiness, and district-level financial information.

The latest data shows that

Wilmington High School has earned the highest mark possible from the state as an exemplary school.

Per the report, each school in the district is assigned an annual summative designation based on the school's overall data and the data for each student group for all accountability indicators.

Illinois has five designations/rankings for schools:

- Exemplary — Overall performance in the top 10% of all schools with no underperforming student groups at or below the "all students" group of the lowest-performing 5% of schools and high schools with graduation rates higher than 67%.
- Targeted Support — One or more student groups performing at or below the "all students" group of the lowest-performing 5% of schools. Groups must have at least 20 students in at least five of eight indicators, one of which must be non-academic. A Targeted Support designation initiates targeted school improvement status and the school begins a four-year cycle of school improvement.
- Comprehensive Support — Overall performance in the bottom 5% of Title I-eligible schools

statewide. High schools with a graduation rate of 67% or below. A Comprehensive Support designation initiates comprehensive school improvement status and the school begins a four-year cycle of school improvement.

- Intensive Support — A school that has completed a full Comprehensive Support school improvement cycle, but whose performance remains in the lowest-performing 5% of Title I-eligible schools statewide or is a high school with a graduation rate of 67% or below at the end of the four-year improvement cycle. An Intensive Support designation initiates intensive school improvement status and the school begins a four-year cycle of school

improvement.

Bruning, Stevens Intermediate, and Wilmington Middle School each earned a designation of "commendable." Wilmington High School earned the highest designation of "exemplary."

Districtwide, 46% of students in grades 3-8 who took the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) exam met standards for English Language Arts, and 12% of those students exceeded the standards. In mathematics, 34% of those same students met standards while 3.6% exceeded the standards in math.

On the SAT, the state exam used

SEE REPORT CARD, PAGE 2



FOR SALE — Signs by Wirtz Realty have been posted to the side of the Launching Pad in Wilmington. The shuttered Route 66 attraction, along with the Gemini Giant, is currently listed for sale for \$1.4 million.

On the market Launching Pad, Gemini Giant up for sale

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

As a Route 66 attraction, some might say the Launching Pad and its green guardian the Gemini Giant are priceless.

But it turns out those local landmarks—which hold no official landmark status but are thought of as such by residents—do have a price tag.

A \$1.4 million price tag.

On Nov. 10, Launching Pad owner Holly Barker announced via X (formerly Twitter) that she was selling the restaurant.

"I am putting the Launching Pad up for sale by owner. All in, including Gemini Giant blah blah blah [sic] for \$1.4 million," Barker posted to her account, @holly-barker1372.

While Barker originally posted it was a by-owner transaction and she was seeking a cash sale, the property has since been listed with Wirtz Realty, with the listing officially going live on Nov. 28.

The listing for \$1.4 million includes the renovated restaurant, the Gemini Giant, a storage shed, transfer of the website and social media sites, fixtures, and equipment.

The listing also notes the restaurant has undergone approximately \$450,000 in updates.

The sales comes after a contract to sell the establishment to the Joliet Area Historical Museum fell through at the end of September, according to letters Barker posted to X. Per

SEE GIANT, PAGE 3

Wilmington 209-U plans for the future

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

Wilmington School District 209-U is planning for long term growth.

Larry Heidemann of StratPlan Consulting gave a brief presentation to the members of the board of education on Nov. 13, outlining the district's finances as it pertains to planning and financial projections for the future.

Heidemann has been working with the district for several years on long term planning. He told the board that he begins with several years of audited data plus budgets to develop factors, drivers and trends. There are

also assumptions made, including estimations on future equalized assessed value of the district's tax base and implications of future contract negotiations.

The, he said, the district can start to do some forecasting.

Heidemann said budget deficits and expected salary/benefit expense increases are areas that 209-U needs to look at while working on those plans for the future.

"There is a structural deficit built in to your operations," Heidemann said. "There's a \$6 million deficit

SEE FINANCE, PAGE 2

WHS seniors earn rank of State Scholars

BY LILY TURCANY
WHS STUDENT REPORTER

Every year thousands of Illinois high school Seniors compete in the State Scholar Program sponsored by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission. This year Wilmington High School had seven members of the class of 2024 named Illinois State Scholars.

Students are awarded based on ACT or SAT test scores and their sixth semester class size and unweighted class rank. Each awardee

receives a congratulatory letter, a Certificate of Achievement and statewide recognition in the news.

This is a very honorable award for both the students and Wilmington High School. To show the success of these exceptional students, WHS hangs photos of the awardees

SEE SCHOLARS, PAGE 2





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Report card

in the report card taken by high school juniors, 28.2% of students met standards in English with 4.5% exceeding those standards. In math, 24.5% met the standards on the SAT. “The reason [WHS Principal Scott Maupin] and those students were able to get over the hump this year is because their test scores saw an increase from the previous year, and that was able to put us in the exemplary range,” Superintendent Kevin Feeney said. “We’ve been focusing on that each year, how do we improve those test scores at the high school which is the SAT, so it’s a college entrance exam and every student has to take it whether they are going to college or not. It doesn’t matter what classes they’re taking, they have to take the SAT. It’s a college entrance exam that is extremely challenging.” Feeney said the district’s curriculum reflects what students can expect to see on the SAT, but the test itself is only a small part of a well rounded education.

“Our main goal here in our district is to make sure we prepare students for what’s after high school,” Feeney said. “Whether that be college, career, military, that’s always been our main goal... Overall, almost in every category we outperformed the state. I think our staff and our administration does an extremely good job preparing our students in all facets, and they need to be recognized for that.”

The report also shows that at WHS, 93% for 9th graders on track to graduate. That number represents students who have earned at least five full year course credits with no more than one failing grade in one semester of ELA, math, or social science. According to the report, students who finish their freshman year on track to graduate are four times as likely to graduate than their peers who are not on track.

Scholars

on display near the high school entrance.

Wilmington High School’s 2024-2025 Illinois State Scholars are:

Claire Lenart is the daughter of Alicia and Jeffrey Lenart. Throughout her four years she has been involved in Band and Choir as well as Math Team.

Claire has also been a stage manager for two years, and a member of Varsity Golf for three years. In 2022 Claire was awarded as a Collegeboard commended student.

Following graduation Claire will attend Saint Mary’s in Notre Dame, Indiana and will major in pre-med.

Emma Grace Strong is the daughter of Elizabeth and Chris Strong. Throughout her four years she has been in Student Council as both a Sophomore class rep and Secretary, as well as Volleyball.

Service by publication issued to David Martinez.

PUBLIC NOTICE
STATE OF ILLINOIS
COUNTY OF WILL, SS
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE
TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
Service by Publication
Barbara Jimenez, petitioner vs David Martinez, Defendant. Case No. 2008F149.
Petitioner has been unable to serve defendant with her petition. Petitioner has filed a Motion requesting permission to serve the Plaintiff by means of publication. The Court hereby grants Petitioner’s request to serve the Defendant by means of publication. (Will County Case# 2008F149). This matter is continued to 12/21/2023 at 9:00 a.m. before Judge Nash in the Will County Courthouse, 100 West Jefferson Street, Joliet, IL 60432, to check on the status of service by publication. NOW THEREFORE, you, DAVID MARTINEZ, Defendant, must file your response to the Petition for retroactive child support, or otherwise make your appearance therein, in the office of the Circuit Court of Will County, at the Will County Courthouse, 100 West Jefferson Street, Joliet, IL 60432, on or before the 21st day of December, 2023, a default may be entered against you at any time after that date.

Attorney for Petitioner
Robert O’Deirk, #6284353
O’Deirk, Allied & Associates, LLC
58 E. Clinton Street, 5th Floor,
Joliet, IL 60432
Phone: 815-740-1700
Fax: 815-723-5686
Email: info@odeirkrlaw.com
Published in the Free Press Advocate
Dec. 6, 13 and 2023

She has been in National

Attorney Berardi files Lobono estate notice

PUBLIC NOTICE
LEGAL 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 VERA M. LOBONO, Deceased. Case No.: 2023PR653
CLAIM NOTICE
Notice is given of the death of VERA M. LOBONO of Joliet, Illinois. Letters of Office were issued as Independent Executor on Nov. 28, 2023 to Dominic C. Lobono whose address is 207 S. Eastern Ave., Joliet, Illinois, 60433; whose attorney is Berardi and Associates, LLC, 14919 Founders Crossing, Homer Glen, IL 60491.
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 100 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 June 6, 2024, 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.
If you need additional help or have trouble e-filing, visit <http://www.illinoiscourts.gov/FAQ/gethelp.asp>, or talk with your local circuit clerk’s office.
Dominic C. Lobono, Independent Executor for the estate of Vera M. Lobono.
Mark M. Berardi, Attorney at Law,
Attorney No.: 6305463, 14919 Founders Crossing, Homer Glen, IL 60491. (708) 942-8030 Email: mark@berardilaw.com
Published in the Free Press Advocate on Wednesday, Dec. 6, 13 and 20, 2023.



CLAIRE LENART

Honors Society and Interact for two years. She has also been on the Math Team. Following graduation Emma Grace will attend Illinois College to continue her Volleyball career, and major in pre-med or Biology.

Emma Grace says, “Becoming a state scholar has been amazing because all of my hard work these past four years has paid off.”

Giana Stahulak is the daughter of Sarah and Brandon Stahulak. She has been in National Honors Society for two years, and this year she holds the position of President.

She has been in Tri-M Honors Society for three years, and President for two years. She has been in band all four years, and has been section leader for two years.

She has been in Scholastic Bowl for three years, Spanish Club for two years, and Varsity Softball for four years. After graduation Giana plans to attend Southern Illinois University to

Kauppila petitions for name change

PUBLIC NOTICE
STATE OF ILLINOIS
COUNTY OF WILL, SS
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE
TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
In the matter of the petition to change the name of ABIGAIL ELIZABETH KAUPPILA TO ALEX KAUPPILA, Case No. 2023 MR 340
NOTICE
Notice is hereby given that the undersigned on behalf of herself, Abigail Elizabeth Kauppila adult, shall appear in the Will County Court Annex Building, 100 West Jefferson Street, Joliet, IL 60432 courtroom 905 at 9:00 a.m. on the 16th day of January, 2024 before the judge assigned to hear said matter, and then there present a petition requesting the name of Abigail Elizabeth Kauppila be changed to Alex Kauppila.
/s/ Abigail Elizabeth Kauppila
Published in the Free Press Advocate on Wednesday, Nov. 22, 29 and Dec. 6, 2023.

Attorney Meents files Treadman estate claim

PUBLIC NOTICE
STATE OF ILLINOIS
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE
TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF WILLIAM JOSEPH TREADMAN, JR., Deceased; No. 2023PR673
CLAIM NOTICE
Notice is given of the death of William Joseph Treadman, Jr., Letters of Office as Independent Administrator were issued on November 29, 2023, to June A. Miller, whose address is 8580 Copperidge Drive, Winston, Georgia 30187; whose attorney is Meents Law, P.C., 25158 W. Eames Street, Unit A, Channahon, Illinois 60410. 60410. Claims against the estate may be filed in the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court at the Will County Courthouse, 100 W. Jefferson Street, Joliet, Illinois 60432, or with the representative, or both, on or before June 7, 2024, or if mailing or delivery of a notice from the representative is required by Section 18-3 of the Probate Act of 1975, 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 by the claimant to the representative and to the attorney within ten (10) days after it has been filed.
E-filing is now mandatory with limited exemptions. To e-file, you must first create an account with an e-filing service provider. Visit <http://efile.illinoiscourts.gov/> service-providers.htm to learn more and to select a service provider. If you need additional help or have trouble e-filing, visit <http://www.illinoiscourts.gov/faq/gethelp.asp> or talk with your local circuit clerk’s office. If you cannot e-file, you may be able to get an exemption that allows you to file in person or by mail. Ask your circuit clerk for more information or visit www.illinoislegalaid.org.
June A. Miller
Independent Administrator of the Estate of William Joseph Treadman, Jr., Deceased
Frank J. Meents
Meents Law, P.C.
25158 West Eames Street, Unit A
Channahon, Illinois 60410
Telephone: (815)534-9515
Facsimile: (815)534-9516
Attorney Code: 06298859
E-mail: frank@fishermeents.com
Published in the Free Press Advocate on Wednesday, Dec. 6, 13 and 20, 2023.



EMMA GRACE STRONG

study Biological Sciences.

Lily Turcany is the daughter of Heather Turcany. Throughout her high school career she has been involved in Varsity Soccer for three years, she was awarded with scholastic achievement and all academic.

She has also been a member of Interact for two years, and this year she holds the position of treasurer. She has also been in Spanish Club, Math Team, POPs, Junior Marshals, and National Honors Society.

In 2023 Lily was awarded with the Small Town and Rural Recognition by Collegeboard. Following graduation she will attend the University of Iowa and major in Psychology.

McKenzie Shields is the daughter of Jodi and Cameron Shields. She has done both stats and been a member of the wrestling team for three years.

She has also been involved in Speech team, Art Club, and Spanish Club for two years. Beginning this year she has also been in National Honors Society and Yearbook Committee.

Following graduation McKenzie will be attending Western Michigan University and majoring in Exercise Science.

Paige Eighner is the daughter of Chad and Stacy Eighner. Throughout her four

years she has been involved in Volleyball, and has been awarded All Academic.

Paige has also been in National Honors Society for two years, and this year holds the position of treasurer. She has also been on the Math Team and has been a Junior Marshall.

Following graduation Paige plans to attend Trinity Christian College and major in Nursing.

Reid Juster is the son of Kristin Ruda. He has been involved in Football, Basketball, and Baseball all four years of high school.

He has been recognized as All Area and All Conference for Basketball. He has also been involved in National Honors Society, LEAD, POPs, and Math Team.

After graduation Reid plans to attend Carthage College and double major in Athletic Training and Sports Management.

Coffee & Newspapers
One wakes you up
One opens your eyes

Alias summons filed against Ford

PUBLIC NOTICE
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE
TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
JUDY KIM,
Petitioner,
vs MARY JENNIFER FORD,
Respondent,
Case Number: 2023OP002245
ALIAS SUMMONS - Petition for No Contact Order
The requisite affidavit of publication having been filed: NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN TO YOU MARY JENNIFER FORD, Respondent, that a petition has been filed in the Twelfth Judicial Circuit Court of Will County of Will County, Illinois, by the Petitioner, against you for an ORDER OF NO CONTACT and for other relief; that summons was duly issued against you as provided by law, and such petition is still pending.
NOW THEREFORE, unless you MARY JENNIFER FORD, the Respondent, file your answer to the Petition or otherwise make your appearance therein, in the office of the Clerk of the Twelfth Judicial Circuit Court, at the Will County Courthouse, 100 W. Jefferson St., Joliet, IL 60432 on or before December 23, 2023, a default may be entered against you at any time after that date and an ORDER OF NO CONTACT be entered against you in accordance with the prayer of said petition.
Dated: 11/28/2023
Andrea Lynn Chasteen/RMBZ
Clerk of the Circuit Court
Petitioner’s Attorney
Antoniolli Maria G
ARD# 6308495
Antoniolli, Cerny & Winthers, P.C.
1N141 County Farm Road - Suite #230
Winfield, IL 60190
Published in the Free Press Advocate on Wednesday, Dec. 6, 13 and 20, 2023.



