

CENTRAL ILLINOIS Business

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BOSS LADIES

Celebrating 40 years of the difference-making Executive Club of Champaign County

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.

Delmar K. Banner	Banner Ford LLP	Champaign	217.353.4900	AG; Close/Private Held; Real Estate: Comm; Real Estate: Finance; Trust/Will/Estate
Chad S. Beckett	Beckett Law Office PC	Urbana	217.328.0263	Class Act/Mass Tort Pltf; Close/Private Held; Real Estate: Comm; Trust/Will/Estate
Jeffrey I. Cisco	Cisco Law PC	Champaign	217.991.0409	Crim Def: DUI; Crim Def: Felon/Misd; Nursing Home Neg; PI: General; Workers' Comp
John L. Barger	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	Agriculture; Gov/Muni/Lobby; Real Estate: Comm; RE: Residential; Trust/Will/Estate
Robert G. Grierson	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	Agriculture; Banking; Close/Private Held; RE: Residential; Trust/Will/Estate
R. Sean Hocking	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	PI Defense: General; Products Liability Defense
J. Patrick Lee	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	Criminal Defense: DUI; Criminal Defense: Felon/Misd; Family; PI Defense: General
John F. Watson	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	Insurance, Ins Cov & Reinsurance; Med-Mal Defense; PI Defense: General
Bruce L. Bonds	Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen PC	Champaign	217.344.0060	Employment: Management; PI Defense: General; Workers' Comp Defense
John D. Flodstrom	Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen PC	Champaign	217.344.0060	Workers' Compensation Defense
Keith E. Fruehling	Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen PC	Champaign	217.344.0060	Employ: Mgmt; Med-Mal Def; PI Def: General; Product Liab Def; Prof'l Mal Def
Joseph K. Guyette	Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen PC	Champaign	217.344.0060	PI Defense: General; Prof'l Malpractice Defense; Workers' Comp Defense
Renee L. Monfort	Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen PC	Champaign	217.344.0060	Health; Med-Mal Defense
Michael E. Raub	Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen PC	Champaign	217.344.0060	Med-Mal Defense; PI Defense: General; Product Liab Def; Prof'l Malpractice Def
Brian M. Smith	Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen PC	Champaign	217.344.0060	Civil Rights/Constitutional; Comm Lit; Employment: Management
Toney J. Tomaso	Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen PC	Champaign	217.344.0060	Workers' Compensation Defense
Kenneth R. Torricelli	Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen PC	Champaign	217.344.0060	ADR: Personal Injury
Daniel P. Wurl	Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen PC	Champaign	217.344.0060	Comm Lit; Insurance, Ins Cov & Reinsurance; Med-Mal Defense
James D. Cottrell	James D. Cottrell Law Office PC	Champaign	217.693.4905	AG; Land Use, Zoning & Condemnation; Real Estate: Comm
Larry A. Apfelbaum	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Workers' Compensation
Todd A. Bresney	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1520	Personal Injury: General
Charles N. Edmiston II	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Workers' Compensation
William J. Harrington	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Personal Injury: General
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; Comm Lit; PI Defense: General
Thomas B. Borton	LivingstonBarger	Champaign	217.351.7479	Med-Mal Defense; Prof'l Malpractice Defense
David M. Moss	Moss & Moss PC	Clinton	217.935.8341	Workers' Compensation
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	AG; Real Estate: Comm; RE: Residential; Tax: Individual; Trust/Will/Estate
Denise Knipp Bates	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Elder; Real Estate: Residential
James D. Green	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Insurance, Ins Cov & Reinsurance; PI Defense: General
Richard R. Harden	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Med-Mal Defense; PI Defense: General
Kenneth D. Reifsteck	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Civil Appellate; Workers' Compensation Defense
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
Bruce E. Warren	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Workers' Compensation Defense
John T. Wozniak	Wozniak & Associates	Urbana	217.367.1647	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.

