

CENTRAL ILLINOIS Business

October | November 2024

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2024 FORTY UNDER 40

RECOGNIZING YOUNG AREA PROFESSIONALS FOR THEIR
ACHIEVEMENTS, LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT



MAN OF THE YEAR

JEREMY
THORPE



WOMAN OF THE YEAR

ALYSSA
ANDERSON

Sponsored by Central Illinois Business Magazine, The News-Gazette and Busey Bank

From the editor's desk



It's one of my favorite times of year — and not just because football season's

in full swing, the baseball playoffs and hockey season just started, and Halloween's right around the corner.

It's Forty Under 40 time. Seeing each new class of difference-makers, who hail from all over the area and a wide variety of industries and businesses, big and small, always brings with it a nice shot of inspiration.

Over the next 40-odd pages, we'll show why the Class of 2024 is deserving of such an honor and hear from each winner, including our Man and Woman of the Year.

As we've done most years, we're celebrating them at a banquet luncheon set for Oct. 24 at the I Hotel and Conference Center.

If you happen to see them out and about — and you undoubtedly will, given the important roles they play in the community — be sure to congratulate them on a job well done.

They've certainly earned it.

— Niko

Niko Dugan is the Managing Editor of The News-Gazette. Reach him by email at ndugan@news-gazette.com or by phone at 217-393-8253.

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Jill Clements, Theodore Facer, Ryan Heiser, Tracy Parsons and Eric Porter selected Central Illinois Business magazine's Forty Under 40 Class of 2024.

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Our highly-sought-after facts and figures for the greater Central Illinois area.

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Business

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TOP LAWYERS

CHAMPAIGN-URBANA AREA

BASED UPON A SURVEY OF THEIR PEERS



These **LEADING LAWYERS** have been recommended by their peers to be among the **TOP LAWYERS** in Illinois.

Jeffrey I. Cisco	Cisco Law PC	Champaign	217.991.0409	Crim Def: DUI; Crim Def: Felon/Misd; Nursing Home Neg; PI: General; Work Comp
James D. Cottrell	James D Cottrell Law Office PC	Champaign	217.693.4905	Agriculture; Close/Private Held Bus; Land Use/Zoning; RE: Comm; Trust/Will/Estate
Larry A. Apfelbaum	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Workers' Compensation
Todd A. Bresney	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1520	Personal Injury: General
William J. Harrington	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Personal Injury: General
Robert M. Javoronok Jr.	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Personal Injury: General; Workers' Compensation
Kathy A. Olivero	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Workers' Compensation
John J. Waldman	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Workers' Compensation
Richard P. Klaus	Klaus LeFebvre & Wince LLP	Champaign	217.337.4700	Civil Appellate; Commercial Litigation; Personal Injury Defense: General
Thomas B. Borton	Livingston Barger Brandt & Schroeder LLP	Champaign	217.351.7479	Commercial Litigation; Medical Malpractice Defense; Prof'I Malpractice Defense
Kevin M. Toth	Livingston Barger Brandt & Schroeder LLP	Champaign	217.351.7479	Commercial Litigation; Medical Malpractice Defense; Prof'I Malpractice Defense
Joseph R. Wetzel	Livingston Barger Brandt & Schroeder LLP	Champaign	217.351.7479	Commercial Litigation; Medical Malpractice Defense; Personal Injury Def: General
Nicholas M. Schiro	Schiro & Themer	Danville	217.443.1721	Personal Injury: General; Workers' Compensation
Rowan E. Themer	Schiro & Themer	Champaign	217.607.0750	Personal Injury: General; Workers' Compensation
William A. Peithmann	The Peithmann Law Office	Mahomet	217.586.6102	Agriculture; RE: Commercial; RE: Residential; Tax: Individual; Trust/Will/Estate
Denise Knipp Bates	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Elder; Real Estate: Residential; Trust/Will/Estate
Justin N. Brunner	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Civil Rights/Constitutional; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; Medical Mal Def; PI Def General
Eric S. Chovanec	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Employment: Management; Labor: Management; Workers' Compensation Defense
James D. Green	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Ins/Ins Coverage/Reins; Personal Injury Defense: General
Richard R. Harden	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Medical Malpractice Defense; Personal Injury Defense: General
Kenneth D. Reifsteck	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Civil Appellate; Workers' Compensation Defense
Nathaniel M. Schmitz	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Close/Private Held Business; RE: Commercial; RE: Residential; Trust/Will/Estate
John M. Sturmanis	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Workers' Compensation Defense
Lott H. Thomas	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Trust/Will/Estate
John T. Wozniak	Wozniak & Associates	Urbana	217.367.1647	Close/Private Held Bus; Real Estate: Commercial; RE: Residential; Trust/Will/Estate

These **EMERGING LAWYERS** have been identified by their peers to be among the **TOP LAWYERS** in Illinois who are age 40 or younger OR who have been admitted to the practice of law for 10 or fewer years.

Gina Couri-Cyphers	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Personal Injury: General
Nathan T. Kolb	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Civil Appellate; Ins/Ins Coverage/Reins; Medical Mal Def; PI Defense: General

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www.LeadingLawyers.com

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CONGRATULATIONS ALYSSA!



Congratulations to Alyssa Anderson, our amazing Larkin's Place Director, on being named Central Illinois Business Magazine's 40 Under 40 Woman of the Year! This recognition is so well-deserved. Your heart, passion, and dedication to inclusivity shine in everything you do, and we are beyond grateful to have you on our team. Thank you for your incredible work with Larkin's Place, ensuring we remain a place for all! We are proud of you!