GIANA STAHULAK



McKENZIE SHIELDS



PAIGE EIGNER

years she has been involved in Volleyball, and has been awarded All Academic.

Paige has also been in National Honors Society for two years, and this year holds the position of treasurer. She has also been on the Math Team and has been a Junior Marshall.

Following graduation Paige plans to attend Trinity Christian College and major in Nursing.

Reid Juster is the son of Kristin Ruda. He has been involved in Football, Basketball, and Baseball all four years of high school.

He has been recognized as All Area and All Conference for Basketball. He has also been involved in National Honors Society, LEAD, POPs, and Math Team.

After graduation Reid plans to attend Carthage College and double major in Athletic Training and Sports Management.

PEO to host cookie exchange

Wilmington PEO Chapter GK will meet Monday, Dec. 11 in the home of Kathryn Henderson for their Holiday Cookie Exchange. Social hour at 7 p.m. and business meeting will start at 7:30 p.m.

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Finance

built in this year... and when you first look at it, there are several million that are easily explainable. It’s money set aside for life safety and other projects. So, a good bit of it is understandable and planned for. The problem is, there is still \$2- to \$3 million dollars projected budget deficit.”

Heidemann said because the district nearly always spends less than its budget, now might be the time to adjust that ongoing structural deficit to better reflect the district’s finances. Heidemann also noted that the district also budgets conservatively, which is what causes the deficit to seem so high, but the district can make adjustments to bring the deficit projections and actual numbers back in line.

Heidemann also noted that the deficit on paper could raise eyebrows at the state level.

“Using your history, let’s downgrade the budget, take a million dollars off of [the deficit], and we then generated what that case would look like. We’d call that the target case, and it’s where you’re going to be really and what you want to shoot for,” Heidemann said.

Ultimately, Heidemann said the district should look to tighten up its deficit projections, but should also be sure to add contingencies to the mix in order to eliminate the need to estimate financial projections.

Heidemann also recommended the board keep those future salary expenses in mind as they plan for the future.

The district’s current planning assumes salary and benefit increases will match the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

The CPI measures the average change in prices paid by consumers over a period of time for a basket of goods and services. The index is calculated and published monthly by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and is among the most common measures of inflation.

But, he added, should salary and benefits reach 1% above CPI for multiple years, that could make a bigger dent than forecasted in the budgets.

Heidemann recommended budgeting to not necessarily to reflect 1% above CPI, but rather to keep that potential in mind when crafting those annual budgets.

“The budget process has some lines in there to allow for contingencies,” Heidemann said. “That is what I’ve seen some districts do, project close to what you think the budget will be and then throw in contingencies. That allows you to forecast based on what you think real expenses will be, so you don’t have to estimate. I’m not faulting conservative budgeting, but when you put it into perspective, a \$2- to \$3 million deficit, you can be in the dark. You don’t necessarily know where you’re going to go. So, that’s a recommendation.”

Lunch at 209-U schools

Mon., Dec. 11: lasagna bake, green beans, garlic toast, peach cup and milk
Tue., Dec. 12: potato soup, turkey sandwich, cookie, blue raspberry applesauce and milk
Wed., Dec. 13: pepperoni pizz, fresh veggies/ranch, mixed fruit and milk
Thu., Dec. 14: taco wedges, spanish rice, salsa, peaches in strawberry gel and choice of milk
Fri., Dec. 15: french toast sticks, sausage patty, hash brown patty, orange juice and milk

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Eric D. Fisher, publisher
Marney Simon, editor

December 1923, good food, good times

If you are expecting hard news from one hundred years ago, you will be disappointed. December 1923 was all about shopping and making merry. Take one giant step backward in time to see what I mean.

During the first week we have the Symerton Column which tells us of the social life. "The dance given in the town hall Friday evening by the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Irish) was well attended. Music was furnished by Formento's orchestra of Joliet."

And "In spite of the continuous rain on last Wednesday, the chicken pie supper and bazaar given in the town hall by the Ladies' Aid had a good attendance. Fancy goods and candy sales and a fish pond for the kiddies were held in daintily decorated booths."

And, in the spirit of neighbor taking care of neighbor in Symerton, "Mr. and Mrs. Edward Doyle were surprised Tuesday at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Doyle, Sr., when a group of relatives and friends gave them a miscellaneous shower. Their household goods were recently destroyed by fire."

The December 7 issue of the Advocate was filled to the brim with Christmas ads. One of them was for the newest Ford on the market, sold by W. L. Meyers. A clever play on words named the car Fordor, because it was the first sedan with 4 doors.

The Stewart House sent its greetings, A. Opaldus, men's clothing store wished everyone a Merry Christmas, and Hiles vied with Gunning for space advertising their confectionary stores and mouthwatering candy items.



TIME WAS....
Sandy Vasko

The second week the Advocate startled the community by printing an entire page of cartoons and another entire page of Christmas ads. The news was limited to national news.

The third week cooking and baking took over the newspaper.

An easy dessert recipe was for apple and rice pudding. "Cook 1 cup of rice, drain well. Add three tablespoonfuls of corn syrup or honey, three tablespoons of sugar. Grease a pudding dish and put in a layer of sweetened rice, spread with a layer of sliced apples, alternating until the dish is full.

Bake covered until the apples are soft. Remove the cover and brown. Serve with or without sauce. A hard sauce prepared by creaming butter and sugar, adding nutmeg for flavoring, is especially good with this dish. A few raisins and less sugar may be used with the apples, adding flavor and variety"

Peach Betty is also a simple and easy dessert. "Tae a can of peaches, put into a greased baking dish in layers with buttered bread slices or buttered fresh bread crumbs, sprinkle with sugar add more bits of butter and pour over the juice from the can with a tablespoon of lemon juice added. Bake thirty minutes in a moderate oven and serve with whipped cream."

There was no paper printed the last week of December, but if the first three weeks are any indication, Wilmington was having a good old fashioned Christmas, with good times ahead and no more war.



CHRISTMAS ADS from the Advocate back in December of 1923 (above) and a cartoon from teh Advocate in 1923 (left).

Commentary

Those who can, should give

BY CYNTHIA RAGAIN

For many years, I have worked with Christian Help Association (CHA) to provide a wonderful holiday season to the families of Wilmington who are struggling.

The smiles, the hugs, the "thank yous" is all a volunteer needs to know that they have made a difference in someone's life. The thought that families will have a blessed Christmas because we gave a few hours of our time and made a donation to organize, pack and distribute food, clothes and gifts will warm your heart on the coldest day.

There are many ways you can help make a difference and warm your heart.

Monetary donations are used to cover additional food, toiletries, packing and other expenses. Donations can be dropped off at local churches, Kuzma Care Cottage or mailed to 635 S. Main Street

Wilmington.

Another easy way to help CHA is by supporting the Chamber of Commerce Christmas Elves. Local businesses throughout town have donation boxes near the register to collect money for CHA. As you check out, look for a bright painted box with a photo of a cute elf or two.

Deposit your change, or a few dollars or even a check. All money is used for CHA expenses to provide a beautiful Christmas to 300+ families in Wilmington.

Please join us on Friday Dec. 15 at 5:30 pm at St. Rose School with giving little more than one hour of your time. By helping pack groceries, you can give back to others and will leave with a wonderful feeling of helping. We have jobs for everyone!

If you are not able to stand or walk for long periods of time, I have a job for you. If you are young and have a strong

back, I have a job for you. If need some community service time for a school or civic organization, I have a job for you! We welcome and appreciate new faces each year!

Donations of unwrapped toys and non-perishable food (can goods, pasta, cereal, cake mix, and one-package meals) may be left with the local churches or at Kuzma Cottage. It takes a lot of items to fill the bags for these families.

With the cold winds starting and snowflakes in the air, CHA is also in need of winter clothing (coats, gloves, hats, etc) for Our Caring Closet. Collections for clothing are set up at churches, the library and few other locations around town. Donations can also be dropped off at 205 N. 1st Street.

Please bring any new or slightly used winter wear for distribution. Others items they need are boots, snow pants, mittens, and scarves. With 305 kids and nearly 700 adults

receiving assistance, it takes a lot of clothes to keep them warm and dry.

Give one hour. Give a donation. Give the warmth of hat & gloves. Give a smile to someone struggling. You only have to touch one life to make a difference. The warmth in your heart from putting others ahead of yourself will be a positive in your life, in your community and in your spirit.

"No one has ever become poor by giving"-- Anne Frank

Cynthia Ragain is president of Double "G" Excavating Inc. who coordinates the annual Chamber of Commerce Elves fundraiser and a coordinator for the Christian Help Association.

Giant

those letters, while a contract was entered into, when that contract lapsed, Barker did not grant any extensions, and the Museum board voted not to make any additional offers.

According to those documents posted by Barker, the initial contract was signed between her and the Museum in March 2023, with a closing date in June that never came to fruition.

An addendum to those documents dated in late July shows a purchase price of \$620,000, including \$420,000 for real estate, \$50,000 for equipment and inventory, and \$150,000 for "monument and intellectual property." That addendum extended the financing deadline to Sept. 29, and after that time Barker opted not to extend the contracts.

Whether the Museum will pursue purchase of the site once again is unknown. The Museum had secured a \$1 million grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) "for costs, including any that are prior incurred, associated with operating expenses and the acquisition of the Launching Pad Restaurant and Gemini Giant landmark statue, located at 808-810 East Baltimore Street in Wilmington, IL."

However, as of press time on Dec. 5, Museum Executive Director Greg Peerbolte had not returned a call from the Free Press Advocate regarding whether the Museum would once again pursue the purchase.

Barker purchased the restaurant along with her former business partner Tully Garrett in 2019, five years after the 60-year old site had been closed down and left in disarray.

The restaurant reopened in 2021, but in the two years since has been fodder for social media disdain, predominantly surrounding the restaurant's hours, business practices, and messages scrawled in white paint along the fence and in the windows of the residence next door, where Barker resides.

Barker's business license was not renewed last year.

Garrett said the business relationship between him and Barker was suspended in June of 2022, and said Barker was the sole proprietor at that time.

The Free Press reached out to Barker via her social media channels for a comment. As of press time, Barker had not replied to those inquiries.

The Launching Pad is owned by Gemini Giant LLC, of which Barker is the manager. That LLC is list as "not in good standing" by the Illinois Secretary of State's office.

The property's delinquent property taxes were sold to Sabrina Investments LLC, of Highland Park. Those taxes were redeemed by Garrett in November for \$12,718.

PERSONAL INJURY

Block, Klukas & Manzella & Shell, P.C.

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WORKERS COMPENSATION

Light Up Your House contest returns to Custer

The 15th annual Lighting Up Your House For the Holidays Contest. Enter your house or a neighbor's.

Entry forms are available at Santa's mailbox at the Custer Park Fire Department, or use the one below, and return it to the mailbox by Thursday, Dec. 14. Judging will be done that weekend. Prizes will be awarded Dec. 19 at 6:30 p.m. during the Custer Town Board meeting.

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

Lighting Up Your House for the Holidays Contest

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Breakfast at school

Mon., Dec. 11: cinnamon pop tart, honey grahams, fruit punch and choice of milk

Tues., Dec. 12: mini cinni, apple juice and choice of milk

Wed., Dec. 13: Apple Jacks, tiger bites, fruit juice and choice of milk

Thurs., Dec. 14: blueberry waffles, orange juice and choice of milk

Fri., Dec. 15: Trix Cereal, graham crackers, fruit punch and choice of milk

Daily milk choices are fat free chocolate or 1% white milk.

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Influenza
Shingles
Pneumonia
Covid & RSV
Vaccines or Boosters
between Sept. 1, 2023 and Dec. 31, 2023.

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lish these remarks the newspaper makes every effort to forward unpublished comments to the parties to whom they are directed.

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It's time to give

BRAIDWOOD—Just a shoutout to everyone to let people know there's a donation drive being sponsored by United Way and Top Fuel Saloon with all proceeds to benefit the Grundy County Homeless. They are asking for mittens, gloves, hats and scarves only. That would be lovely so let's get together everyone and help out. Thank you and God bless. USA Strong.

A Christmas message

COAL CITY—Taking this time to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a New Year filled with joy and happiness. May we bond together in love and caring and keep the stars adjoined in the glow of a peaceful outcome for the problems faced in this world. The battle of life is difficult and peace hard to find, but each of us has the ability to take that moment to feel the joy of peace and love, if only in our hearts. Who knows one day we may all join together with the wisdom, strength and grace to be a part of a lasting and eternal peace. I know that looking at the world as it is now it is hard to imagine. Keep the heart of love always present and find the joy that is there within you. Perhaps one day the hate and violence will be a thing of the past. We must look forward to a future filled with beauty and love. If we do not do this we become the embittered remnants of all those who have been the catalysts for all things evil in this world. Love is the promise, God is the gift, and we must be the answer. God Bless You All, Gary Carter.

Eat what they kill

SHADOW LAKES— Hunting and killing animals? Answer to that question. Since man walked this earth, I am sure they hunted for survival. They were of an omnivorous nature. As we move forward to the 21st century, Homo Sapiens, are still in the category as omnivorous. I do not think we are to the point of eating bugs and grass. As the article goes, hunters kill because they love to kill. You can weave this presumption into anyway you would like. Of all the hunters I personally spoke to never, ever has one said to me that he liked to kill. They all stated, whatever they hunt, they eat. Hunting is something we probably inherited from the first men that walked on this earth. Obediently yours, Margot Lane.

Charlatans among us

WILMINGTON—For those of us who have read the classic novel, Elmer Gantry, an alarm bell should ring out loud and clear about the

personality of Republican Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House. Despite playing the card of strict spiritual piety, Johnson conveniently ignores Bible verses that he would prefer not to follow. Scripture describes the evils of money but Johnson eats like a pig at the trough as he rakes in astronomical campaign cash from the fossil fuel industry while the earth, of which we are God's stewards, burns. Johnson violates the command to love our neighbors as ourselves but he includes only neighbors that he personally prefers. Yes, Johnson is not so much a man of God as a politician who will turn his back on you, yours and our entire country. Irene

Have no idea

BRAIDWOOD—After attending the Braidwood comprehensive plan open house it was quickly clear that many residents who attended didn't have a clue what a comprehensive plan is for or how it benefits our community. The majority of the people were just 100% bent on complaining about the Tryner Farm issue. That was neither the time nor the place for it, but people were so focused on that issue that they failed to comprehend just what the goal of a comprehensive plan is. They didn't care about the benefits of having a comprehensive plan, they just cared about stopping whatever it is because of the word "Chicago" being in the name of the agency, Chicago Metropolitan Alliance for Planning, who is helping to create the plan and which doesn't have anything to do with the city of Chicago. So many people are against it just because they fail to understand what it is. It's sad, it really is because they have no idea just how much of a benefit having a comprehensive plan in place is for a community. For some reason, a lot of people were also upset because they thought that they were going to be sitting down for some sort of a meeting or presentation. It was advertised as an "open house," not a meeting, not a presentation. So wherever people got the notion from that the event was going to be in that sort of format, it was completely incorrect.