Tyler J. Pratt	Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen PC	Champaign	217.344.0060	Med-Mal Defense; PI Def: General; Prof'l Malpractice Def; Transportation Def
Gina Couri-Cyphers	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Personal Injury: General
Joseph R. Wetzel	LivingstonBarger	Champaign	217.351.7479	Comm Lit; PI Defense: General
Seth D. Baker	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	PI Defense: General; Workers' Compensation Defense
Justin N. Brunner	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Civ Rts/Constitutional; Gov/Muni; Med-Mal Def; PI Def: General; Prof'l Mal Def
Eric S. Chovanec	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Employment: Mgmt; Labor: Mgmt; Workers' Comp Defense
Nathan T. Kolb	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Civ Appellate; Insurance/Ins Cov/Reinsurance; Med-Mal Def; PI Def: Gen

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A lawyer CANNOT buy the distinction of Leading or Emerging Lawyer. The distinction was earned by being among those lawyers most often recommended by their peers. For a full description of our research process, a complete list of all Leading or Emerging Lawyers, and to view profiles of the lawyers listed on this page, go to

www.LeadingLawyers.com

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**From the
editor's desk**



New meets old in this issue of Central Illinois Business.

In these 32 pages, we're celebrating milestones — 40 years for the Executive Club of Champaign County and 30 for Filippo's.

We're also cheering new beginnings — a new location for Two Men and a Truck and a fairly recent addition to the food truck scene that is off to a smashing start, Smith Burger.

We're also adding a new column to our pages.

Introducing the fine folks from Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana.

The column, written by Wendy Bartlo, Joan Dixon, Marianne Downey and Kathleen Holden, will share information relevant to older adults, help support their health and wellness and fight pervasive stereotypes about aging.

—Mike

Mike Goebel is the Managing Editor of The News-Gazette. Reach him by email at mgoebel@news-gazette.com or by phone at 217-393-8254.



Visit news-gazette.com for updates of business news and event information.



Filippo Paris, left, and his dad Jerry Paris goof around outside at the restaurant in Mahomet.

All in the family

Filippo's has been serving up tasty pizza for 30 years

Story Kevin Barlow Photos Robin Scholz

When Filippo Paris attends family gatherings, he is careful how to answer when someone shouts his name.

"In our family's culture, it is a custom to name your first-born son and daughter after your mom and dad," he said. "Before my grandfather passed, there were five of us named Filippo, and when we would get together and someone would call out for 'Filippo,' all five of us turned around."

While his name is common in his family, "Filippo's" is better known in Mahomet as a restaurant that has served

MAHOMET authentic Italian food since opening 30 years ago. Filippo's Pizza, 2112 Tin Cup Road in Mahomet, is one of three family-owned and operated central Illinois locations, serving recipes the family brought from Sicily when Paris' grandparents immigrated to the United States in 1968.

Filippo Galbo and his wife, Rosa, immigrated to America in search of a better life for their family. They first settled in Muscatine, Iowa, opening their first restaurant. After two years, they discovered Monticello and immediately fell in love with the small, hardworking community in Piatt County. In May 1970, Galbo and his wife realized their

dream and opened Filippo's Pizza.

"My goal is to make it to the age of 73," said his grandson, now 29, "so that way, I will see the original Filippo's Pizza turn 100 years old. It's kind of a cool legacy thing. Once that happens, I think I can give up on everything, because that is something I really want to see."

During those early years in Monticello, Paris' mother, Brigi, began working at the restaurant almost as soon as she was old enough to walk. By the age of 5, she was vacuuming, helping sweep and doing dishes.

When she was 8 and a waitress didn't show up for work, she took a pad and took down orders. Later, Brigi and her husband, Jerry, decided to open the Mahomet location on Oct. 16, 1991, on the advice of her father.

"When my parents got married, they weren't sure of what they wanted to do," Paris said. "They were pretty young, and they decided to follow in my grandparents' footsteps and open up a pizza place. This was back in 1991 and Mahomet wasn't as big as it is now. My grandfather was the one who suggested they settle here because it was a nice small town and he anticipated the growth."

Paris also started working at the restaurant, but growing up, he didn't plan on following in the family business.

"I have been working at the restaurant since I was a little kid, but growing up, I didn't want this to be my job," he explained. "I was going to Parkland and had plans to move down to Edwardsville with my cousins."