Love, your Y Family



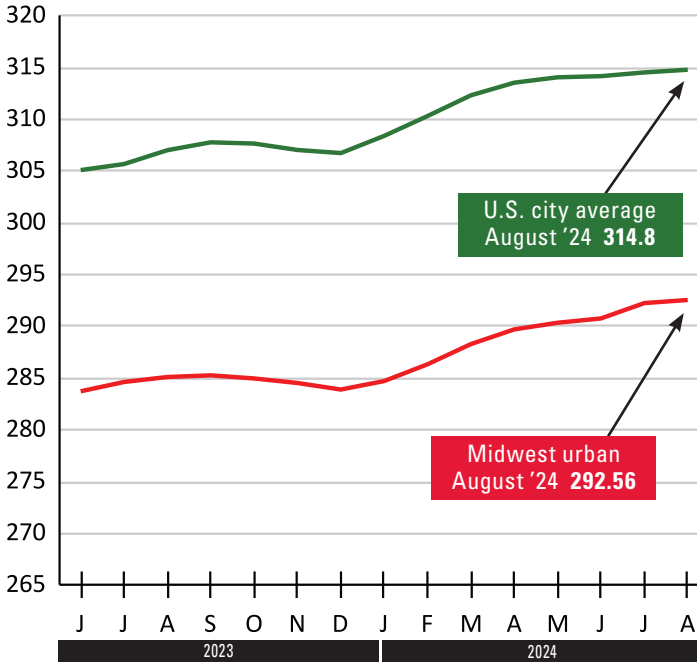
STEPHENS FAMILY YMCA
www.sf-ymca.net



INDICATORS

Consumer price index

The CPI measures average price changes of goods and services over time, with a reference base of 100 in 1982-84. To put that into context, a current CPI of 270.75 means a marketbasket of goods and services that cost \$100 in 1982-84 now costs \$270.75.



Willard Airport passenger totals

Monthly totals	August '24	August '23	Change
Enplanements	7,859	5,821	▲ 35.0%

YTD totals	August '24	August '23	Change
Enplanements	54,394	45,041	▲ 20.8%

Annual totals	2023	2022	Change
Enplanements	70,355	63,128	▲ 11.4%

Weekly grain prices

Unofficial prices for grain crops for the week of Oct. 7, 2024. Figures are for this week and the percentage change compared with a year ago.

(b) = per bushel; (t) = per ton; (100 wt.) = per hundredweight

Grain	Oct. 7, 2024	2023
Central Illinois Corn (b)	4.25	▼ -13%
Central Illinois Soybean (b)	9.86	▼ -23.2%
Central Illinois 48% Soybean Meal Rail (t)	358.80	▼ -0.06%
Hard Red Winter Wheat (b)	5.23	na
Truck to Kansas City		
Dark Northern Spring Wheat (b)	na	na
14% MN, Rail		
Soft White Wheat Portland (b)	6.88	na
Sorghum, Kansas City (100 wt.) Rail	na	na

Source: USDA Livestock & Grain Market News

Hotel/motel statistics

Total amount of revenue generated in Champaign and Urbana by hotels and motels for room rentals only.

TOTAL REVENUE		
August '24	July '24	Change
\$412,885.60	\$482,947.33	▼ -14.51%
YEAR-TO-DATE TOTALS		
2024	2023	Change
\$3,398,497.97	\$3,639,941.70	▼ -6.63%

Source: Cities of Champaign and Urbana

Prices at the pump

Average price per gallon of regular unleaded gas as of Oct. 4, 2024.

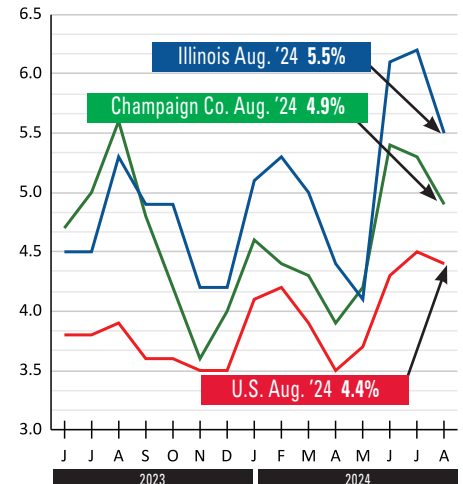
Area	October '24	October '23
Bloomington-Normal	\$3.18	\$3.58
Champaign-Urbana	\$3.23	\$3.66
Chicago	\$3.86	\$4.25
Danville	\$3.31	\$3.63
Decatur	\$3.25	\$3.51
Illinois	\$3.36	\$3.78
U.S.	\$3.18	\$3.79

Source: AAA

Unemployment rates for Central Illinois counties, state and nation

County	Labor Force	Jobless	Aug. '24 (%)	July '24 (%)	Aug. '23 (%)	Change Month (%)	Change Year (%)
Champaign	111,741	5,485	4.9	5.3	5.1	▲ -0.4	▲ -0.2
Coles	22,678	1,155	5.1	6.1	5.5	▲ -1.0	▲ -0.4
Douglas	10,371	410	4.0	4.8	4.2	▲ -0.8	▲ -0.2
Edgar	9,055	385	4.3	5.3	4.4	▲ -1.0	▲ -0.1
Ford	6,408	299	4.7	5.7	5.0	▲ -1.0	▲ -0.3
Iroquois	12,938	620	4.8	5.4	4.7	▲ -0.6	▼ 0.1
Macon	45,019	2,830	6.3	7.4	6.8	▲ -1.1	▲ -0.5
McLean	91,346	4,393	4.8	5.5	4.6	▲ -0.7	▼ 0.2
Moultrie	7,170	288	4.0	4.7	4.2	▲ -0.7	▲ -0.2
Piatt	8,738	344	3.9	4.7	4.4	▲ -0.8	▲ -0.5
Vermilion	31,876	2,186	6.9	7.9	6.8	▲ -1.0	▼ 0.1
Region	357,340	18,395	4.9	5.7	5.1	▲ -0.8	▲ -0.2
State	6,523,426	357,431	5.5	6.2	5.1	▲ -0.7	▼ 0.4
U.S.	168,763,000	7,415,000	4.4	4.5	3.9	▲ -0.1	▼ 0.5

Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security, U.S. Department of Labor. Figures not seasonally adjusted.