Brown cows

SHADOW LAKES—Interesting fact. Over 17 million Americans think chocolate milk comes from brown cows and not surprisingly most think Biden is doing a good job and will vote for him again. Eddie

Your name missing

WILMINGTON—To the submitter of



"Freedom of Speech" in last week's Sound-Off page. I find your sound-off to be somewhat hypocritical. You compliment both Mr. Hill and Ms. Michaels for signing their names to their sound-offs and you throw a gentle jab at those who do not sign off. Yet you fail to write your name at the end of your post. Benny Lane

On their own

WILMINGTON—I don't see the need to fund Israel. They seem to be God's chosen people so let God sort it out. Happy Hanukkah

Glad I'm atheist

WILMINGTON—When I see these white evangelical Christians support Trump it makes me proud to be an atheist.

Dragging it out

WILMINGTON—Hypocrisy was on full display this week. Since Joe Biden was elected the Right has been after Hunter so now when he offers to come and speak to Comer's committee as long as it is public Comer says no. What about the transparency we were promised? The truth is they don't want answers because they want to keep this so-called scandal going longer with baseless accusations and

innuendo. Penny Lane

All created equal

DIAMOND—When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume the amount of powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's god entitle them. A decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which Intel's them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self evident and that all men are created equal that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights governments are instituted among men driving their just powers from the consent of the governed that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ins it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it and to institute new government. Laying it's foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness.

Pass It On... From homeless to Johns Hopkins

Chris Smith looked like any other young boy in his class: bushy hair, a wide smile and enough freckles to charm a grandmother out of a whole jar of cookies. He played sports, working his way onto the football and wrestling teams. By all appearances, life for Chris was the same as it was for a hundred other boys in the small town where he grew up. Except for the constant evictions, living like a squatter without electricity and eventually being homeless.

Chris' father was reckless with finances and dishonest in business. His mother coped the best she could until Chris' little brother drowned, and his father went to jail. Then it all fell apart.

"My mom shut down emotionally. Everything got worse," Chris remembers. And then she was gone, moved on without telling Chris. He did the best he could, sleeping on his newly married sister's couch. "They didn't have much money, and I know it was a burden to take me in at 17 years old. I was just hoping to graduate from high school and make it on my own."

But Chris' history teacher had other ideas. When Chris began to falter on assignments, she cornered him. "You're the smartest kid in the class," she told him. "If you don't graduate, you're going to regret it."

A good mentor makes all the difference, and sometimes you need more than one to help you along. Chris' wrestling coach taught him how to work hard to value teamwork over individual achievement.

"School was my safe place," Chris says. He spent a lot of time in the library and the gym, ingesting the lessons of underdogs who overcame incredible odds to make it. School also offered heat and food. It became the closest thing to home he could find,

compared to his father's old Chevy truck that became his bed and his study space. He remembers his hair freezing onto the window in the winter.

When graduation came, Chris earned a full scholarship to college, but the load was heavy, and his grades slipped just enough to lose his funding. Still, Chris refused to give up. He found grants and loans, transferred to a smaller college and graduated in the top 10 of his class. And then on to bigger dreams.

Chris was accepted to medical school, got married and threw himself into the grind. That's when another challenge hit. A family member lost custody of her child, so Chris and his new wife adopted the baby girl and tried to balance life together.

When it came time to apply for medical residencies, Chris set his sights high. He applied to residencies around the country and included the No. 1 program in the nation: Johns Hopkins.

"I didn't really think I had a chance. But I had learned to give everything your best shot."

And then the letter came. Chris was in.

They say dreams are made of hard work. Chris had to work harder than most. And now, as a practicing radiologist, he takes time to speak to students about what it takes to make it.

"You can do it," he says, echoing the words of his history teacher. "You are the smartest kids in the world." Determination...Pass It On.com

By The Foundation for a Better Life which promotes positive values to live by and pass along to others.

Gov. Pritzker announces additional \$4 million to help feed asylum seekers

Building on the state's plan to improve the asylum seeker response, Governor JB Pritzker, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), and the Greater Chicago Food Depository announced an additional \$4 million investment to provide meals to asylum seekers through the end of the calendar year.

The state's share will be \$2 million which will be matched by philanthropy through the Food Depository.

At the request of the City of Chicago in June 2023, the State has provided \$10.5 million in funding to the Greater Chicago Food Depository, a food bank with a network of community-based providers, to deliver meals to asylum

seekers while the City worked to procure additional vendors.

Due to delays in the procurement process, the State and Food Depository will now contribute an additional \$2 million each, to ensure asylum seekers are fed through the month of December.

In January, the City of Chicago will assume this responsibility as Illinois ramps up its shelter, resettlement, and temporary protected status and employee authorization document efforts.

"In Illinois - we welcome asylum seeking families with dignity and that means ensuring they don't go hungry," said Governor JB Pritzker. "The state is continuing to make strategic investments in the absence of the resources and

coordination we continue to advocate for from Congress and the federal government."

This \$2 million from the state builds on Governor Pritzker's recently announced \$160 million investment, via IDHS, to improve the asylum-seeker path to self-sufficiency, as well as the \$478 million in state funding that has been allocated to the asylum seeker response over Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024.

Before this latest investment, the state provided \$10.5 million in funding for food for new arrivals, bringing the total now to \$12.5 million. The state began partnering with the Greater Chicago Food Depository for this purpose in June 2023.

ICC disallows Nicor Gas' rate increase

The Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) has disallowed \$96.99 million to Nicor Gas' rate request for its natural gas delivery services in Illinois.

The decision is about 30.3 percent lower than Nicor's initial request for a \$320 million increase and approves a 9.51 percent return on equity (ROE), a reduction from Nicor Gas' current 9.73 percent ROE and the company's requested 10.35 percent ROE.

The ICC issued its decision after scrutinizing Nicor's rate case filings and additional materials submitted by the utility, Commission staff, and various interveners over an 11-month legal proceeding.

The process aims to ensure the utility receives the necessary funds to provide safe and reliable service to customers and to maintain and replace aging infrastructure at a reasonable cost to ratepayers. In accordance with the Illinois Public Utilities Act, these costs are only recoverable if a utility demonstrates they are reasonable and prudent.

The decision initiates a two-step future of gas proceeding that includes a detailed action plan for the utilities' future infrastructure investments to evaluate the impacts of Illinois' decarbonization and electrification goals on the natural gas system.

"As the State embarks on a journey toward a 100 percent clean energy economy, the gas system's operations will not continue to exist in its current

form. Identifying how our gas and electric systems can adapt to meet these goals, and what specific actions should be taken to achieve them, will be an important task for the Commission moving forward," said ICC Chairman Doug Scott.

The decision also establishes a new low-income discount rate for eligible customers whose incomes are up to 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The rate will offer a five-75 percent monthly total bill credit for qualifying customers beginning October 1, 2024.

In December of last year, the ICC found the implementation of low-income discount rates to be appropriate for Illinois' electric and natural gas residential customers.

Customers already enrolled in the state's Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) will automatically qualify for

the newly-established low-income discount rate. Customers not currently eligible for LIHEAP, but whose income falls within 200-300 percent of FPL still qualify for a discount by self-reporting their income eligibility to their utility.

The impact of the rate case decision on individual customers will vary based on customers' service class and energy usage. The ICC plans to issue an estimated bill impact for the average residential customer once Nicor submits its updated compliance filing with the Commission.

Customers struggling to pay their utility bills are encouraged to apply for LIHEAP, Utility Bill Assistance (illinois.gov) and can access Nicor's Energy Assistance Programs at www.nicorgas.com/residential/billingandpaymentoptions/energy-assistance-programs.html here.

Mobile food pantry in South Wilmington

On Monday, Dec. 11 at 4 p.m., Catholic Charities' Mobile Food Pantry will be distributing food at St. Lawrence Church, 135 Rice Road in South Wilmington, in the church parking lot (rain or shine).

Participants are asked to stay in their car. Mobile Food

Pantries use a "drive thru" method to distribute pre-packed groceries. Please clear space in your trunk or backseat so volunteers can load boxes of food directly into your vehicle.

It is open to anyone, no identification is required.

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Belt-tightening needed for next year's deficit

The Governor's Office of Management and Budget released a revised state revenue and spending forecast last month for the current fiscal year and it's pretty good. Its projections for next fiscal year, however, was not nearly as strong.

Projected Fiscal Year 2024 revenues have been revised upward by \$1.4 billion, according to GOMB. However, "most of this fiscal year 2024 revenue forecast revision is assumed to be one-time in nature," the budget office warned.

Spending has also been revised upward by \$969 million, leaving a \$422 million net surplus.

According to the governor's office, that revised spending estimate includes the \$160 million the governor is spending on migrants. "With the \$160 million we're spending, we still have a \$422 million surplus," said Pritzker spokesperson Jordan Abudayeh.

Unlike most of the revenue, many of the cost increases don't appear to be one-time. And, of course, it's unknown how long the migrant crisis will last, but it could very well wind up being a semi-permanent budgetary



Rich Miller

projected deficit next fiscal year of \$891 million. The deficit is expected to rise to \$1.4 billion in FY26 and \$1.66 billion in FY27.

Pension expenditures, including for the Chicago Teachers' Pension Fund, are projected to be \$10.14 billion this fiscal year, or 19.7 percent of projected General Funds expenditures including the supplemental appropriations costs, which is a little below where they've been for the past few years. Pension payments will rise to \$10.5 billion in FY25, or 20 percent of all projected state General Funds spending. And they'll go up \$10.8 billion in FY26, for the same 20 percent of all projected General Funds spending.

In other words, while the pension payments will be high, they'll be stable and sustainable as a percentage of the budget — as long as the projections hold up.

Education costs are pro-

pressure.

That net \$422 million surplus, if the estimates hold, will come in handy because GOMB is projecting Fiscal Year 2025's revenues will be \$480 million below its revised FY24 estimate. That, combined with increased spending, will result in a projected deficit next fiscal year of \$891 million. The deficit is expected to rise to \$1.4 billion in FY26 and \$1.66 billion in FY27.

jected to rise by \$952 million between this fiscal year and FY26, according to GOMB. The costs as a percentage of the budget will go from 25 percent this year to not quite 26 percent of the budget in FY26. Human services costs will rise \$652 million by FY26, and healthcare costs will rise \$614 million during the same period.

Let's get back to that projected \$891 million deficit next fiscal year, which starts in July.

Can the projection be trusted? After all, the global pandemic threw every economist off their game. Abruptly shutting down the world's economy and then trying to turn it back on again, with gigantic bottlenecks and labor shortages emerging everywhere amid massive and sustained government stimulus, resulting inflation, rising interest rates and an economic boom just had no precedent.

In November of 2020, near the height of the "second wave" of COVID-19, the governor's budget office projected this Fiscal Year 2024's budget would have about a \$4.7 billion deficit with a state unpaid bill backlog of \$24.5 billion.

Instead, we've had years of budget surpluses, which along with prudent budgeting have wiped out the bill backlog, allowed the state to put \$2 billion into a rainy day fund and pay off much of its non-capital debt while prepaying some pension obligations.

Illinois' bond ratings, which once neared junk status, have steadily risen to the "A" level with all three ratings agencies.

But even before the pandemic, in the fall of 2019, FY24's deficit was projected to be \$3.1 billion with \$16 billion in backlogs. A year earlier, in 2018, the current fiscal year's deficit was projected to be \$3.2 billion with a \$20.5 billion backlog.

So, again, can the latest projection be trusted? Not completely, but it should still be heeded. After a period of being mostly careful not to drastically increase the state's base spending, and instead using much of the unexpected revenue bonanzas for one-time items, the legislature and the governor added a ton of money to base spending last spring. If revenues do fall off next fiscal year, base spending will likely have to be cut.

The governor's budget address is three months away, so the budget-making process is about to begin. We've seen countless forecast adjustments during the past few years, so maybe this one will change, too. But, in the meantime, everyone should prepare themselves for some belt-tightening in the months ahead.

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

Governor announces key milestones for I-80

Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) were joined by local officials and community leaders to celebrate several important milestones on the \$1.3 billion overhaul of Interstate 80, setting up one of the cornerstone projects in the governor's Rebuild Illinois capital program to be almost fully under construction in the spring.

Entering next construction season, an estimated \$385 million worth of projects just on I-80's mainline lanes will be underway on almost 12 miles of the corridor, signaling the start of a major new phase.

"Illinoisans deserve infrastructure built for the modern era, with the highest standards of safety and reliability, and a little less congestion and frustration," said Governor JB Pritzker. "That's why the General Assembly and I dedicated \$1.3 billion of our road modernization plan -- the largest single allocation -- to the rebuilding and restoration of I-80 through Will, Grundy

and Kendall Counties. These improvements will not only make it safer for commercial drivers, but for the thousands of families who rely on I-80 to commute to work, drive their kids to school, and move safely through their daily lives."

The reconstruction of I-80 is replacing more than 50-year-old infrastructure, improving safety, adding capacity, and building new connections across the interstate. The projects also create thousands of construction and permanent jobs while boosting quality of life and positioning the region for long-term economic opportunity.

The Houbolt Road interchange in Joliet was recently converted to a diverging-diamond design, marking substantial completion of a project in excess of \$200 million with CenterPoint Properties, the city of Joliet, and Will County. The work improves access to North America's largest inland port and opens up new economic development opportunities. The state

contributed \$32 million toward the project.

Other I-80 elements soon to be wrapping up include the Shepley Road and Wheeler Avenue bridges over the interstate, weather permitting. The new structures will accommodate the larger footprint needed to support I-80 capacity and safety enhancements, with pedestrian and bicycle accommodations added to Wheeler Avenue.

Similar improvements to the Briggs Street bridge are ongoing and will finish in late 2024, with construction starting on the River Road bridge this winter.

On the west end of the corridor, temporary pavement is being added to I-80's westbound lanes between Ridge and River roads to accommodate traffic in the work zone during the upcoming construction seasons.

Finally, IDOT has awarded or is finalizing contracts that will cover nearly 12 miles of improvements to I-80, between Ridge Road and

Center Street and from Rowell Avenue to U.S. 30.

Once the improvements are complete, tentative for 2026, the final piece on I-80 will begin: the Center Street and Chicago Street interchanges as well as new bridges over the Des Plaines River. The entire project is anticipated to be substantially complete by the end of 2028, with landscaping, bridge demolition, and miscellaneous work extending into 2029.

The overall I-80 project will redesign and rebuild 16 miles from Ridge Road in Minoaka to U.S. 30 in Joliet and New Lenox, improving travel times and reducing congestion. Interchanges will be rebuilt or improved at Interstate 55, Illinois 7, Center Street, Chicago Street, Richards Street and Briggs Street, with a new flyover ramp linking southbound I-55 to eastbound I-80 to improve traffic flow and safety. More than 30 bridges will be rehabilitated or replaced.

State gets 9th credit upgrade

BY JERRY NOWICKI
CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS

SPRINGFIELD — Illinois received another credit upgrade, the same day a legislative committee again scrutinized Gov. JB Pritzker's administration for its handling of unemployment claims during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The upgrade came from Fitch Ratings, the last remaining holdout of the nation's three major credit reporting agencies to advance the state's status to "A" grade.