But in 2012, tragedy hit the family. Paris' 5-year-old cousin, Gabrielle "Gabby" Galbo, died after an undetected tick bite developed into an extreme case of sepsis.

"On May 11, 2012, when my 5-year-old daughter, Gabby, died, I held her body in my arms and made a promise to her — that I would get Gabby's Law so that no other parents would have to walk in our shoes," said her father, Tony Galbo. That led to the passage of Gabby's Law in 2016, which requires hospitals in Illinois to implement evidence-based processes for quickly recognizing and treating sepsis.

"We are a very close family and we all worked at restaurants, but on Mondays, we would all gather at my grandmother's house to hang out and eat dinner," Paris said. "I watched Gabby grow up from being a newborn until she sadly passed away. She was a special girl. She was hilarious, but it hit our family hard. I decided to take a year off and spend time with the family, and that is when I decided to



From left, Filippo Paris, and his parents Brigi Paris and Jerry Paris show off the banner they had made to celebrate 30 years in business.

stay in the family business."

That includes working 16-hour days sometimes, and he describes the work as "grueling" at times. Everything is made fresh at Filippo's, and they even grind their own cheese.

"But we love the people and the citizens of the Mahomet area," he added.

The coronavirus pandemic hit the business hard. The restaurant has yet to reopen its dining room, having closed it in March 2020. Inside, it had about a dozen tables.

"A lot of people judge us, but we are taking it very seriously," he said. "My parents are both older. My dad has had some health issues and he is 60 now, and if one of us got COVID, we wouldn't be able to open the pizza place, and since we are self-employed, if we can't open, we don't have any income. So that has been a challenge for us."

Prior to COVID-19, the restaurant had plenty of help and a high rate of retention.

"We aren't a corporate restaurant, and we never ran it that way," he said. "Our employees got a free meal when they worked, and we treated them like family. They often started in high school and stayed through college."

"We have never had managers. It has always been us three here and so we were never used to taking a day off and letting the managers deal with it. We have always worked our butts off. Now, even more so, because we have no help."

The restaurant had to cut staff but expanded its delivery options to include Champaign-Urbana, Fisher, Farmer City and other areas.

Paris and his parents miss the pre-COVID-19 days.

"I do miss those people and just hanging out with them, but we appreciate the support from everyone during this most difficult time," he said.



HANDLING WITH CARE

Specializing in memory care,
Carriage Crossing aims to keep
residents active and engaged

Story Kevin Barlow · Photos Robin Scholz

CHAMPAIGN

As a Certified Dementia Practitioner, Angela Russell understands that change is constant. She sees it in her job at Carriage Crossing Senior Living, a senior care facility with seven central Illinois locations, including one at 1701 Congressional Way in Champaign.





A resident is wheeled into Carriage Crossing Senior Living in Champaign.



Residents play bingo in the dining room.

“We are trying to get back to what we consider a ‘normal set of routines and business,” she said. “But the pandemic won’t allow us to do that.”

Carriage Crossing of Champaign can provide memory care for up to 60 residents in state-of-the-art living apartments that offer independent living plus the advantage of a helping hand when needed.

“This is our busiest time of the year,” states Russell of the holiday season. “Families come home for the holidays and see their parents and loved ones and it is then that they notice changes or a decline in their abilities. It’s like the shoe gets put on the other foot. For all of our lives, our parents were there protecting us. Then, when you see your parents start to struggle, you have to start protecting them. You don’t want them living in an unsafe environment.”

A memory care facility offers a higher staff-to-resident ratio, and Russell and her staff have developed procedures specific to caring for residents with Alzheimer’s and other dementia-related illnesses. Carriage Crossing offers residents full-time non-medical care while also providing transportation arrangement and assistance with their daily living activities.

The goal, Russell says, is to avoid isolation, which was made more difficult with the pandemic.

“We realize that isolation is the hardest thing for seniors

Mouthwatering Perfection



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A wall of residents who have served in the armed forces is spotlighted at Carriage Crossing Senior Living.

and many times the main reason why they move into assisted living,” she said. “They become isolated at home and it becomes a safety issue.”

At Carriage Crossing, there are always activities planned.