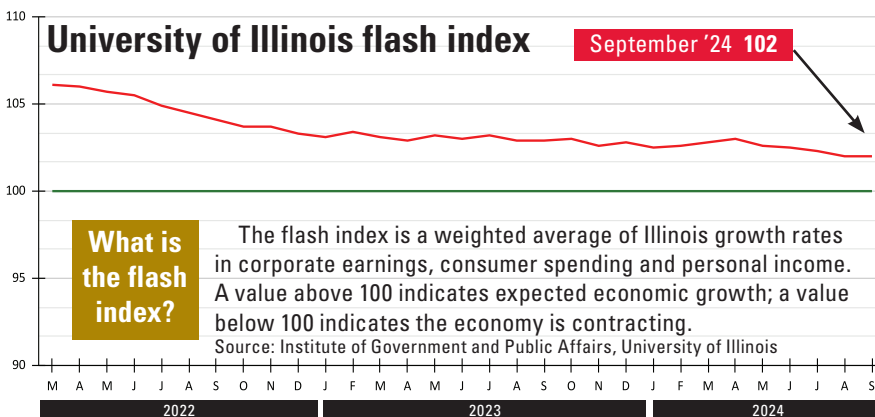


Home sales

Total units sold, including condominiums, by most-recent quarter.

County							Median sales price		
	2Q 2024	2Q 2023	Pct. Change	2024	2023	Pct. Change	2Q 2024	2Q 2023	Pct. Change
Champaign	590	695	▼ -15.1%	992	1,096	▼ -9.5%	\$242,000	\$220,700	▲ 9.7%
Coles	140	157	▼ -10.8%	243	266	▼ -8.6%	\$131,875	\$110,000	▲ 19.9%
Douglas	33	52	▼ -36.5%	60	94	▼ -36.2%	\$145,250	\$141,000	▲ 3.0%
Edgar	41	32	▲ 28.1%	70	68	▲ 2.9%	\$89,900	\$85,100	▲ 5.6%
Ford	62	46	▲ 34.8%	86	74	▲ 16.2%	\$142,000	\$123,500	▲ 15.0%
Iroquois	69	62	▲ 11.3%	128	107	▲ 19.6%	\$152,000	\$131,000	▲ 16.0%
Macon	360	346	▲ 4.0%	627	591	▲ 6.1%	\$130,000	\$131,000	▼ -0.8%
McLean	574	574	▲ 0.0%	901	927	▼ -2.8%	\$257,500	\$242,000	▲ 6.4%
Moultrie	19	34	▼ -44.1%	34	54	▼ -37.0%	\$100,000	\$101,950	▼ -1.9%
Piatt	71	50	▲ 42.0%	99	88	▲ 12.5%	\$187,900	\$184,950	▲ 1.6%
Vermilion	181	173	▲ 4.6%	334	294	▲ 13.6%	\$104,900	\$105,000	▼ -0.1%
Illinois	37,374	38,750	▼ -3.6%	62,117	64,632	▼ -3.9%	\$302,500	\$280,000	▲ 8.0%

Source: Illinois Association of Realtors



Primary Mortgage Market Survey

Freddie Mac surveys lenders each week on the rates, fees and points for the most popular mortgage products. The following are the average rates for the week of Oct. 3, 2024, for the U.S. and for the North Central region, which includes Illinois, and the average rates for the U.S. one year ago. The Primary Mortgage Market Survey no longer publishes fees/points or adjustable rates, as of Nov. 17, 2022.

Mortgage type	U.S. Oct. '24	U.S. Oct. '23
30-year fixed	6.12%	7.49%
15-year fixed	5.25%	6.78%

Source: Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.

CONGRATULATIONS!

2024 FORTY UNDER 40



Tierra Brown:
Urbana High
School



Kristi Kaplan:
Yankee Ridge
Multilingual
School



Domesha
Perkins-Nunn:
Tiger Academy



Thank you for supporting our students,
staff, families and community.

Congratulations!

40 LEADERS UNDER 40



JEREMY THORPE

Forty Under 40 Man of the Year
Officer | Charitable Relations Specialist II



ALYSSA COMBS

Senior Vice President
Internal Audit Manager

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MEET THE JUDGES

FORTY UNDER
40 2024

CENTRAL ILLINOIS BUSINESS MAGAZINE
THANKS ITS PANEL FOR ITS HARD WORK IN
SELECTING THE FORTY UNDER 40 CLASS OF 2024



JILL CLEMENTS

STATION MANAGER, ILLINOIS SOUL 101.1 FM
ILLINOIS PUBLIC MEDIA

Clements was born and raised in Champaign, and earned a bachelor's degree in radio-television from Southern Illinois University.

She was instrumental in the creation of large promotional events while working in the Chicago market at WVAZ V103 FM, including "An Expo for Today's Black Woman," "The Phenomenal Woman" Gala and "The World's Largest Steppers Contest."

After joining Illinois Public Media, she created "News, Brews and Beatz," a community-affairs series that focused on community solutions regarding gun violence that aired on both WILL-TV and YouTube.

In February, she was the visionary leader for the launch of Illinois Soul 101.1 FM, and was recently named the inaugural station manager. She currently serves on the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts Advancement Council, and in September was recognized as a Media Trailblazer by the NAACP Champaign County branch.

THEODORE FACER

ATTORNEY
FACER LAW OFFICE

Facer joined the family firm as the second generation of Facer Law Office in November 2023, working side-by-side with his father, Thorpe. With a unique background as a former LeRoy police officer, he brings a wealth of experience and profound commitment to justice to his legal practice.