Collectively, Fitch, S&P Global Ratings and Moody's Investors Service have given the state nine credit upgrades since 2021.

Credit upgrades generally make it cheaper for the state to borrow money, playing a major role in investors' assessment of risk in buying state bonds. Fitch moved Illinois to an A-, up from the BBB+ rating it had given the state last year. Illinois' ratings had been on a general downward trajectory across administrations of both parties since the mild recession two decades ago.

Fitch's review of state finances drew similar conclusions to those that came before it: reserves are growing while long-term liabilities, including pension debt, remain "an elevated but still moderate burden."

"Reserves have improved to historically high levels for the state and provide an important fiscal cushion, but levels remain relatively modest versus other states," Fitch said in its analysis. "Management has eliminated many outstanding budgetary

liabilities and established a sustainable pattern of smoother fiscal decision-making."

The state's "rainy day" fund — officially referred to as the Budget Stabilization Fund — had a balance of nearly \$2 billion as of Nov. 7.

Still, the state's unfunded pension liabilities sit at roughly \$140 billion — a number representing what the state would owe if every pensioner sought to collect benefits at once. While an indicator of the pension funds' financial health, it does not reflect their current ability to pay out benefits that are owed.

In recent years, lawmakers have allocated hundreds of millions of dollars beyond statutory requirements to Illinois' pension funds, lessening future liabilities. Fitch called those payments "helpful, but insufficient to address this structural budget gap."

It also warned the rating could once again be lowered if Illinois returns to a point of "irresolute and contentious fiscal decision-making" which had become commonplace

over several recent administrations, especially during the two years the state went without a budget between 2015 and 2017.

"We are continuing to right the past fiscal wrongs in our state with disciplined fiscal leadership, and credit rating agencies and businesses alike are taking notice of Illinois' remarkable progress," Pritzker said in a statement.

The upgrade was issued, Fitch noted, because Illinois is planning on issuing bonds next week to continue financing a pension buyout program that's anticipated to shave \$1.4 billion off the state's pension liability over its lifetime.

Also in recent years, Illinois has reduced its "backlog" of unpaid bills to within a 30-day accounts payable cycle. That effort was boosted by an \$898 million allocation to pay off old group health insurance bills last year, which passed as part of a broader plan to pay down debt accrued by the unemployment insurance trust fund during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Electronics dropoff event coming to Wilmington

Will County's free electronics drop-off event will be held Thursday, Dec. 14, from 5-7 p.m. at the Wilmington City Hall parking lot, 1165 S. Water St.

Participants are reminded to remain in their vehicles at all times, show ID by holding it to the window for staff to see and then allow staff to remove items without assistance from each vehicle.

Items accepted include: Televisions, monitors, printers, computers (desktops, laptops, notebooks, tablets), electronic keyboards, fax machines, videocassette recorders, portable digital music players, DVD players, DVD recorders, video game consoles, small scale servers, scanners, electronic mice, digital converter boxes, cable receivers, satellite receivers,

cell phones, computer cable, portable digital assistants (PDAs) and zip drives.

Electronic items contain materials that can be recycled countless times while other materials in items are considered hazardous.

The recycling takes place in Wilmington the second Thursday of each month.

Habitat boost coming for 1,320 acres at Midewin Prairie

Over 1,320 acres at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie in Wilmington will see habitat improvement thanks to a \$1.5 million federal grant.

Beginning in early 2024, the project will connect and take initial steps of habitat improvement on an area nearly the size of 1,000 football fields, within Midewin's Grant Creek Priority Watershed.

This grant kicks off the first phase of a major, multi-year plan to restore and re-meander Grant Creek, the first U.S. Forest Service-designated priority watershed in Illinois.

The target restoration site shares a mile-long border with the existing 1,200-acre bison pasture grassland complex and represents a unique opportunity to restore an entire stream corridor.

The \$1.5 million grant was awarded to Openlands, together with the Wetlands Initiative (TWI) from the America the Beautiful Challenge (ATBC) grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

The awarded project, titled "Grassland Habitat Expansion and Restoration across Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie in Illinois," aims to enhance landscape-scale habitat restoration at Midewin, the first and only national tallgrass prairie in the country.

The project focuses on Grant Creek with the goal of turning it into healthy prairie, savanna, and floodplain wetland habitat.

"Midewin is one of the most important conservation initiatives in Illinois of the 20th century and serves as a model for the conservation of surplus federal property to public open space," said Michael Davidson, President and CEO of Openlands.

"Openlands has been a key partner in its creation, and we are committed to its ongoing restoration, its protection through advocacy, and its promotion as a major regional asset. This grant is a landmark conservation win for our region's people and natural environment and we are grateful to NFWF and our federal partners at the U.S. Forest Service for this consequential support."

ATBC, in its second year, funds high-priority and locally led projects that support wildlife habitat while improving community resilience and access to nature. Grant awards were made possible with funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and other federal conservation programs and private sources.

"We are thrilled that Openlands and the Wetlands Initiative have been awarded



A flock of birds soar over Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, where a herd of bison plays a vital role in grassland habitat restoration. Photo by Preston Keres, USDA Forest Service

this prestigious grant that will allow them to leverage their, and our, investments and contributions to our grassland habitat expansion and restoration efforts on the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie," said Shanna McCarty, Restoration and Planning Staff Officer at Midewin.

The grant was one of 74 awarded nationwide and the only one in Illinois.

Native to North America, the tallgrass prairie once covered a large portion of the American Midwest. Tall grass species such as Indiangrass, big bluestem, and others average five to six feet in height and create a complex ecosystem that hosts many plants, insects, and birds.

Illinois prairies are globally imperiled because most have been converted to other land uses and only fragments of the original tallgrass prairie ecosystem remain in a state with the official nickname "Prairie State."

In turn, grassland birds are among the most vulnerable group of birds in the United States that depend on the pro-

tection of remaining grasslands.

The project will improve habitat connectivity especially for grassland birds, reduce invasive species pressure, and facilitate future prairie and wetland restoration projects. Furthermore, this project will increase recreational opportunities for birding, walking, biking, and bison viewing less than an hour from one of America's dense urban centers - Chicago.

The Wetlands Initiative and Openlands have a long-standing history and close partnership with the U.S. Forest Service at Midewin, dating back to its designation. Before becoming a public open space, this area was the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant, purchased by the federal government in 1940. This plant produced a record 1 billion pounds of TNT during WWII and over 926 million bombs, shells, and mines. Most of this production ceased by 1976, and in 1993 the plant, now named the Joliet Arsenal, was declared surplus.

In 1995, Congress enacted

the Illinois Land Conservation Act which requires the U.S. Army to transfer lands of the Joliet Arsenal to the U.S. Department of Agriculture when they are no longer needed for military purposes. In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed legislation to formally establish the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

Since 1997, TWI's Midewin NTP field restoration crew has collaboratively restored nearly 3,400 acres to a healthy prairie-wetland landscape on Midewin NTP's west side. Both TWI and Openlands play an active role in the Midewin Stakeholders Group, a coalition of the Forest Service's private partners at Midewin NTP which regularly meets to discuss strategy and future planning for the vast site.

Now, more than 25 years since its establishment, Midewin is home to a herd of approximately 70 bison that were reintroduced to the site in 2015 and welcomes thousands of visitors annually who come for its historical, archeological, and natural attractions.

"Building on the years of restoration and public-access success on the west side of this huge site, this new funding expands those improvements into Midewin's even-larger east side," said Botts.

This grant, accompanied by an additional \$375K in matching funds the partners are now working to acquire, will total \$1.87 million and take just over two years to complete. It will pave the way for one of the largest contiguous landscape restoration efforts in northeastern Illinois.

Those interested in supporting the project can contact Openlands Vice President of Conservation and Policy, Emily Reusswig, to learn more at ereusswig@openlands.org.



Photo by Bill Glass

THE HENSLOW'S SPARROW is a grassland bird species facing rapid population decline due to habitat loss. It is found at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie north of Wilmington.

Wilmington American Legion to host murder dinner

The Wilmington American Legion Post 191 Ladies Auxiliary will be hosting a Murder Mystery Dinner on Jan. 13. Enjoy a night of who dunnit, the theme is "A

Dance with Death".

The 1950's sock hop gone south will be a night to remember. Dressing is encouraged but not a must. There will be raffles and a

50/50 drawing. Doors open at 5 p.m. and dinner will be held at 5:45 p.m.

Located at VFW Post 557 on West Baltimore St., Wilmington. You must be 21 or

older and there is a fee of \$35. All funds raised will support active Military and Veterans. Tickets are available at the Wilmington VFW or by calling 815-252-7830.



Our Anonymous Matching Angels have returned again this holiday season! The first \$3,500 in donations received until December 17th will be matched.

Mark your donation "Angel Fund" and mail to:

Kuzma Care Cottage, 635 S. Main St., Wilmington IL 60481

or donate online at www.kuzmacarecottage.org

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OBITUARIES

Edith Hess

WATSEKA—Edith Hess, 76, of Watseka, IL and formerly of Springfield, Morris and Wilmington, passed away Tuesday, Nov. 21, 2023 at Watseka Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

Born March 23, 1947 in Springfield, Edith was a daughter of John Glenn Jr. and Mary Pauline (Oschwald) Tarr. She was raised and educated in Springfield and graduated from Springfield High School. Edith went on to attend Blackburn College and made her career working as a Residential Counselor for a Community Home, most recently Trinity Services.

Edith was a member of Grace Lutheran Church in Wilmington and was an avid quilter. She enjoyed making beautiful creations not just on her own, but also in quilting groups she would meet with.

Survivors include her daughter, Heidi Hess (Dan Longest); granddaughter, Mykila; grandson, Blake Longest; two brothers, David and



Jonathan Tarr and three sisters: Ruth E. Tarr, Janice Leach and Barbara Hobson.

Edith was preceded in death by her parents.

Cremation rites have been accorded.

Family and friends are welcome to gather for a memorial visitation at Grace Lutheran Church, 907 Luther Dr., in Wilmington on Thursday, Dec. 7, 2023 from 10 a.m. until the time of memorial service at 11 a.m.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made as gifts in Edith's memory to Grace Lutheran Church or Lutheran World Relief.

Online guest book is available at www.BaskervilleFuneral.com.

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

Pamela Lynn Ronchetti

CREST HILL—Pamela Lynn Ronchetti, 63, of Crest Hill, IL passed unexpectedly on Nov. 29, 2023.

Born in Sacramento, CA, Pam was the daughter of the late Don Bogash and late Benette Head. She graduated with the Coal City class of 1978. An immensely talented quilter and seamstress, she enjoyed stitching together patterns and sharing her love of the craft, frequently gifting her creations to family and friends. A member of the Pieces From The Heart Quilt Guild, Pam's work was recognized with awards and admiration. She was always on the hunt for a new approach or fabric to bring her creations to life. Her stitches spanned seasons, captured color, and formed a variety of shapes. She loved sharing her love of quilting, teaching friends and family alike and serving as a go-to resource for any question, or, as the trusted talent who could complete a project where others had gotten stuck.

A lover of travel, she enjoyed the sights and tastes of the world whether venturing by plane, cruise ship, or wherever her kids and grandkids would have her walk, whether that was Mexico City or Disney World. Pam would take inspiration from these trips to add to her recipe collection, always having meals on hand and looking for the next great dish.

As a registered nurse (RN), she provided comfort and support to communities in her lifetime. Whether in a hospital setting or providing



home health, her capacity for care was great and welcomed by those she treated.

Survivors include three sons: Matthew (Maliha) Ronchetti, of Los Angeles, CA; Nathan (Paige) Ronchetti, of Naperville, IL; Jonathon Ronchetti, of Westmont, IL; three grandchildren: Miller, Marshall and Juniper; sister, Dawn Bogash; sister-in-law, Linda (the late Richard) Burns; mother-in-law, Jeanne Ronchetti; brother, David (Debbie) Bogash, and nephews and nieces: Craig (Tonia) Burns, Jeffrey (Stacey) Burns, Seth Bogash (Nicole) and Lynnsey Bogash (Ryan Naples).

She is preceded in death by her husband, John Ronchetti and together they shared 41 beautiful years.

Funeral services were held Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023 at Reeves Funeral Home in Coal City and burial followed in Ward Cemetery in Verona.

Preferred memorials may be made as gifts in Pam's memory to the Pieces From The Heart Quilt Guild.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the guestbook, upload photographs and share Pam's memorial page online through social media by logging onto: www.ReevesFuneral.com/obituary/Pamela-Ronchetti

Funeral services and arrangements were made under the direction and care of Reeves Funeral Homes, Ltd. in Coal City.

Joyce Miller

GODLEY—Joyce Miller, 80, of Godley, passed away Monday, Dec. 4, 2023 at Loyola University Medical Center in Proviso Township, IL.

Born July 31, 1943 in Joliet, Joyce was the daughter of Clarence and Marie (Krull) Ross. She was raised and educated in Joliet and graduated from Joliet Township High School with the class of 1962. Joyce married William Miller, and she worked for Wescom/Rockwell and later at several area banks as a bank teller. She was a social person that liked being out and about with her friends, and she enjoyed playing computer games, especially Pogo. Joyce was a dedicated mother and grandmother, as well as a

proud pet owner who loved her cats.

Survivors include her daughters, Shelly and Hope, and her five grandchildren.

Joyce was preceded in death by her parents, Clarence and Marie; her husband, William and her two brothers, Donald and Herbert Ross.

Per her wishes, cremation rites are being accorded.

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

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

Eunice C. Doherty

WILMINGTON—Eunice C. Doherty, 66, of Wilmington, passed away Sunday, Dec. 3, 2023 at Silver Cross Hospital in New Lenox, IL.

Born Dec. 15, 1956 in Bayonne, NJ, Eunice Charlotte was a daughter of Taduez and Eunice (Pasquale) Wlodarski. She was raised and educated in Bayonne, and graduated from Bayonne High School. Eunice worked as an office manager for several companies, and met Shawn Doherty in 1982 and would go on to marry him on March 18, 1994. Together they would relocate to Wilmington, where they would make their home. After moving, Eunice centered her life on caring for her family. She enjoyed cooking and baking for them and being a reliable and loving caregiver. Eunice treasured her grandchildren and had a kind, generous heart for anyone who needed her. She was strong willed and fought hard through all the challenges she faced over the years, creating a great example for her family.

Survivors include her son, Stephen Krand, of Wilmington; two grandchildren, Stephen

Tyler Krand and Mariah Rose Krand; one sister and three brothers: Janet Delaney, of Chesapeake, VA; Gregory Wlodarski, of Jersey City, NJ; Andrew (Judith) Wlodarski, of Brick Township, NJ and Keith (Lisa) Wlodarski, of Montague, NY and numerous nieces and nephews.

Eunice was preceded in death by her parents and her husband, Shawn Doherty on April 17, 2021; and three siblings: Delores Husker, Taduez "Teddy" Wlodarski and Patricia Wlodarski.

Per Eunice's wishes, cremation rites are being accorded and there will be no services at this time.

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

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

Pritzker says feds must ditch work fees for migrants

BY ANDREW HENSEL
THE CENTER SQUARE

Gov. J.B. Pritzker is calling on the Biden administration to waive a fee on employment-based visas and other immigration programs in an effort to get more migrants to work.