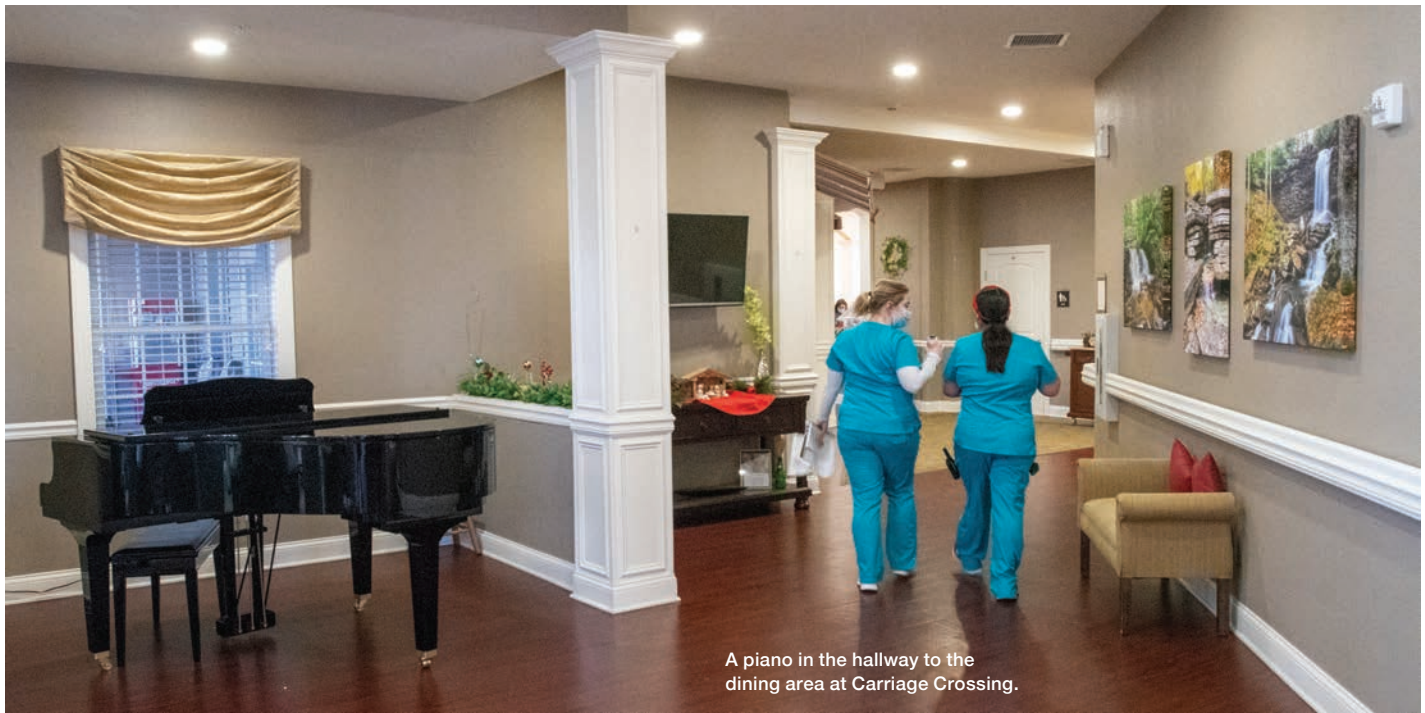
“We have holiday celebrations, but if their families live close enough, they often go home with their families for those events,” Russell said.

“We have programs and entertainment and in the spring, summer and fall, have a number of events outside. We can’t do that in the winter because of the cold, but other times, because of COVID-19, we are doing things outside

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An advertisement for Marine Bank. It features five business advisors (four men and one woman) in professional attire, smiling. They are arranged in a group, with some in the foreground and others slightly behind. The background is a dark, textured purple. Overlaid on the image is the text "We're with you!" in a large, white, sans-serif font. Below this text is the Marine Bank logo, which consists of a green circle with three white vertical bars inside. To the right of the logo is the text "MARINE BANK" in a white, serif font. Below the bank name is the phone number "217.239.0132" and the website "ibankmarine.com". In the bottom left corner, there is a small logo that says "MEMBER FDIC".