A graduate of the University of Illinois Chicago School of Law, Facer embarked on a career in law with a strong foundation in public service. His journey culminated in his official swearing-in ceremony at the UI College of Law.

Facer's approach to the legal profession is characterized by integrity, diligence and a deep sense of duty. He understands the complexities of the legal landscape and is committed to protecting families from the high cost of long-term care.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, Theodore is a devoted family man, finding strength and inspiration in the support of his wife, Stephanie, and their daughter, Kennedy.



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RYAN HEISER

PRESIDENT AND CEO
FISHER NATIONAL BANK

Heiser's banking career started in 1997, and he has worked with Fisher National Bank since 2006. Prior to joining Fisher National, he was a commercial loan officer at Peoples State Bank.

Heiser has been an ambassador for his community, serving on organizational boards like the Mahomet Chamber of Commerce, Champaign Parks Foundation and Community Bankers Association of Illinois.

Heiser is a proud member of the Forty under 40 Class of 2013.

TRACY PARSONS

COMMUNITY RELATIONS MANAGER
CITY OF CHAMPAIGN

Parsons is responsible for managing the Community Outreach and Engagement Division of the city's Equity and Engagement Department and facilitating the work of the Champaign County Community Coalition. The coalition's mission is to direct and implement sustainable strategies to improve youth and family outcomes by building solid partnerships and collaborations with diverse community partners in youth development, healthy youth, police/community relations and youth violence prevention.

Parsons has been with the city since 2015. Prior to that, he served in leadership roles such as project director of the ACCESS Initiative of Champaign County and president/CEO of the Urban League of Champaign County. His involvement in the community has afforded him the opportunity to serve on the boards of several businesses and social-service organizations. He also received the first "Joint" keys to the cities of Champaign and Urbana.

He earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from Northwestern University.



ERIC PORTER

BROKER, OWNER, TEAM LEADER
THE REAL ESTATE GROUP INC.

Porter was raised in Champaign and brings over 38 years of real-estate experience to the area.

Porter is a partner, broker and certified specialist at The Real Estate Group in Champaign.

He is married to his lovely wife, Davonne, with whom he has two children, both married, and two grandsons.

He is proud to work and volunteer in his local community.



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WOMAN OF THE YEAR

ALYSSA ANDERSON | 33

Director, Larkin's Place, **Stephens Family YMCA**

Story Luke Taylor ✎ Photos Robin Scholz

Advocating for people with disabilities has been Alyssa Anderson's lifelong passion and goal, and working at the Stephens Family YMCA has given her more opportunities to do so than ever before.

"I can't believe I get to wake up every day and do this job and live my passion, because it doesn't ever really feel like work," Anderson said. "There are busy times, but I find so much enjoyment in what I do and so much connection with the families. The fact they pay me for it is just icing on the cake."

Her efforts have earned her recognition as the 2024 Forty Under 40 Woman of the Year.



2024 Forty Under 40 Woman of the Year Alyssa Anderson, director of Larkin's Place at the Stephens Family YMCA in Champaign, works with Wylan Bird, 12, of Champaign in the teen hangout lounge.



Alyssa Anderson gets daughter Millie, 3, ready to go home with husband Simon and son Hank, 7, while she stays at the Stephens Family YMCA in Champaign.

After studying at the University of Illinois, Anderson started her career with 10 years of teaching special education in the Champaign school district.

She was inspired to pursue special ed after growing up with a sibling who had an intellectual disability.

"I watched my parents struggle to navigate the education system,"

Anderson said. "As I was making really large-scale choices about my future career, my sister was transitioning out of high school into this adult world where my parents had no support, and it was horrendous to watch. I decided that I wanted to be part of the solution."

With that in mind, Anderson never had any intention of leaving the

education field behind.

She heard about the opening for director of the YMCA's Larkin's Place from a friend who worked at the YMCA and encouraged her to come in and learn more.

That's what she did; within a few days, she had an official interview, where she was offered the job on the spot.

Rather than feeling like she was stuck trying to manage within a system she couldn't change, Anderson said that directing Larkin's Place made her feel like she was the one creating the systems.

"I get to determine what the needs are and how we go about meeting those needs, as opposed to a school district that has so many laws and regulations and things," Anderson said.

One other thing happened during Anderson's teaching career: the birth of her daughter.

The Anderson family knew before she was born that she had spina bifida, a condition where the spine doesn't develop properly in utero, and she was one of the first children in Illinois to receive treatment through fetal surgery for the condition, "which was really cool," Anderson said.

This caused a huge shift in perspective for Anderson.

"I love my daughter. She's the most important thing, her and my son," she said. "But her care needs are very vast, and it is quite challenging for my husband and I to do all of those things. I think trying to explain that, even to friends who are special-education teachers, I don't even know if people fully grasp it."

It was different having a person with a disability as a family member to care for, rather than students who would all go to their own homes at the end of the day.

This also gave Anderson new perspective on physical disabilities.

"While I am ultra-passionate about disabilities in general, I have a very, very special place in my heart in terms of advocacy and programming for adaptive recreational opportunities," she said.

That led her to create the Stephens Family YMCA's first wheelchair-

basketball program.

Youth wheelchair-basketball programs aren't terribly common, in part because they're expensive; the chairs used for play are different from the ones used to get around day to day.

Anderson remembers being nervous to ask her bosses to start such a big project after having been employed for only around 6 weeks at the Y, but they got on board right away.

The YMCA partnered with Champaign-Urbana Special Education, of which Anderson is a board member, and the University of Illinois' Disability Resources and Educational Services loaned some chairs.

"It was really, really small, the first day of that practice," Anderson said. "We didn't have a team name, we didn't have jerseys, we didn't have anything. We just had kids and we had a coach who is a Paralympian."