The state has seen over 24,000 arrive over the last 15 months, which has led to the city and state spending nearly \$1 billion for shelter, care and other services.

A significant number of arrivals are being housed in tents inside and outside police stations and have been encouraged to seek work while in Chicago.

However, migrant works fees have prompted Illinois elected officials to speak out.

Gov. J.B. Pritzker said on

Monday that he is working to remove the costs.

"Every time I see White House personnel or the President, I have raised this issue and others related to the asylum seekers coming to Chicago," Pritzker said. "This waiver of those fees is very, very important."

According to reports, Chicago gained 25 more buses full of non-citizen arrivals seeking shelter in the city over the last two weeks, increasing the demand for shelter and services, which, without work permits, leaves people sitting and doing nothing.

"\$500 is really untenable for many of these migrants who cannot go to work without a work authorization, and they can't get a work authorization without being able to

purchase the permit," Pritzker said.

The city and the state have already used taxpayer dollars to shelter the arrivals.

The amount already spent by the state and city has led to Pritzker calling on donations to help support the migrants.

"We are working together with them; we also have philanthropists and others who are trying to help pay some of those fees," Pritzker said. "What we really need is a national waiver for these asylum seekers."

Chicago has set aside an additional \$150 million to help shelter and care for the influx of noncitizen arrivals. The state recently announced it will be contributing another \$160 million in taxpayer funds for services.

Pat Spangler

WILMINGTON—Pat Spangler, 93, of Florence Township, Wilmington, passed away peacefully on Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023, at Ascension Saint Joseph Medical Center in Joliet.

Born May 2, 1930, in Oak Park, IL, Mary Patricia was a daughter of Roy Orvin and Blanche Elizabeth (Wright) Benson. She graduated from Wilmington High School with the class of 1948 and went on to marry Richard "Dick" Spangler on Nov. 29, 1952, in St. Mary's Catholic Church on Ottawa Street in Joliet. Together the two made a home and raised their family on the family farm in Florence Township. A woman of strong faith, Pat was a member of St. Rose Catholic Church in Wilmington where she enjoyed volunteering in the kitchen for various parish fundraisers throughout the years. She held employment with the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant prior to dedicating herself to the home and her family.

One could often find Pat outside tending to her flowers, or meticulously mowing the lawn or maintaining the family home. She shared Dick's passion for boating and made countless treasured memories on the water with family and friends throughout nearly five decades. In addition to her love for outdoor activities, Pat also had an avid interest in NASCAR. She attended eight NASCAR events between Daytona, Homestead, and Chicago—an experience that undeniably brought her joy. Furthermore, Pat had a deep appreciation for travel and was blessed to spend nearly 30 winters in Florida.

On what would have been their 71st wedding anniversary, Pat was reunited with her beloved husband, Dick.

Survivors include her four children: Joseph (Nola) Spangler, of Wilmington; Robert Spangler, of Estes Park, CO and Thomas (Kathy) Spangler and Diane (Tom) Housman, both of Wilmington; eight grandchildren: Mike (Tracy)



Spangler and Rick Spangler, both of Bettendorf, IA; Jennifer (Dan) Morris, of Godley; Jackie (Rob) Park, of Manhattan; Brian (Danielle) Spangler, of Avon, IN; Ashley (Ben) Ingram, of Wilmington; Tiffany Housman, of Phoenix, AZ and Jimmy Housman, of Wilmington; great-grandchildren: Reece, Carter, Alivia, Miley, Lexi, Makayla, Jackson, Gavin, Lucas, Mason and Evelyn; one brother, Jack (Kathie) Benson, of North Fort Myers, FL; one sister-in-law, Lori Spangler, of Rock Island; nieces and nephews: Sheryl (LeDarcy) DaRosa, of Downers Grove; Jane (Jeff) Bonick, of St. Pete Beach, FL; Jimmy Benson, of Atlanta, GA and Tom (Vicky) Spangler, of Wilmington and one special cousin, Rachel Riley, of Chicago.

Pat was preceded in death by her parents, one brother, Roy in infancy; father-in-law and mother-in-law, Joseph Grover and Mary Angela (Baskerville) Spangler; her special aunt, Sr. Leonidas Wright; one brother-in-law, James Spangler; sister-in-law, Mary K. Spangler and a dear cousin, Mary Riley.

A private family visitation was held with graveside services presided by Deacon Jay Pleser from St. Rose Parish.

Burial was in Mount Olivet Catholic Cemetery in Wilmington. Pallbearers and honorary pallbearers were Mike Spangler, Rick Spangler, Brian Spangler, Dan Morris, Rob Park and Ben Ingram.

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

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

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

Lenore C. Thompson

WISCONSIN—Lenore C. Thompson (nee Swigart), of Eagle River, WI, formerly New Lenox, passed away peacefully Sunday, Dec. 3, 2023, surrounded by her loving family.

Lenore was born to Leonard and Mary Swigart on Sept. 1, 1949 in Chicago. She married the love of her life, Mike Thompson on Nov. 7, 1970.

Lenore was a career driven woman her entire life. She closed out her corporate career as a Regional Vice President at which time she started her own business as a successful Snap-on Tool dealer. She and Mike both owned their own franchise's and they enjoyed competing against each other for top sales each month. Many months they were number one and two in the region. After moving up to Eagle River, Lenore continued to manage the financial and communication end of Mike's Cornwell tool business.

Lenore also took great passion in being a mother to her children, Lisa and Tommy. After 18 years of marriage she and Mike selflessly adopted Lisa and Tommy and gave them a wonderful life. Lenore enjoyed watching them grow and teaching them all the important aspects of life. In 2007 she and Mike moved up to Eagle River where they enjoyed a slower paced lifestyle. Lisa and her children spent many holidays with them in Eagle River.

Lenore will be remembered as the most amazing mother, wonderful grandmother, lov-



ing wife, and all around kind hearted person. She will be greatly missed and the world is a bit emptier without her presence. Knowing she is reunited with her loving husband and no longer suffering should give peace to all those who mourn her passing.

Lenore is survived by her children, daughter, Lisa Stuart and son, Thomas Thompson; grandchildren: Zoe (Annie) Stuart, Anthony Corrado, Vincent Corrado, Hope DeBoard, Gracie DeBoard, Abigail Thompson, and David Stuart. She is also survived by countless friends, too many to name individually.

Those who have gone before her include her father, Leonard Swigart; her loving husband, Mike Thompson and her first grandchild, Michael Corrado.

The family will receive friends for a memorial visitation on Saturday, Dec. 9, 2023 at Baskerville Funeral Home, 700 E. Kahler Rd., in Wilmington from 11 a.m. until the time of memorial service at 2 p.m. A memorial luncheon will follow the services at the Silver Dollar Restaurant in Elwood.

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

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

Dan, the helpful man, earns trophy



DAN TAYLOR of Whitmore Ace Hardware in Wilmington accepts the employee of the month trophy from Wilmington chamber ambassador Dee Yehling of The Corner Tap. Taylor works the floor at the hardware store, giving advice on DIY projects and products. Dan's nomination by a customer stated that he always so helpful and engaging in pleasant conversation. He has been with Ace for 8 years stating "I like people and it's a great company to work for." His best work is behind the smoker or grill when Ace has cooking demonstration out front of the store. Best smoked brownies we've ever had.

Dial 9-8-8 for mental health help

988 is a confidential lifeline and available 24/7. If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide or facing a mental health or substance use crisis, help is just a call or text away.

Life can throw us unexpected challenges, and sometimes it can make you feel over-

whelmed. You are not alone, help is here. Call or text 988 to be connected with a trained, compassionate crisis counselor who can help you navigate difficult times. This message is brought to you by the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Free Press Newspapers.

A cookie recipe that will turn your kids into bandits

ELAINE FISHER-OHLUND
FOOD FOR THE SOUL

Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar, who me? I have a cookie recipe that is so good, it will turn your kids and their buddies into cookie bandits. I swore I would never give this recipe away but in honor



ZACH OHLUND (left) and Ryan Nelson caught being cookie bandits.

of a state football championship for the Wildcats, I think we should all celebrate with a sweet treat. So this week I want to write about my son, Zach's favorite chocolate chip cookies.

I will never forget when good friends Brady and Vicki Wilkins asked me to make these cookies for their wedding celebration. I was stressed but honored. I just wanted to do a good job and have enough. So the day of the wedding I woke up early and started baking away.

Once I was finished, I spread them around the kitchen to cool. Twenty minutes later I walked into the kitchen to find the entire baking sheet of cookies gone. I was perplexed and turned to the dog. She sat there with a look on her face saying, "Who me?" And I thought "Yes you." Of course my next thought was "couldn't be" so "then who?"

Then I noticed the six

empty milk glasses on the counter. I walked into the garage to find Zach and his buddies getting their fishing poles ready to go out back to the river. I looked at Zach and wailed, "Zach those cookies were for the wedding!" He responded with "How was I suppose to know, those cook-

ies are usually for me."

It was true, when Zach gets a good grade, I make his cookies. When he has a good game, I make his cookies. After he accomplishes a two week sugar detox, it doesn't make much sense, but I make him his cookies. So I scurried into the kitchen to make another batch and everything worked out just fine.

So it became a thing, when the boys were over, I made cookies. It's just what I love to do.

The difference with this chocolate chip cookie recipe is using half regular flour and half cake flour so it makes a dense cookie that stays gooey in the middle.

However my oldest Alyssa started complaining, "where did all the cookies go, you just made them." So I smartened up and would put half the batch into a bag to hide for the rest of the family.

That is until one day, I was just minding my own business when I heard a rum-

bling in the kitchen. It literally sounded like someone was breaking into the house and robbing us. I crept around the corner to find, Zach and his buddies rummaging through the cabinets.

I said, "dear God I thought we were getting robbed, what are you doing?" They responded with, "sorry Mrs. Ohlund, we were just looking for the rest of the cookies." I couldn't get mad because if there is one thing I like to do, is show my love for the people I care about through food. So now I make two batches and I suggest you do too.

Ingredients

- 1 cup cold butter cut into small cubes
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon of vanilla
- 1 1/2 cups cake flour
- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- 3/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups chocolate chip chunks
- 1 cup of chocolate chip mini
- 2 cups walnuts roughly chopped

Directions

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

In a large mixing bowl, cream together cold cubed butter, brown sugar, vanilla and sugar for 4 minutes or until creamy.

Add eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each one.

Stir in flours, cornstarch, baking soda, and salt. Mix until just combined to avoid overmixing. Stir in chocolate chips and walnuts.

Separate dough into balls a little bigger than a golf ball. The batch usually makes about 20 cookies. Place on lightly on cookie sheet with parchment paper.

Bake for 11 minutes or until golden brown on the top. Let them rest for at least 10 minutes to set.

Do you have a favorite cookie? If so, this week we are having a cookie contest at the Free Press Newspapers. There will be a \$50 cash prize and I would like to showcase your recipe in my column.

Please submit at least 6 cookies by Dec. 15. Our office is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30

p.m., Monday thru Friday.

I would just like to say Congratulations to the Wildcats and thank you to every person that made it so special for them.

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morrishospital.org/obgyn

IDPH warns about recalled applesauce pouches

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is alerting consumers to an FDA recall of children's cinnamon applesauce pouches which may contain elevated levels of lead.

At least one confirmed case in Illinois, and a total of 34 nationwide, have been linked to the product, which was sold online and at chains like Schnucks and Dollar Tree under the brand names WanaBana, Weis and Schnucks.

Information on specific lot numbers and UPC codes can be found at www.fda.gov/food/outbreaks-foodborne-illness/investigation-elevated-lead-levels-cinnamon-applesauce-pouches-november-2023.

The products may contain elevated levels of lead, which can be dangerous to persons of any age. Children are particularly susceptible to lead toxicity. Lead is a neurotoxin and expo-

sure can impact a child's development. Most children with elevated lead levels have no symptoms. Occasionally, nonspecific symptoms may include headache, abdominal pain, and vomiting.

Consumers should not eat or serve the product and should dispose of it safely. IDPH recommends opening the packets, dumping the contents into a plastic bag, and then discarding the bag and contents, in order to prevent anyone from attempting to salvage the unopened product from the trash. Wash hands thoroughly after disposing of the product.

Parents who suspect their child may have consumed a contaminated product should consult the child's health care provider for further guidance, including whether a blood test for lead exposure may be needed.

back to Bethlehem

a journey through Bethlehem on the night of the birth of Jesus

December 8th & 9th

Friday 6:30-8:30 pm
Saturday 5-8:30 pm

Island City Baptist Church
120 Vine Street
Wilmington, IL
815.476.9750

OPERATION ST. NICK

41st RADIO AUCTION

Sunday December 10th

8:00am to NOON

WCSJ Radio - 103.1 FM

Back in 1983 the Operation St. Nick Radio Auction was born with auctioning off one Cabbage Patch doll. Here we are 41 years later with 123 items for you to choose from, helping 150 children and their families from here in Grundy County have a Christmas they could only dream about.

Each child will receive \$250 in toys and gifts right from their own wish list they have given Santa. The family will also receive \$300 in food to help them enjoy this special time of year. St. Nick. will also pay \$1,000 on their winter utility bills.

To accomplish this Christmas Miracle here in Grundy County we have budgeted \$100,000, once again, not possible without your generous participation in the Radio Auction.

Pick up an Auction Brochure at Grundy Bank in downtown Morris or go to their website, grundy.bank under the "About Us" tab and view the entire brochure on line and be sure to call in on Sunday December 10th from 8 am 'til Noon.

KEY AUCTION ITEMS

- 100 Pheasant Hunting Experience
- 1958 Fully Restored Cushman Scooter
- Chicago Cubs Vs. White Sox at Wrigley Field
- George Strait Concert at Soldier Field - July 20, 2024
- Bears Vs. Falcons on New Years Eve

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• 444 Bedford Rd. Morris • 120 S. Main St. Wilmington
815-942-0130 • grundy.bank

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8 to Noon
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Classified Word Ads
Mondays - noon

The Free Press Newspapers will be responsible for the first incorrect insertion, and its liabilities shall be limited to the price on one insertion. The Free Press Newspapers reserves the right to classify correctly, edit, reject or cancel any advertisement at any time in accordance with its policy. All ads must be checked for errors the first week of publication by the advertiser.

Cost
Line Ads are up to 30 words
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3 wks. - \$22; 4 wks. - \$25
\$1.00 Extra per line for bold or caps on classified

Phone (815) 476-7966 or (815) 634-0315 for details.

The Braidwood Journal — The Coal City Courant — The Free Press Advocate

APARTMENTS FOR RENT

Wilmington, 2nd floor, efficiency/studio, \$575 month plus security, plus utilities, no pets, no smoking, Text 815-768-5020. cc49-52

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385 N. Second Ave.
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Mandy Eaton
815-791-2913

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2 Bedroom Duplex Ranch Style. Only 2 units per building. 1/2 mile from I-55 in (Diamond, IL). Attached garage, backyard. Oak cabinets, concrete drive, washer & dryer hook-up. All maintenance included. \$1,050 per month. Available 1/1/24. No smoking or pets & year lease. Call 815-351-2494.