Congratulations

40 UNDER FORTY

Wade Hoey

Austin Hogue

Joe Lamberson

Keith Norton

Peter Pasholk

Jimala Rogers

Chaya Sandler

Daniel Thies

Robert White

<<<

Congratulations to all the honorees especially our ECL graduates.

United Way
of Champaign County

“What an amazing gift that Champaign is just saturated with these highly skilled athletes and role models, too. My daughter is never going to grow up in a world in which she’s the only mobility-device user, because we see it all the time. We have access to the U of I and can take her there and can take her to the Y, and she sees people in wheelchairs. That’s a huge reason why I wanted this team to be a thing.”

Two years later, Kaitlyn Eaton still coaches the team, and a \$35,000 gift from the Champaign-Urbana Elks Lodge was enough to jump-start funding for chairs, uniforms, trailers and a coaching stipend.

The team remains small, but it’s able to partner with another small team out of Peoria to compete in a handful of tournaments.

“It has been my biggest professional accomplishment, I would say, solely just because we’re giving these kids an opportunity that truly wouldn’t happen anywhere else,” Anderson said.

Wheelchair basketball has been a huge project, but it’s far from her only accomplishment at the Y.

In the day to day, Anderson works with individuals who visit the center to assess their accessibility needs and offer whatever help she can.

She has also worked to make ongoing programs accessible to as many people as possible, as well as to create and support programming specifically for people with disabilities.

“The best part about it is we’re doing fun things, right? We’re not a school. We’re not working on reading, writing and math. We’re not helping kids get over a cognitive deficit that is really hard for them,” Anderson said. “We’re doing art, we’re doing music, we’re doing dance, we’re doing cooking, things that are just really fun.”

The YMCA also offers programs like speech and water therapy that



ABOVE: Alyssa Anderson waves to a young friend in the teen hangout lounge at the Stephens Family YMCA in Champaign. **BELOW:** Anderson talks with Daniel Calero, 13, of Champaign, in the lounge.



From the nominator

“Every day, Alyssa brings positivity and enthusiasm, fostering an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and supported. Her efforts go beyond the walls of her organization as she actively builds bridges with local organizations, collaborating to enhance opportunities and supports systems for individuals with disabilities in our community” — **Jeff Dobrik**, COO, Stephens Family YMCA

Anderson coordinates.

She’s also on the boards of CU Able and the Illinois Spina Bifida Association, and was previously a member of the disability advisory council for state Sen. Paul Faraci, D-Champaign.

Anderson said she appreciates

opportunities to push for legislative change as a larger-scale version of the work she does in the local community.

Outside of her disability advocacy, Anderson is also proud to be chapter adviser for her sorority, Alpha Xi Delta, and a member of the Westview Elementary School PTA. 

MAN OF THE YEAR

JEREMY THORPE | 38

Charitable Relations Specialist, **Busey Bank**

The window next to Jeremy Thorpe's desk at Busey Bank in Champaign looks out toward Christie Clinic, where he can see a tree that was planted in honor of his grandfather, Eddie Thorpe Sr., who worked at Christie for decades as a janitor.

Story and Photos  Anthony Zillis

Jeremy Thorpe knew he could've brought in more revenue when he worked for the Indianapolis Colts from 2018 to 2021, if only he stopped offering discounted tickets.

Offering kids from his hometown of Champaign-Urbana the chance to

take in an NFL game for the first time, though, was worth the financial hit.

"Going to an NFL game is something that a lot of kids don't get to experience," Thorpe said. "So I was able to work with them. There's always been a little bit of me that wanted to find those kind of tickets to provide an opportunity."



Jeremy Thorpe points out the plaque next to a tree planted in the parking lot at Christie Clinic in downtown Champaign in honor of his grandfather Eddie Thorpe Sr., who was a janitor there for decades. The younger Thorpe's office is at the Busey Executive Center in the background.

Despite the markdowns, Thorpe did just fine at his job. On his desk at Busey Bank's Executive Center in downtown Champaign sit three small glass awards, including one that reads, "2019 Revenue Champion."

But when he decided to move back to Champaign-Urbana, where his family has lived for generations, he decided to take a job where helping others was the goal and not a hindrance.

As Busey's community relations and marketing specialist, Thorpe works with nonprofits in the Champaign-Urbana area and Indiana to sponsor events and coordinate volunteer opportunities for Busey employees, including a recent Habitat for Humanity home build. He also took the lead in creating a collection of kids' artwork on display in an exhibit at the bank's Urbana headquarters and is spearheading a partnership with DREAM, which provides services to kids and young adults.

"It kind of made sense to step into this role where the overall role was giving back and that would be my daily thing," he said, "where I would be able to reach out to organizations to provide the financial help that we can offer, as well as the volunteerism. ... It's always been a little bit there for me to help those in need, and now it's an everyday thing for me."

After starting this new role in October 2022, Thorpe increased the organization's volunteer hours in Champaign from 4,608 that year to 5,500 the next.

For his efforts, he was named the 2024 Forty Under 40 Man of the Year.

His penchant for leading efforts to help others, though, is nothing new.

"As a kid, he was always a leader," said his father, Ed Thorpe Jr. "Whatever it was, whatever he was involved in, he was either chosen to be the leader or always stepped up to be the leader. He's always wanted to be the person that's going to go and lead and go and stand up for someone else, or stand up for his family, or just do the best that he can at everything he does."



From his cubicle, Thorpe doesn't have to look far for a reminder of his family's legacy. When he peers out his window, he can spot a crabapple tree on the southwest corner of Christie Clinic's parking lot that is adorned with a plaque that reads, "In Loving Memory, Eddie Thorpe Sr., 1925-2002."

For 50 years, Thorpe's grandfather worked as a janitor at the clinic. While his work uniform didn't necessarily fit his immaculate sense of style, he always showed up in freshly pressed clothes. He was so dedicated to his job, Thorpe said, that his bosses finally took away his keys when he was suffering from the effects of cancer near the end of his life.



Jeremy Thorpe has worked as a charitable relations specialist at Busey Bank since October 2022.
RIGHT: Thorpe works with other Busey employees who are helping to build a house in Champaign for Habitat for Humanity of Champaign County.

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From the nominator

"Jeremy's commitment is unmatched. He's always willing to go the extra mile, help others and smile while he's doing it. He's thoughtful with his approach, inclusive to all and leaves everyone in his presence feeling brighter, lighter and stronger." — **Deanna Capel**, executive vice president, Busey Bank; member, Forty Under 40 Class of 2023

"He continued to come to work and never actually retired," Thorpe said. "They finally said, 'You can go home and rest and relax now.'"

In terms of his work ethic and sense of style, Thorpe took his cues from both of his grandfathers, who never went to church without wearing a suit and tie.

His desire to help others came from his parents. After his mother's job at Prudential Insurance was terminated after 30 years with the company, she decided to volunteer at Salt and

Light Ministries for multiple years instead of going back to work immediately, he said. His father was always willing to mentor kids without father figures, and both parents took their kids to give out Thanksgiving dinners to those in need.

In 2015, Thorpe saw a post on social media that prompted him to start DAPPER University, a mentorship organization that sought to change the way young Black men were perceived through fashion, education and aspects of their lives. He used "DAPPER" as an acronym for "Dress, Attitude, Pride, Plan, Education and Respect." Eventually, Thorpe used his organization to put together a "Back to School" event that included a school-supply giveaway along with free haircuts.

"I got together with some of my friends here locally, and decided to just paint a picture of us in a different light," he said. "A lot of us like to dress up, had a little bit of a passion for fashion. So we did a couple photo shoots, just to kind of highlight, you know, some different styles, and show that there were different layers to young Black men."

His desire to help area youth hasn't gone away. With Busey, Thorpe has partnered with DREAM, an organization that offers programming and mentorship to children and their families. Busey has supported the organization financially, but now, Thorpe is organizing a weekly evening for volunteers from Busey to help DREAM students with their homework. Thorpe will soon join DREAM's development committee.



It was never a given that Thorpe would become entrenched in the Champaign-Urbana community. Growing up, he didn't even know if he wanted to stay in the area despite his family's deep roots.

"Definitely not," he said. "I had no idea that I really wanted to be involved in the community at that level."

It didn't take long for him to settle back into his hometown, though, when he moved back two years ago.

On one of his first days at Busey, Thorpe took his lunch and walked across the street to a bench near his grandfather's crabapple tree, which has grown steadily in that spot for the last 21 years. As he ate, he thought about what the community meant to him.

"It feels like home here," he said. The tree is "just a constant reminder that, you know, he wanted my dad to be better than him, and my dad wanted my brother and I to be better than him. And it's just a constant reminder that my family has always worked hard. And even in, I guess, a humble position as a janitor, my grandfather was respected enough because of his attitude and things that he did there to have a tree planted outside for him.

"It's a constant reminder of where I've come from, and I just hope to leave a legacy for my kids as well." 



GHADA ADHAMI | 39

Dentist, Owner, All Smiles Family Dentistry



Winners' portraits by Robin Scholz

Community involvement: I have worked with some amazing Muslim community members to help open the only Islamic School in Champaign-Urbana, Hidayah Academy. As a dentist, I frequently volunteer for the yearly "Give Kids a Smile" event, where I travel to local schools to teach students the importance of maintaining good oral health and ways to take care of their teeth and gums. I also volunteer at Parkland College's free cleaning and checkup days. Lastly, my dental office hosts the Candy Buy Back program where we purchase children's excess Halloween candy and donate it to local nonprofit organizations in the community.

Proudest professional accomplishment: I have two. The first is opening my own dental office. With mentorship from the Small Business Development Center at the Champaign County Economic Development Corp., I was able to successfully open All Smiles Family Dentistry, which is now celebrating its six-year anniversary! The second is the success of opening an Islamic School in C-U. This has been a need in our community for many years, and it is an honor to be involved in a school that will serve my children and future generations to come.

I attribute my success to ... my supportive family and being humble enough to learn from mistakes.

Best advice given or received? Everything happens for a reason, and when things don't work out sometimes, a better thing will come in its place.

The most important lesson I've learned in my professional career is ... Be humble; there will always be people who are better than you. Take advantage of the opportunity to learn from others and appreciate that there are people with differing skill sets.

From the nominator: "Dr. Adhami is a caring and hard-working leader with a passion for everything she sets her mind to, whether it's one-on-one patient care, serving disenfranchised individuals or her community generally." — Roaa Al-Heeti, sister-in-law

Forty UNDER 40 2024



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We proudly celebrate our board member for being named a Forty Under 40 recipient. Your leadership, dedication, and passion for empowering young women continue to inspire us all. We are honored to have you on our team!



GIRLS
GO FOR IT

PAIGE BENNETT | 32

Juvenile Detective, Urbana Police Department

Community involvement: I attend many resource fairs and community meetings dealing with mental health and homelessness. For the past seven years, I have attended numerous law-enforcement events such as Shop with a Cop, Touch-a-Truck, etc. In my role as a behavioral-health detective in our Crisis Co-Response Program, I've had the privilege of speaking to many students from elementary to college, as well as several community groups such as Rotary clubs and NAMI, on mental- and behavioral-health crisis response in the community.

Proudest professional accomplishment: Getting to work in our Crisis Co-Response Program since its inception and helping drive its success. I was able to network with many community leaders and essential social-service agencies. A close second is being chosen as a detective in our Criminal Investigations Division within seven years of becoming a police officer. In both of these roles, I have been able to advocate for vulnerable populations and do work that fuels my passion that I came into law enforcement with.