HOMES FOR RENT

Two bedroom house for rent in Wilmington on the Kankakee River. 35013 S. Peterson Lane. 2 pet maximum. Showings will be Monday through Friday from 8AM-3PM. Call 708-268-2976 for appointment. ca48-51

HELP WANTED

Offering CNA classes, days, evenings and weekends. Home health nurses needed. CNA instructor needed. Call for class dates, 630-771-1162 or 630-771-9069, www.spectrumnursesna.com cc45-18

HELP WANTED

Applications are being taken for full time, 12 month, Union Custodial Maintenance position. Please contact Jim Habing at jhabing@209u.net or phone 815-926-1725. Resumes should be sent to: Mr. Jim Habing, Wilmington High School 209U Wildcat Court, Wilmington, IL 60481. Wilmington Community Unit School District No. 209U is in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which states that no person in the United States shall, on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex or handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity in which District 209U receives federal assistance. ch48-49

LOST & FOUND

Lost - White steel heavy duty car ramp for car trailer. Lost between Gorman Road and Braidwood or along Rte 113. 815-585-0770.

MISCELLANEOUS

Hall Rental - Available for parties, showers & meetings. Seats 100 people, full kitchen available. If interested call New Hope Presbyterian Church in Coal City, 815-634-8332. ch 27a-tfn

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Purebred Siberian Husky puppies for sale. Asking \$250 to cover vet bills. Four males and one female. Located in Braidwood. Call for details at 708-477-1536. cc46-49

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Source: Midwest Real Estate Database, (MLS) Single Family Detached Homes Sold in 2022 by Grundy County Offices.

1802 N. Division St., Morris

SOLD

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REAL ESTATE

SHERIFF'S SALE OF REAL ESTATE OF 916 Laurel Dr Unit B, Elwood, IL 60421 (Single Family Home). On the **21st day of December, 2023** to be held at 12:00 noon, at the Will County Courthouse, 100 W. Jefferson Street, Room 904, Joliet, IL 60432, under Case Title: **Freedom Mortgage Corporation Plaintiff V. Toni M. Henderson; et al. Defendant.** Case No. **23 FC 0304** in the Circuit Court of the Twelfth Judicial Circuit, Will County, Illinois. Terms of Sale: ten percent (10%) at the time of sale and the balance within twenty-four (24) hours. No judicial sale fee shall be paid by the mortgagee acquiring the residential real estate pursuant to its credit bid at the sale or by any mortgagee, judgment creditor, or other lienor acquiring the residential real estate whose rights in and to the residential real estate arose prior to the sale. All payments shall be made in cash or certified funds payable to the Sheriff of Will County. In the event the property is a condominium, in accordance with 735 ILCS 5/15-1507(c)(1)(H-1) and (H-2), 765 ILCS 605/9(g)(5), and 765 ILCS 605/18.5(g-1), you are hereby notified that the purchaser of the unit, other than a mortgagee, shall pay the assessments and legal fees required by subdivisions (g)(1) and (g)(4) of Section 9 and the assessments required by subsection (g-1) of Section 18.5 of the Illinois Condominium Property Act. Pursuant to Local Court Rule 11.03 (J) if there is a surplus following application of the proceeds of sale, then the plaintiff shall send written notice pursuant to 735 ILCS 5/15-1512(d) to all parties to the proceeding advising them of the amount of the surplus and that the surplus will be held until a party obtains a court order for its distribution or, in the absence of an order, until the surplus is forfeited to the State. For Information Please Contact: **Codilis & Associates, P.C.** 15W030 N. Frontage Road Suite 100 Burr Ridge, Illinois 60527 P: 630-794-5300 F: 630-794-9090 PURSUANT TO THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT YOU ARE ADVISED THAT THIS LAW FIRM IS DEEMED TO BE A DEBT COLLECTOR ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE. Published in the Free Press Newspapers on Wed., Nov. 29 & Dec. 6 and 13, 2023.

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Ron's Drywall, Hang, Tape & Paint, 25 years experience. Reasonable rates including drywall repairs, plaster repairs, cracks, holes, & patches. Carpenter available by request. 815-549-5136. cc44-51

REAL ESTATE

SHERIFF'S SALE OF REAL ESTATE OF 1923 Roberts Street, Wilmington, IL 60481 (Unknown). On the **14th day of December, 2023** to be held at 12:00 noon, at the Will County Courthouse, 100 W. Jefferson Street, Room 904, Joliet, IL 60432, under Case Title: **U.S. Bank National Association, not in its individual capacity but solely as trustee for RMTPT Trust, Series 2021 Cottage-TT-V Plaintiff V. Brigit Howard; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; Lakewood Shores Improvement Association; Unknown Owners and Nonrecord Claimants, Defendant.** Case No. **23 FC 0001** in the Circuit Court of the Twelfth Judicial Circuit, Will County, Illinois. Terms of Sale: ten percent (10%) at the time of sale and the balance within twenty-four (24) hours. No judicial sale fee shall be paid by the mortgagee acquiring the residential real estate pursuant to its credit bid at the sale or by any mortgagee, judgment creditor, or other lienor acquiring the residential real estate whose rights in and to the residential real estate arose prior to the sale. All payments shall be made in cash or certified funds payable to the Sheriff of Will County. In the event the property is a condominium, in accordance with 735 ILCS 5/15-1507(c)(1)(H-1) and (H-2), 765 ILCS 605/9(g)(5), and 765 ILCS 605/18.5(g-1), you are hereby notified that the purchaser of the unit, other than a mortgagee, shall pay the assessments and legal fees required by subdivisions (g)(1) and (g)(4) of Section 9 and the assessments required by subsection (g-1) of Section 18.5 of the Illinois Condominium Property Act. Pursuant to Local Court Rule 11.03 (J) if there is a surplus following application of the proceeds of sale, then the plaintiff shall send written notice pursuant to 735 ILCS 5/15-1512(d) to all parties to the proceeding advising them of the amount of the surplus and that the surplus will be held until a party obtains a court order for its distribution or, in the absence of an order, until the surplus is forfeited to the State. For Information Please Contact: **Sottile & Barile, LLC** 1415 West 22nd Street Tower Floor Oak Brook, IL 60523 P: 1-312-736-7336 F: PURSUANT TO THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT YOU ARE ADVISED THAT THIS LAW FIRM IS DEEMED TO BE A DEBT COLLECTOR ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE. Published in the Free Press Newspapers on Wed., Nov. 22, 29 and Wed., Dec. 6, 2023.

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REAL ESTATE

SHERIFF'S SALE OF REAL ESTATE OF 605/9(g)(5), and 765 ILCS 605/18.5(g-1), you are hereby notified that the purchaser of the unit, other than a mortgagee, shall pay the assessments and legal fees required by subdivisions (g)(1) and (g)(4) of Section 9 and the assessments required by subsection (g-1) of Section 18.5 of the Illinois Condominium Property Act. Pursuant to Local Court Rule 11.03 (J) if there is a surplus following application of the proceeds of sale, then the plaintiff shall send written notice pursuant to 735 ILCS 5/15-1512(d) to all parties to the proceeding advising them of the amount of the surplus and that the surplus will be held until a party obtains a court order for its distribution or, in the absence of an order, until the surplus is forfeited to the State. For Information Please Contact: **Sottile & Barile, LLC** 1415 West 22nd Street Tower Floor Oak Brook, IL 60523 P: 1-312-736-7336 F: PURSUANT TO THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT YOU ARE ADVISED THAT THIS LAW FIRM IS DEEMED TO BE A DEBT COLLECTOR ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE. Published in the Free Press Newspapers on Wed., Nov. 22, 29 and Wed., Dec. 6, 2023.

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Send resume to Eric Fisher
The Free Press Newspapers
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Call (815) 476-7966 or email: efisher@fpnusa.com

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Price stalls at the gas pump

There was little price change over the week as the average cost per gallon trickled 0.8 cents last week.

The Mohsen station at Lorenzo Rd and I-55 and one station in Coal City were charging \$2.99/g Monday. Other than that prices varied from \$3.07/g in Coal City, \$3.25/g in Wilmington and \$3.35/g in Braidwood. Even stations in Morris (\$3.07/g) and Bourbonnais (\$3.05/g) were showing an increase.

"We've barely eked out a drop in the national average over the last week, extending the streak to 11 straight weeks of decline, even as some states have seen prices jump, while others have seen prices continue to inch lower. Motorists can blame the OPEC+ meeting for causing oil to jump early

last week and then plummet late last week for the volatility in gas prices," said Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy.

The lowest price in the state was \$2.73/g while the highest was \$4.99/g. The national average price of gasoline has fallen 0.4 cents per gallon in the last week, averaging \$3.21/g.

"The good news is that as the dust settled, OPEC+ agreed to barely move the needle, deepening their production cuts by an additional 900,000 barrels per day in 2024, with Saudi Arabia extending their own million barrel per day cut through March. There is hope that the national average still could fall to \$2.99/gal by the end of the year."



Celebrating 25 years of patient transportation

Morris Hospital & Healthcare Centers is celebrating the 25 year anniversary of its patient transportation service. Launched in November 1998, the service offers patients free rides to the Morris Hospital main campus and physician offices. To date, 313,000 rides have been provided to healthcare appointments over the past 25 years.

Beginning with only one conversion van and four riders the first month of operation, the patient transportation service has grown to include eight buses and two mini vans that together complete an average of 600 trips each month. This growth was possible thanks to generous donations made to the Morris Hospital Auxiliary and Foundation over the past 25 years.

Morris Hospital Patient Transportation Manager Tina Carter has been with the service since 1999 and says the growth over 25 years has been remarkable. "Throughout the past 25 years, we have grown with more vehicles, more riders, and more volunteers," says Carter. "Today, we are able to serve so many more riders all throughout the area,

many who tell us that they wouldn't have a way to get to their medical appointment if it weren't for our patient transportation service."

Along with providing hundreds of thousands of rides over the past 25 years, Carter is especially proud that some of the original volunteers from 1998 are still volunteering today, expressing thanks to Ray Lissy, Bill Akre, Larry Mitchell, and Ron Ragan for their dedicated volunteer service with the service over the past 25 years.

When asked why he has continued to volunteer with patient transportation all these years, Mitchell says it is the combination of helping others in the community and being alongside fellow volunteers. "Volunteering has given me the opportunity to meet people I wouldn't have met otherwise, and those people have turned into a second family to me," says Mitchell.

Morris Hospital wishes to thank all the volunteers who have made the patient transportation service possible over the past 25 years. For more information on volunteering, call 815-705-7250.

Grundy Bank collects over 450 coats

Grundy Bank's annual coat drive kicked off on Oct. 16 and turned out to be a huge success. The coat drive brought in over 450 winter clothing items such as winter coats, scarves, hats, gloves and winter boots that will benefit the families in Grundy County and Southern Will County.

Coats were dispersed to We Care of Grundy County in Morris and Our Caring Closet in Wilmington.

"It is such a great feeling when you see the coat drive box continuing to fill up day after day. It really does show that the community is here to support one another," said Christine Mendez, Marketing & Sales Director of Grundy Bank. "We all know how bad Chicago winters can be and are beyond grateful to see this drive be successful year after year."

For over a decade, Grundy Bank has been running this drive with the aim of providing warmth and comfort to those in need this season.



THE GRUNDY BANK coat drive resulted in over 450 winter items being collected and delivered to clothes closets in Morris and Wilmington. Grundy Bank's Christine Mendez (left) and Stefany Michelson (right) deliver to The Care Closet volunteers (second from left) Debbor LaVigne, Ruth Lockwood and Debbie Altiery.

The generosity of individuals, businesses and organizations who have donated has been overwhelming. Grundy Bank is committed to continuing this tradition and believes it is a testament to the communities' compassion, support and generosity.

"We are always so glad and appreciative of the Grundy Bank Coat Drive. This time of year, can be particularly hard on struggling families. It is so great to see their faces light up when we tell them they can pick out coats and hats for their family. We are grateful to have Grundy Bank as a community partner," said Eric Fisher,

Executive Director of We Care of Grundy County.

Grundy Bank President and CEO Kevin Olson said and Grundy Bank now is showcasing Operation St. Nick's auction items in the Morris main branch.

"We are pleased to once again announce that Operation St. Nick will be taking place on Sunday, Dec. 10, from 8 a.m. to noon and will have several of their auction items on display in the bank's

main lobby located at 201 Liberty St. in Morris. Auction items will be showcased through Saturday, Dec. 9," Olson said.

For more information on

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

Sheriff's sale of 916 Laurel Dr. Unit B

PUBLIC NOTICE

PURSUANT TO THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT YOU ARE ADVISED THAT THIS LAW FIRM IS DEEMED TO BE A DEBT COLLECTOR ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE.

STATE OF ILLINOIS)
COUNTY OF WILL) SS.

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS

Freedom Mortgage Corporation, Plaintiff,
vs.
Toni M. Henderson; et. al. Defendant.
No. 23 FC 0304

NOTICE OF SHERIFF'S SALE

Public notice is hereby given that pursuant to a judgment entered in the above cause on the 13th day of September, 2023, MIKE KELLEY, Sheriff of Will County, Illinois, will on Thursday, the 21st day of December, 2023, commencing at 12:00 o'clock noon, at the Will County Courthouse, 100 W. Jefferson Street, Room 904, Joliet, IL 60432, sell at public auction to the highest and best bidder or bidders the following-described real estate:

THE SOUTHERN 42.50 FEET OF LOT 23 IN MEADOWBROOK, 2ND ADDITION, A SUBDIVISION OF PART OF THE NORTH HALF OF SECTION 20, TOWNSHIP 34 NORTH, RANGE 10 EAST OF THE THIRD PRINCIPAL MERIDIAN, ACCORDING TO THE PLAT THEREOF RECORDED MAY 23, 1997 AS DOCUMENT NO. R97-43158, IN WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

Commonly known as: 916 Laurel Dr Unit B, Elwood, IL 60421
Description of Improvements: Single Family Home
P.I.N.: 10-11-20-202-014-0000

Terms of Sale: ten percent (10%) at the time of sale and the balance within twenty-four (24) hours. No judicial sale fee shall be paid by the mortgagee acquiring the residential real estate pursuant to its credit bid at the sale or by any mortgagee, judgment creditor, or other lienor acquiring the residential real estate whose rights in and to the residential real estate arose prior to the sale. All payments shall be made in cash or certified funds payable to the Sheriff of Will County.

In the event the property is a condominium, in accordance with 735 ILCS 5/15-1507(c)(1)(H-1) and (H-2), 765 ILCS 605/9(g)(5), and 765 ILCS 605/18.5(g-1), you are hereby notified that the purchaser of the unit, other than a mortgagee, shall pay the assessments and legal fees required by subdivisions (g)(1) and (g)(4) of Section 9 and the assessments required by subsection (g-1) of Section 18.5 of the Illinois Condominium Property Act.

Pursuant to Local Court Rule 11.03 (J) if there is a surplus following application of the proceeds of sale, then the plaintiff shall send written notice pursuant to 735 ILCS 5/15-1512(d) to all parties to the proceeding advising them of the amount of the surplus and that the surplus will be held until a party obtains a court order for its distribution or, in the absence of an order, until the surplus is forfeited to the State.