I attribute my success to ... firstly, my parents, for their never wavering support. I did not know I wanted to be in law enforcement until I was earning my bachelor's degree. They stood behind me and encouraged me to pursue my dreams. Secondly, my husband. He constantly encourages me, listens to me after a hard day and provides a safe place for me to come home to. I also attribute my success to my co-workers; working side by side with them has taught me a lot and many of them have become like family to me.

What's your one unbreakable rule? Always treat others with respect and kindness.

From the nominator: "Paige is a valuable teammate in an occupation where team members have to bring their A game for the greater good. Her education, determination and hard work are a fine example of why women are needed in the law enforcement, and how their perspective and involvement is very much needed in this occupation." — **Cory Koker**, *supervisor*



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TASHA BRASHER | 29

Community Social Worker, **Rantoul Police Department**



Community involvement: I am actively involved by responding to mental-health-related crisis calls, advocating for victims of crimes and providing therapeutic and peer support services to first responders.

I attribute my success to ... setting goals and believing in myself.

Best advice given or received? “No” is a complete sentence.

Something you may not know about me is ... I served in the Army as a military police officer.

Best decision you’ve ever made? Going back to school to get my master’s degree after having my son, as it allowed me to pursue my dreams while setting a strong example of perseverance and dedication for my family.

What’s your one unbreakable rule? Be kind to everyone; you never know what battles they might be silently fighting.

The most important lesson I’ve learned in my professional career is ... Being patient with others is something I’ve learned deeply as a social worker, especially when working with people in crisis. Crisis situations demand understanding and a calm presence, allowing individuals space to process what they are going through. Patience becomes a vital tool — not just for that single interaction, but also for fostering trust and ensuring they feel heard and supported.

From the nominator: “Tasha is the most dedicated and hard-working employee I have personally supervised. She continues to stretch herself personally and professionally, in an effort to better herself and our community. Her dedication is unmatched.” — **Christina Reifsteck**, *supervisor*



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TIERRA BROWN | 33

Career and Technical Education Business Teacher, Head Cheerleading Coach, Urbana High School

Community involvement: I am a co-coordinator for “Toyz N The Hood,” an initiative that distributes toys at Christmastime to high-poverty areas of Danville like Fair Oaks, Green Meadows and Vermilion Gardens. It was started by Glen Rowell who grew up in Fair Oaks. He wanted to give back to his community because he recognized that kids there were not as fortunate as other kids. This Christmas will be our ninth year.

Proudest professional accomplishment: Opening the first Black-owned dance studio in Danville. For so many years growing up, I was told that dance was just a hobby and I wouldn’t be able to make a career from it. I was told plenty of times that when I get older, I’ll need to get a “real job” because dance will not be able to sustain my lifestyle. Not only did I make it my “real job,” but I was able to inspire so many other young ladies that look like me in my community!

Best advice given or received? The best advice I have received was from reading the book “The Four Agreements” and applying them to my life: 1) Be impeccable with your words, 2) Don’t take anything personally, 3) Don’t make assumptions, and 4) Always do your best. Now, I live by these four concepts and teach them to my business students.

What’s your one unbreakable rule? “Find a Way or Make One,” the motto of my alma mater, Clark Atlanta University. I live by this rule!

My partner/best friend/mom would describe me as ... A God-fearing woman! A determined and passionate woman that is comfortable in her own skin and loves working to help develop the youth of any community.

From the nominator: “Tierra’s work with youth will leave an impact on the Champaign-Urbana and Danville communities for years to come. She shows them how to live out loud on stage and in the classroom. She also teaches them the technical skills to run a business and be their own boss one day.” — **Mary Catherine Roberson**, *colleague and 2022 Forty Under 40 Woman of the Year*



JARRETT CLEM | 39

Business Manager, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 601



Community involvement: I sit on multiple boards throughout our community, including the Parkland College Board of Trustees and the Champaign Workforce Innovation Board and recently was chair of the Champaign-Urbana Joint Electrical Apprenticeship Training Committee. Workforce development and training is my biggest passion.

Proudest professional accomplishment: Serving as business manager at IBEW Local 601. The business manager is elected by members to manage the daily business matters of the union and act as a liaison between the union and management during contract negotiations. I take pride in representing the hard-working families of my local, and I am honored that they have placed their trust in me.

I attribute my success to ... Throughout my life, I have been blessed with several role models who taught me that hard work, organization and dedication are key to accomplishing your goals. My wife is one. She has worked hard to build her career as a veterinarian and works long hours. Her success serves as a source of inspiration and is a testament to our shared value of hard work.

Best advice given or received? “Work as hard as you play, and play as hard as you work.” I strongly believe in hard work and being dedicated to what you do. I also believe you have to let your hair down and have a good time as well.

Best decision you’ve ever made? Marrying my wife. My wife is an incredible life partner who has given me a wonderful family and serves as a source of inspiration to me every day.

From the nominator: “Jarrett is passionate about his work and about all of the people that he works for. He honestly wants to lean everything he can so that he can be sure everyone under his care can have the best work outlook and benefits that he can get for them. I see this firsthand working in the office with him.” — **Deanna Lavoie**, *co-worker*

SARAH COLOMÉ | 38

CEO and Founder, **Collective Futures**



Community involvement: I serve on the fundraising and 50th anniversary planning committees for Rape Advocacy, Counseling and Education Services. I am also on the board and serve as treasurer for End Rape on Campus. I am on the leadership council for the Campus Advocacy and Prevention Professional Association and previously served on the board of the University YMCA.