FOR INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Codilis & Associates, P.C.
15W030 N. Frontage Road Suite 100
Burr Ridge, Illinois 60527
P: 630-794-5300
F: 630-794-9090
Plaintiff's Attorney

MIKE KELLEY
Sheriff of Will County
Published in the Free Press Advocate on Wednesday, Nov. 29, Dec. 6 and 13, 2023.

Notice of foreclosure of 403 N. Main St.

PUBLIC NOTICE

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS

FEDERATED BANK, an Illinois Banking Corporation, Plaintiff,
vs.
FOX'S PIZZA, INC., an Illinois Corporation,)
GREGORY M. FOX, personally,)
UNKNOWN OWNERS and NON-RECORD CLAIMANTS)
Defendant.
Case No. 2023FC000996
IN CHANCERY
PROPERTY ADDRESS:
403 N. MAIN STREET, WILMINGTON, IL 60481

PUBLICATION NOTICE

The requisite affidavit for publication having been filed, notice is hereby given you, **UNKNOWN OWNERS and NONRECORD CLAIMANTS**, defendants in the above entitled suit, that the said suit has been commenced in the Circuit Court of Will County, Illinois, by the Plaintiff against you and other defendants, praying for the foreclosure of a certain Mortgage conveying the premises described as follows, to wit:

LOTS 7 AND 8 IN BLOCK 29 OF THE ORIGINAL TOWN OF WINCHESTER, NOW CITY OF WILMINGTON, IN THE WEST HALF OF THE SOUTHWEST QUARTER OF SECTION 25, TOWNSHIP 33 NORTH, RANGE 9, EAST OF THE THIRD PRINCIPAL MERIDIAN, IN WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

PERMANENT INDEX NO: 03-17-25-330-003-0000

COMMONLY KNOWN AS:
403 N. MAIN STREET, WILMINGTON (WILL COUNTY), ILLINOIS 60481

and which said Mortgage was made by **FOX'S PIZZA, INC.**, as Mortgagor, to **FEDERATED BANK**, as Mortgagee, and recorded in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds of Will County as **Document No. R2021-026411**, and for such other relief prayed; that summons was duly issued out of the said Circuit Court of Will County against you as provided by law, and that the said suit is now pending.

NOW, THEREFORE, UNLESS YOU, the said above defendants, file your answer to the complaint in this case or otherwise file your appearance in the Office of the Clerk of this Court at 100 West Jefferson Street, Joliet, Illinois, 60432, on or before the **4th day of JANUARY, 2024, AN ORDER OF DEFAULT MAY BE ENTERED AGAINST YOU** at any time after that day and a decree entered in accordance with the prayer of said complaint.

YOU ARE FURTHER ADVISED THAT THE TIME IN WHICH THE SUBJECT REAL ESTATE MAY BE REDEEMED FROM FORECLOSURE, PURSUANT TO LAW, COMMENCES TO RUN WITH THE FIRST DATE OF PUBLICATION OF THIS NOTICE.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Seal of said Court this 9th day of November, 2023.

Andrea Lynn Chasteen
Clerk of the Circuit Court of Will County, Illinois

ARDC #06182562
J. Steven Butkus, Esq.
GUERARD, KALINA & BUTKUS
3310 S. County Farm Road, Suite H
Wheaton, IL 60187
(630) 665-9033, Ext. 15
E-Mail: sbutkus@ameritech.net
FederatedFoxPizza@Unknownl1023231cp
Published in the Free Press Advocate on Wednesday, Nov. 22, 29 and Dec. 6, 2023.

Sheriff's sale of 1923 Roberts Street

PUBLIC NOTICE

PURSUANT TO THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT YOU ARE ADVISED THAT THIS LAW FIRM IS DEEMED TO BE A DEBT COLLECTOR ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE.

STATE OF ILLINOIS)
COUNTY OF WILL) SS.

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS

U.S. Bank National Association, not in its individual capacity but solely as trustee for RMTP Trust, Series 2021 Cottage-TT-V, Plaintiff,
vs.
Briget Howard; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; Lakewood Shores Improvement Association; Unknown Owners and Nonrecord Claimants, Defendant.
No. 23 FC 0001

NOTICE OF SHERIFF'S SALE

Public notice is hereby given that pursuant to a judgment entered in the above cause on the 7th day of September, 2023, MIKE KELLEY, Sheriff of Will County, Illinois, will on Thursday, the 14th day of December, 2023, commencing at 12:00 o'clock noon, at the Will County Courthouse, 100 W. Jefferson Street, Room 904, Joliet, IL 60432, sell at public auction to the highest and best bidder or bidders the following-described real estate:

LOT 355 IN FIFTH ADDITION TO LAKEWOOD SHORES, A SUBDIVISION OF PART OF THE NORTHWEST 1/4 OF THE NORTHEAST 1/4 AND FRACTIONAL NORTHEAST 1/4 OF THE FRACTIONAL NORTHWEST 1/4 OF SECTION 12, ALSO PART OF THE SOUTHWEST FRACTIONAL QUARTER AND THE SOUTHWEST FRACTIONAL QUARTER OF THE NORTHWEST FRACTIONAL QUARTER OF SECTION 1, TOWNSHIP 32 NORTH, RANGE 9, EAST OF THE THIRD PRINCIPAL MERIDIAN, ACCORDING TO THE PLAT THEREOF RECORDED JULY 16, 1955 IN PLAT BOOK 28, PAGE 97, AS DOCUMENT NO. 778121, IN WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

Commonly known as: 1923 Roberts Street, Wilmington, IL 60481
Description of Improvements: Unknown
P.I.N.: 08-24-01-303-012-0000

Terms of Sale: ten percent (10%) at the time of sale and the balance within twenty-four (24) hours. No judicial sale fee shall be paid by the mortgagee acquiring the residential real estate pursuant to its credit bid at the sale or by any mortgagee, judgment creditor, or other lienor acquiring the residential real estate whose rights in and to the residential real estate arose prior to the sale. All payments shall be made in cash or certified funds payable to the Sheriff of Will County.

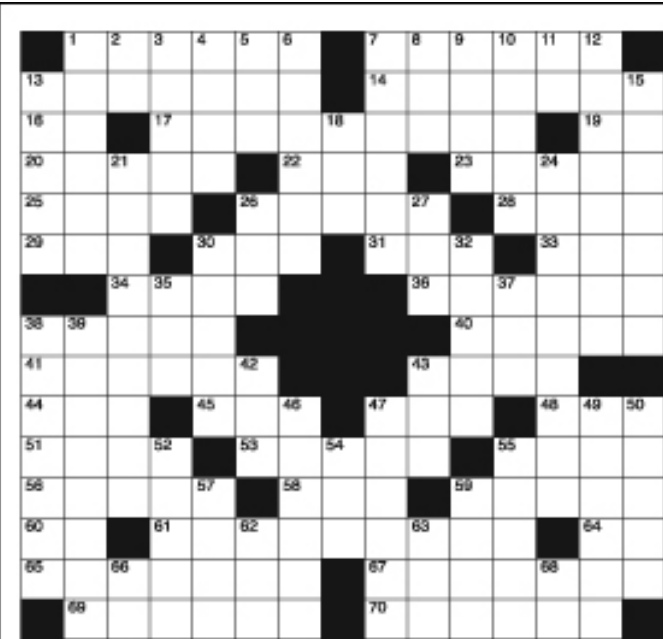
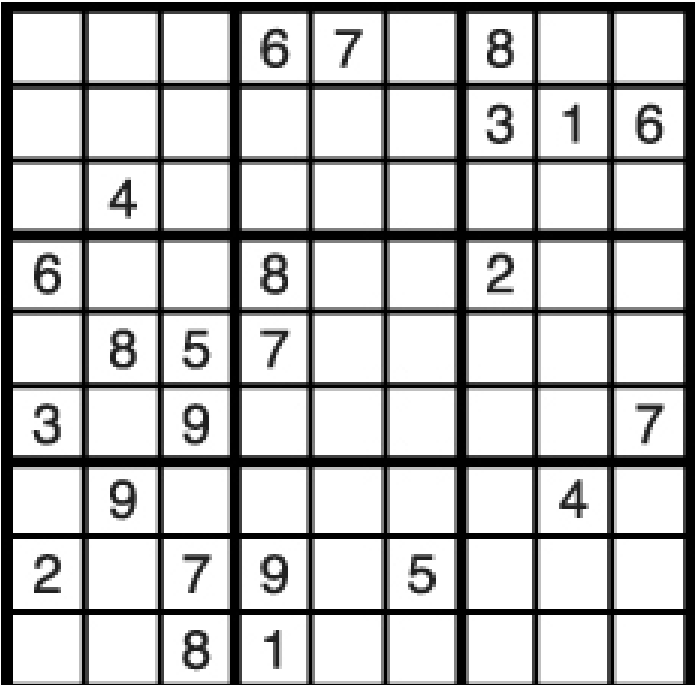
In the event the property is a condominium, in accordance with 735 ILCS 5/15-1507(c)(1)(H-1) and (H-2), 765 ILCS 605/9(g)(5), and 765 ILCS 605/18.5(g-1), you are hereby notified that the purchaser of the unit, other than a mortgagee, shall pay the assessments and legal fees required by subdivisions (g)(1) and (g)(4) of Section 9 and the assessments required by subsection (g-1) of Section 18.5 of the Illinois Condominium Property Act.

Pursuant to Local Court Rule 11.03 (J) if there is a surplus following application of the proceeds of sale, then the plaintiff shall send written notice pursuant to 735 ILCS 5/15-1512(d) to all parties to the proceeding advising them of the amount of the surplus and that the surplus will be held until a party obtains a court order for its distribution or, in the absence of an order, until the surplus is forfeited to the State.

FOR INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Sottile & Barile, LLC
1415 West 22nd Street Tower Floor
Oak Brook, IL 60523
P: 1-312-736-7336
Plaintiff's Attorney

MIKE KELLEY
Sheriff of Will County
Published in the Free Press Advocate on Wednesday, Nov. 22, 29 and Dec. 6, 2023.



- CLUES ACROSS**
- Spiritual leaders
 - Salt
 - Fortified wine
 - Edible mollusk
 - It begins with them
 - A way to compare
 - Government lawyer
 - Back parts
 - 8th month (abbr.)
 - Very willing
 - __ ex machina
 - Satisfies
 - Quebec river
 - A doctrine
 - Popular pickup truck
 - Dekagram
 - Naturally occurring solid material
 - Company officer
 - Villains
 - Cricket frogs
 - German founder of psychology
 - Endured
 - A female domestic
 - A "place" to avoid
 - Cigarette (slang)
 - Canadian politician Josephine
 - French ballet/acting dynasty
 - Employee stock ownership plan
 - Belonging to the bottom
 - Sound
 - Yankees' slugger Judge
 - Dickens character
 - More wise
 - Flash memory card
 - Exposing human vice or folly to ridicule
 - Atomic #79
 - Longtime Braves pitcher Julio
 - Humor
 - Shawl
 - Preliminary assessment of patients

- CLUES DOWN**
- Animal disease
 - Commercial
 - Craft supply
 - Storage units
 - Investment vehicle
 - Colorado Heisman winner
 - In a way, sank
 - Post-birth brain damage (abbr.)
 - Lay about
 - Intestinal
 - The opposite of yes
 - Caused to be loved
 - Messianic in Islamic eschatology
 - Showing since conviction
 - Not safe
 - The number above the line in a fraction
 - Yard invader
 - Pouch
 - Swedish krona
 - Start anew
 - While white or yellow flower
 - Fourteen
 - Graphical user interface
 - Up-to-date on the news
 - Campaigns
 - Touch softly
 - "Boardwalk Empire" actress Gretchen
 - Violent seizure of property
 - One who supports the Pope
 - Anxiety
 - Body fluid
 - Phony person
 - Title of respect
 - Chilean city
 - City in central Japan
 - Silk garment
 - Draw from
 - Automobile
 - Man
 - Legal bigwig (abbr.)

The benefits of installing solar shingles

Dear EarthTalk: My roof needs replacing and I'm also thinking about getting solar panels. Do solar shingles make sense or are they still too new-fangled to trust?

-- Peter. H., Boston, MA

EARTH TALK

Questions & Answers About Our Environment

Going solar is becoming an increasingly appealing choice for homeowners looking for sustainable energy solutions. Solar shingles are an innovative and aesthetically pleasing alternative to traditional solar panels, thanks to advancements in solar technology. However, whether they're a good fit for you depends upon a number of factors.

Solar shingles, or solar roof tiles, are a great way to add renewable energy to your home without sacrificing curb appeal. They blend in seamlessly with your existing roof, so you won't have to worry about them looking out of place. Solar shingles are also a great way to increase the value of your home.

Solar shingles are becoming increasingly common in new construction homes, and they're also a great choice if your old roof needs repair or replacement. Combining the installation of solar shingles with your roof renovation kills accomplishes two things at once.

However, solar shingles tend to be more expensive up front compared to traditional solar panels; you'll have to crunch the numbers with the help of one or more local installers to see what makes the most financial sense for you. Definitely get a few bids to make sure you're getting a fair deal.

Since solar shingles haven't been around as long as conventional photovoltaic panels, they don't have much of a track record of reliability.

That said, solar shingles tend to last longer and are more resistant to the elements than photovoltaic panels, as they are designed to be part of the actual structure of the roof itself. If you can't find any with a warranty of less than 25 years, keep looking.

If you're contemplating

the move to solar shingles, proceed with caution and do your homework regarding different manufacturers' products and warranties and find/read real customer reviews.

The suitability of solar shingles also depends on your geographical location and the direction your roof faces. It's important to figure out how much sunlight your roof gets throughout the year to determine how much energy solar shingles can generate.

If your roof doesn't get enough sunlight because of shade or its position, the effectiveness of solar shingles may be reduced, making them less cost-effective. Google's free Project Sunroof website lets you see if your roof would be a good host for solar panels or shingles.

While solar shingles definitely cost more than photovoltaic panels—typically at least twice as much—it might pencil out if you need roofing tiles replaced anyway. The best way to find out is to interview and get bids from



SOLAR SHINGLES are being ideal for use if you need a new roof and want to go solar at the same time.

roofers, solar installers and others well-versed in the technology.

Some of the leading manufacturers of solar shingles include CertainTeed Solar, Luma Solar, SunTegra, GAF Energy's Timberline Solar and, yes, even Tesla.

The latter's solar shingle solution is the priciest of the

bunch—\$70,000 isn't unheard of for one of Tesla's Solar Roofs—but may be the most reliable given the company's head start in the business and huge cash reserves.

EarthTalk® is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit EarthTalk. Send questions to: question@earth-talk.org.

Alert: Social media gift exchange is a scheme

BY RICK WALZ
PRESIDENT/CEO BBB SERVING NORTHERN INDIANA

A "Secret Santa" around the office or with friends and family can be fun. A gift exchange among online friends you haven't met is a little different and carries a heavier consequence. While these gift exchanges look like innocent fun, they are pyramid schemes and illegal.

The "Secret Sister" gift exchange campaign quickly became popular several years ago through Facebook posts promising participants would receive up to 36 gifts in exchange for sending one gift. Each holiday season, the scheme pops back up.

A newer version of this scam revolves around exchanging bottles of wine; another suggests purchasing \$10 gifts online. You might see references to receiving "happy mail" or doing the exchange "for the good of the sisterhood." During the holiday season, be aware of variations of this theme that may crop up on social media.

The scheme starts with a convincing invitation, either by email or social media, to sign up for a great, fun program. All you must do is provide your name and address and the personal information of a few additional friends and tack this information onto a list that's already started of people you've never met on the internet.

Next, it's your turn to send an email or social media invitation to send a modest gift or bottle of wine to a stranger along with their friends, family, and contacts.

A newer twist on the idea asks you to give your e-transfer email and ask users to pick a name off a list and send money to strangers to "pay it forward." There was another new twist called "Secret Santa Dog," where you are asked to buy a \$10 gift for a "secret dog."

In all of these versions, you give away your personal information, and you're left with buying and shipping gifts or money to unknown individuals in hopes that the favor is reciprocated by receiving the promised number of

gifts in return. Unfortunately, it doesn't happen.

Like any other pyramid scheme, it relies on recruiting individuals to keep the scam afloat. Once people stop participating in the gift exchange, the gift supply also stops, leaving hundreds of disappointed people without their promised gifts or cash.

It should be noted that pyramid schemes are illegal in the explains that these gift exchanges are considered a form of gambling and that participants could be penalized for jail time, fines, or a lawsuit for mail fraud.

There is another layer of danger to participating in these schemes. When signing up, the alleged campaign organizer asks for personal information such as a mailing address or an email. With just a few pieces of information, cyber thieves could expose you to future scams or commit identity theft.

The next time someone promises a bounty of gifts or cash by mail, email, or social media, BBB recommends the following:

Ignore it! Keep in mind that pyramid schemes are international. Chain letters involving money or valuable items and promising big returns are illegal. Stop and ask, is it worth breaking the law? Report it instead to the U.S. Postal Inspection Services.

Report social media posts. If you receive an invitation to join a pyramid scheme on social media, report it to Facebook by clicking in the upper right-hand corner and selecting "report post" or "report photo."

Never give your personal information to strangers. This will open you up to identity theft and other scams.

Be wary of false claims. Some pyramid schemes try to win your confidence by claiming they're legal and endorsed by the government. These imposter schemes are false, as the government will never endorse illegal activity.

No matter what they claim, pyramid schemes will not make you rich. You will receive little to no money back on your "investment" or gift exchange.

Alzheimer's caregiver support group

If you or someone you know is caring for a loved one with memory problems, you are invited to attend a caregivers support group that meets the second Tuesday of every month at 7 p.m. at the First Baptist Church of Coal City, 4470 E. Route 113 in Coal City.

This meeting is for caregivers only. For additional information, please contact Becky Haldorson at 815-791-2658.

Alzheimer's caregiver support groups have many benefits for both caregivers and patients. Caregiving takes a heavy toll on the caregivers' mental and physical health and the health of the patient with dementia is directly related to the health of his or her caregiver: the healthier the caregiver, the healthier the patient, and vice versa.

Support group participants, value support groups as a place to learn more factual

information about dementia. Increased education about dementia makes caregivers more effective: they are better able to respond to patients' needs when they understand and can anticipate them.

Furthermore caregiver depression decreases as caregiver education about dementia increases, and when caregiver depression decreases, patient outcomes improve.

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BBB Rating: A+

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Your business can sponsor a child's drawing to send out a season's greetings message to your customers.

Parents, grandparents, and children comb through the ads looking at all the businesses who supported these community pages.

Make sure your business isn't left out by scheduling TODAY.

Deadline is Dec. 15

Artist Name - School
Business Name • Address • Phone #

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

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815-476-7635

WILDCAT SPORTS

Tough Wildcat matmen in pursuit of victories

BY SHAWN LONG
SPORTS CORRESPONDENT

The Wildcat matmen didn't have the team they've had in past years but they definitely had some talented wrestlers, two of which competed in the Individual State Finals. This year, they're looking to sustain that individual success while also capturing more wins as a team.

Incoming senior Landon Dooley (113) and Wildcat graduate Hunter Hayes (195) both competed but ended up falling in wrestlebacks this past spring.

Dooley fought hard during his first match but ended up a victim of a decision to the eventual fifth place winner Litchfield's Alex Powell. He battled back with two impressive wins in wrestlebacks before got pinned by Coal City's Brody Widlowski. Dooley finished his third season with 41 wins and 13 losses.

The senior Hayes got a tough draw as he had to face the eventual runner-up, Brody Cuppernell, who quickly dispatched him by pin fall. Hayes drew one of the top seeds in Sherrard's Anderson. Anderson outlasted Hayes with a pin in the late rounds. Hayes ended up 30-13 in his final season at Wilmington.

As a team, the 'Cats had a lot of gaps in their program. Still, they didn't back down despite their obvious disadvantages. This year, they've got double the kids that could help fill those gaps.

"We had a down year last year win-wise because we couldn't fill very many weight classes," said WHS coach Nick Dziuban. "We had a lot of really tough wrestlers and a lot of really good kids. Some were inexperienced but the one thing we liked about them was they always went out there and wrestled tough. They might lose but you didn't get beat up like you were out there

beating people up and you weren't backing down from anybody so that was kind of our goal last year. Just to be tough and if you're going to lose, you're going to fight hard the whole time."

Dziuban is excited to welcome back Dooley for his senior season. The second-year coach doesn't exactly know his full lineup but he has a good idea where some wrestlers will be.

At 120, Dooley returns where he will try to break through for a medal at state. Dooley captured a state title in eighth grade for the 'Cats but has yet to get there at the high school level. This year might be the year he breaks through.

Oakley Rivera will be slotted in at 126 pounds. Rivera is another freshman who qualified to IESA state last season.

At 150, the 'Cats will go with Matt Swisher.

Dziuban notes Parker Adams will be slotted somewhere between 157-165.

Dziuban is excited to see what Will Wilson does at 175. The freshman Wilson took second at IESA state a year ago and will be looking to make some noise in his first season as a Wildcat.

At 190, Dziuban will go with Logan Van Duyne.

"We expect good things from him this year," added Dziuban.

The 'Cats are looking to stay right around .500, winning as many matches as they lose and he thinks they can get there with the talent they possess.

"We're well on the way to being .500 and to win as many duals as we can. That'll be-I mean if we go .500, I'm a happy coach."

The Wildcat matmen will have to dig down deep during the first half of their schedule because it is loaded. Their season began last night (Tuesday) as they had a dual match with a tough Seneca team.

That will be followed by

their Illinois Central Eight Conference Quad which will feature Reed-Custer and Herscher on Thursday at Herscher. On Saturday, they'll travel to compete in a tough Pontiac dual. They will welcome in Bishop Mac and Sandwich on December 15th and will compete in Abe's Rumble on December 29-30.

This is all before their first match with the defending state champion Coalers on January 4th. The Princeton Invite will follow that match on January 5th before they compete in the Comet Classic (1/13), the ICE Tournament (1/20) and the regional (2-3).

"Yeah, we don't have an easy schedule. That's for sure. We go down south in the middle of December and wrestle 10 times in two days. That's a lot of wrestling in that sense. Some of our wrestlers are going to run through some grinders of competition. Then, we go to the Princeton one two weekends later. Then, I

think it's every weekend after Princeton that there is some sort of tournament that we'll have to wrestle so it's just a tough part of the season where there are just no breaks.

They're going to rely on their toughness and endurance to get through this grueling schedule.

"All of our kids buy into this whole working hard, networking other teams that we might not necessarily be at scale since we're so inexperienced but that doesn't stop us from working hard and getting in great shape to win matches. We're fresh in the third period rather than dying. We're pushing the match and they're making mistakes and helping us win our matches."

Dziuban will have both Eddie Van Duyne and Jake Murphy back to help him get this team to where they want to be. Cameron Shields and other former wrestlers will help out as well.

Lady 'Cats lose tough battle with Manteno



Photo by Eric Fisher
FIGHTING THROUGH MANTENO defenders to draw a foul is WHS senior Lexi Liaromatis.



Photo by Eric Fisher
PUTTING UP A SHOT for the Wilmington Lady Cats is junior Anna Morgan during Thursday night's game.



Photo by Eric Fisher
LADY CAT Alaina Clark drives the lane against Manteno during Thursday night's game. Manteno defeated Wilmington 54-30.



Photo by Eric Fisher
WHS SOPHOMORE Melia Hincerick goes up for a shot against Manteno. The Lady 'Cats ended up losing 54-30.

NOTICE OF PROPOSED PROPERTY TAX INCREASE FOR THE MANHATTAN FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

I. A public hearing to approve a proposed property tax levy increase for the MANHATTAN FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT for 2023 will be held on December 18, 2023 at 4:30 p.m. at the District Fire Station, located at 100 Park Road, Manhattan, Illinois.

Any person desiring to appear at the public hearing and present testimony to the taxing district may contact President William Moncrief c/o Manhattan Fire Protection District, 100 Park Road, Manhattan, Illinois, telephone (815) 478-3197.

II. The corporate and special purpose property taxes extended or abated for 2022 were \$6,302,940.

The proposed corporate and special purpose property taxes to be levied for 2023 are \$6,791,400. This represents a 7.75% increase over the previous year.

III. The property taxes extended for debt service and public building commission leases for 2022 were \$0.00.

The estimated property taxes to be levied for debt service and public building commission leases for 2023 are \$0.00. This represents a 0% increase or decrease over the previous year.

IV. The total property taxes extended or abated for 2022 were \$6,302,940.

The estimated total property taxes to be levied for 2023 are \$6,791,400. This represents a 7.75% increase over the previous year.

NOTICE OF PROPOSED PROPERTY TAX INCREASE FOR WILMINGTON COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 209-U

I. A public hearing to approve a proposed property tax levy increase for Wilmington Community Unit School District No. 209-U for 2023 will be held on Monday, December 11, 2023 at 6:15 P.M. at the Wilmington High School, 209U Wildcat Court, Wilmington, Illinois 60481.

Any person desiring to appear at the public hearing and present testimony to the taxing district may contact Mr. Kevin Feeney, Superintendent of Schools, 209U Wildcat Court, Wilmington, Illinois 60481. Phone: 815-926-1751.

II. The corporate and special purpose property taxes extended or abated for 2022 were \$9,030,445.

The proposed corporate and special purpose property taxes to be levied for 2023 are \$11,288,057. This represents a 25.00% increase over the previous year.

III. The property taxes extended for debt service and public building commission leases for 2022 were \$2,445,375.18.

The estimated property taxes to be levied for debt service and public building commission leases for 2023 are \$2,447,950.00. This represents a .11% increase over the previous year.

IV. The total property taxes extended or abated for 2022 were \$11,475,821. The estimated total property taxes to be levied for 2023 are \$13,736,007. This represents a 19.70% increase over the previous year.

WILDCAT SPORTS

'Cats open with heart-breaker but display a defense that will be tough to beat

BY SHAWN LONG
SPORTS CORRESPONDENT

The Wilmington boys basketball team opened its season on Friday against the rival Comets. After just three practices after getting a late start due to a 14-week football season, the Wildcats suffered a 36-34 nail biting loss to the Comets.

The 'Cats struggled with scoring in the early going, trailing by as many as 10 points. But they battled back in the second half, taking a two-point lead with two minutes left.

The visitors tied it up 34-34 with 40 seconds left as Reid Juster tried to muscle the ball in but the Comets got the rebound.

They hustled it down the court and fed it to center Jacob Reardon who got off a shot under the basket despite three defenders as time expired to get the win.

Reid Juster led Wilmington with 12 points and 12 rebounds. Joey Cortese tallied 11 points and 12 rebounds while Lucas Rink and Ryan Nelson finished with 4 points and 4 rebounds each. Kyle Farrell had 3 points and 4 assists.

It was an opener that proved Wilmington can compete with its scrappy defense.

This season, they need to win key conference games like that. They're going to rely on their defense to do just that.

The 'Cats were 5-9 in games against the Illinois Central Eight Conference and were 7-5 outside of the conference. The key is going to be capturing wins against ICE. They got that chance on Friday and had another one last night against Manteno. Second year Wildcat coach Doug Krop knows just how important conference games like that are.

"We expect Streater and Manteno to be at the top of the conference," said Krop. "We circle every conference game and put a huge emphasis on preparing for them."

They'll get their chance to face Streater later in the season when the Bulldogs come to Wilmington on Jan. 12th. They'll get a revenge match against Reed-Custer before they travel to Coal City on Jan. 30th for a another rival matchup. That will set them up for another contest with Streater on February 13th before their regionals.

Krop has high expectations for the 'Cats this season.

"We want to win 20 games, be one of the top three teams in the ICE, win our Christmas tournament while also capturing a regional title, and I think we are capable of doing it with the roster we have."

The 'Cats bring back a 15-man roster that consists of Brysen Meents (Fr.) Drew Jackson (Jr.), Juster (Sr.), Nelson (Jr.), Ryan Kettman (So.), Rink (Jr.), Farrell (Jr.), Jake Castle (Sr.), Brycen Feil (Jr.), Darren Morris (Sr.) Reagan Bolin (Jr.), Cade McCubbin (Sr.), Braeden Anderson (Sr.) and Cortese (Sr.)

Krop plans to use Farrell (point guard), Rink (shooting forward), Nelson (power forward), Juster (shooting guard) and Cortese (center) as his starting five to start the season. He notes McCubbin will be slotted in when he returns from an injury.

"I love Kyle Farrell's defense," added Krop. "Kyle took on a lot of top scorers from last year and held them well below their average. Reid (Juster) is a stat sheet stuffer. He was second on the team in every statistical category last year and affects the game in so many ways. Cade (McCubbin) is a great coach on the floor and is the leader of our team.

"Joey (Cortese) is a good post player and I'm looking for him to be close to a double-double this year. Lucas (Rink) should provide some shooting for us while Ryan (Nelson) brings toughness and rebounding."

Krop is also excited about the crop of young players who will be joining the team as freshmen. Players with the potential to be called up include Declan Moran, Cooper Holman, Tyler Krand and Meents who will all play up at some point during the year. Sophomore players Nate Cupples and Kettman are expected to improve every week.

The 'Cats are going to be a tough out for anybody this year as their defense will stifle opponents.

"I feel defense, toughness and execution are our strengths this year."

Krop will have Nolan Smith (varsity assistant), Sean Micetich (JV coach) and RJ Van Duyne (freshmen coach) back to help him out.

Wilmington will host Herscher on Friday and Coal City on Tuesday.



Photo by Eric Fisher

WHS JUNIOR Lucas Rink passes the ball down low during Friday night's game against RCHS. Rink had four points and four rebounds.



Photo by Eric Fisher

WHS SENIOR Joey Cortese goes up for a shot against RCHS during Friday night's game at home. Cortese had 11 points and 12 rebounds.



Photo by Eric Fisher

GOING UP FOR a shot against Reed-Custer is WHS Junior Ryan Nelson. Nelson had four points and four rebounds.

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WILDCAT KYLE FARRELL drives the lane against Reed-Custer. Farrell had three points and four rebounds.