Proudest professional accomplishment: In 2018, I was published in Ms. magazine after presenting at my dream national conference, all within a week. Places I'd revered became places I sat in. That would be tied with serving as an International Delegate to the Centre Hubertine Auclert and the Conseil régional d'Île-de-France in Paris in 2015, where I worked with global partners to discuss healthy relationships and anti-violence strategies through a youth-centered lens.

I attribute my success to ... hard work, yes, but even more so, the incredible community of women I am blessed to know — women who champion me, challenge me and support me. That, and my commitment to being authentic in everything I do.

Best advice given or received? Remove the notion that you need to earn rest. Rest is not a reward; it's a necessity. And it will find you if you don't make sure to find it.

Best decision you've ever made? Embracing the discomfort of setting boundaries. My health, relationships and company have benefited tremendously by (continually) cultivating this skill.

From the nominator: "Sarah is a dedicated, innovative and collaborative individual. She has had a profound effect on Champaign County, and her advocacy for survivors of interpersonal violence has had a national impact." — **Jaya Kolisetty**, executive director, *RACES*



Champaign County Government congratulates Financial Manager, Christopher Wilson, of Champaign County's Mental Health & Developmental Disabilities Boards on being named among the Forty Under 40 class of 2024!

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Ashley M. Davis

Business Faculty and
Program Director, Business
Administrative Technology
and Entrepreneurship



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ALYSSA COMBS | 39

Senior Vice President / Internal Audit Supervisor, Busey Bank

Community involvement: My primary commitment is providing sign-language interpreter services at my church on a biweekly basis. I enjoy the process of translating the service and the people I get to interact with. I also really enjoy the volunteering opportunities through my work. These allow me to see to the variety of programs available in the community and work with my coworkers on something other than audit.

Proudest professional accomplishment: Getting my CPA. It was a lot of studying, late nights and note cards, but it taught me what I could do, and I made some great friendships studying at the library.

I attribute my success to ... being tenacious and having a strong support system. The tenacity helps me to come back each day. The support system in my friends and family cheer me on and advise me with different perspectives when I face challenges.

Best advice given or received? Start small. It can often feel like everything needs to be done at once, but we need to pick one thing and start there. Then do it again.

My partner/best friend/mom would describe me as ... fun, thoughtful and industrious.

The most important lesson I've learned in my career is ... Be collaborative. It is always better when there are other perspectives, and I really like a good partnership — it creates friendships and makes for more lasting results.

To relax, I ... make something tangible. It uses a different part of my brain, and I enjoy the challenge of tackling something new, whether I am trying out a recipe or working on something around the house.

From the nominator: “She empowers her staff to explore skill sets beyond the stated job description when appropriate — allowing her to both encourage growth in others and build a cohesive and multifaceted team for herself and Busey.” — **Karen Rock**, *supervisor*



ASHLI DANCY | 31

Owner, BALM Beauty



Community involvement: I am a current board member of Girls Go For It — an organization that empowers girls to pursue their passions and achieve their dreams.

Proudest professional accomplishment: To date, it would have to be becoming a solo esthetician and starting my own business — celebrating three years in December!

Best advice given or received? The best advice I've received is to prioritize providing excellent customer service and creating a positive experience. Stay flexible and be willing to adapt to changes in the market or industry. Be open to feedback and use this feedback to make improvements and learn from both successes and failures. The best advice I can give is to maintain a healthy work-life balance. It's important to manage your time effectively and take care of your well-being. Also, network and build relationships.

Best decision you've ever made? Starting my own business, of course!

What's your one unbreakable rule? Always prioritize ethical practices and integrity. Be transparent and truthful in all business transactions, communications and relationships. Take responsibility for mistakes and work to correct them. This builds trust and credibility with current and potential clients.

The most important lesson I've learned in my career is ... to not be afraid to ask for help. You may be a professional, but that doesn't mean that you know everything. You don't know what you don't know, and being afraid to ask for help can hurt you more than you think.

From the nominator: “What sets Ashli apart is her unwavering dedication to empowering others. Her entrepreneurial journey is marked by her passion fostering confidence and self-worth in her clients. Ashli's innovative approach to beauty therapy not only enhances physical appearance but also nurtures the spirit.” — **Denise Poindexter**, *client and friend*

ASHLEY MICHELLE DAVIS | 39

Director, Business Administrative Technology Program, **Parkland College**; Owner, **Ashley's Waffle Baby**



Community involvement: I serve as the director of operations and minister of music for Grace Fellowship Church in Champaign; vice president of the TALKS Leadership and Literacy Movement Board of Advisers; a veteran basketball referee (IHSA for 20 years) for elementary, middle and high school sports; the sole proprietor of Ashley's Waffle Baby, a mobile cuisine offering; a member of the Banks, Bridgewater, Lewis Fine Arts Academy Board of Directors, and a conductor and member of the Martin Luther King Jr. Advocacy for Justice Celebration Choir.

Proudest professional accomplishment: Having my sustained service to college students acknowledged with numerous honors and awards, including the Outstanding Faculty Award; the Excellence in Service Award; the Strive Advocate Award; and the Presidential Award for Outstanding Service to the Student Body from the Illinois Student Senate Student Body.

I attribute my success to ... God's grace, favor, my loving family and friends, my commitment to constant improvement, and my unyielding work ethic.

Best advice given or received? Make it happen for yourself. Whatever "it" is, do not delay. Your life is waiting for you to live it.

Best decision you've ever made? I'm glad I never left Champaign. I was born and raised here, and I've stayed and worked to secure the legacy of my parents, the Rev. Dr. Harold Davis and Dr. Ollie Watts Davis, and create a legacy of my own. Also, I bought my house after the 2008 crash. That was a great decision. ;)

From the nominator: "Ashley is a multifaceted leader in the Champaign-Urbana community. She is also a loyal friend and mentor to many. I admire that she is faithful to all her professional endeavors and still maintains a balanced personal life." — **Denise Vaughn, friend**

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