A piano in the hallway to the dining area at Carriage Crossing.

where it is safer.”

In addition to the Champaign location, Carriage Crossing also has locations in Arcola, Bloomington, Decatur, Rochester, Paris and Taylorville.

In Champaign, the amenities include restaurant-style dining, outdoor courtyards, a café and soda shop, a game room and library, beauty salon services, chauffeured transportation, laundry and housekeeping and is pet friendly.

All visitors at Carriage Crossing are required to wear masks. Most of the employees have received vaccinations, Russell said.

“Education is one thing that we tried to do,” she said. “We gave our employees the educational material on the vaccinations. It is science and we want everyone to be as safe as possible. Every assisted living facility and nursing

home has had COVID in their facility at one time or another. We would like to get back to normal someday, but we aren’t ready for that just yet.”

Visitors are also required to get their temperature checked and fill out a questionnaire from the Illinois Department of Public Health about whether they are suffering from any symptoms or have been around someone with an active COVID case.

Russell encourages to take note of family members during the holiday season.

“Check up on your parents and see where they are at,” she said. “We do mini mental evaluation tests and I tell seniors that it is something they cannot fail. But it gives us insight into how much of their memory is starting to slip. The earlier we can diagnose that, the better it is for everyone.”



Among the areas at Carriage Crossing where residents can feel welcome include the game room (left) and the main reception area (right).



By LAURA WEIS
CIB Contributor

Count on program to continue its good work

Can you read this? If your answer is yes, you are one of the 50 percent of American adults who can read past an eighth-grade level. According to the U.S. Department of Education and the National Institute for Literacy, more than 32 million American adults cannot read.

Why should the business community care about this? Reading is both a necessary life skill and the most basic workforce competency. The most dedicated individual and contributor to the company's bottom line may never walk through an employer's door — because they cannot read well enough to fill out the application.

We tend to wait until students approach the end of their K-12 academic career before we ask, “are they career ready?” By then, it is too late. If Champaign County employers want to grow their workforce, preparation must start earlier than high school. United Way of Champaign County has a long history of investing in birth-to-five and kindergarten readiness. Why? Because studies tell us that if we can capture this demographic and provide these children with a solid social-emotional base, it sets them up for a life of learning.

We will stop talking about the pandemic at some point (fingers crossed). Still, for the moment, it's not over, and it feels like everywhere we turn, there are pandemic consequences to address. One of them is “unfinished learning,” or, an interrupted education that doesn't allow students to master the skills necessary for moving to the next level.

In July 2021, McKinsey & Company issued *The Lingering Effects of Unfinished Learning*. The report focuses on one of the most significant academic challenges our country has ever faced — namely, learning loss intensified by remote learning, Zoom fatigue and greater absenteeism. The pandemic also cast a massive spotlight on the inequities of education. The McKinsey analysis shows that nationally, average K-12 students were five months behind in mathematics and four months behind in reading by the end of last school year. Historically disadvantaged students were the hardest hit. Students nationwide in majority-Black schools were six months behind, and low-income students were seven months behind.

The report also lays out the economic ramifications of

doing nothing as a country and a community. McKinsey estimates that these students will earn upwards of \$61,000 less over their lifetimes. The impact on the U.S. economy could be \$188 billion when this group of students enters the workforce.

In 2019, the Chamber, United Way of Champaign County, the CU Schools Foundation, Stephens Family YMCA, Parkland College, Champaign Unit 4 Schools, Urbana Unit 116, the Champaign Community Coalition, and WILL-TV launched a community initiative called iRead • iCount. The program had 150-plus volunteers in the classroom (each volunteering 10 total hours over 10 weeks), helping kindergartners and first-grade students master age-appropriate math and literacy skills. There wasn't anything earth-shattering about the methodology or curriculum that was developed and implemented. The magic happened when we partnered caring, trained adults with the students in greatest need. The extra 10 or 15 minutes a volunteer spent with one of our littlest citizens made a difference. We know this because the program measures success. But then, COVID put a temporary end to iRead • iCount.

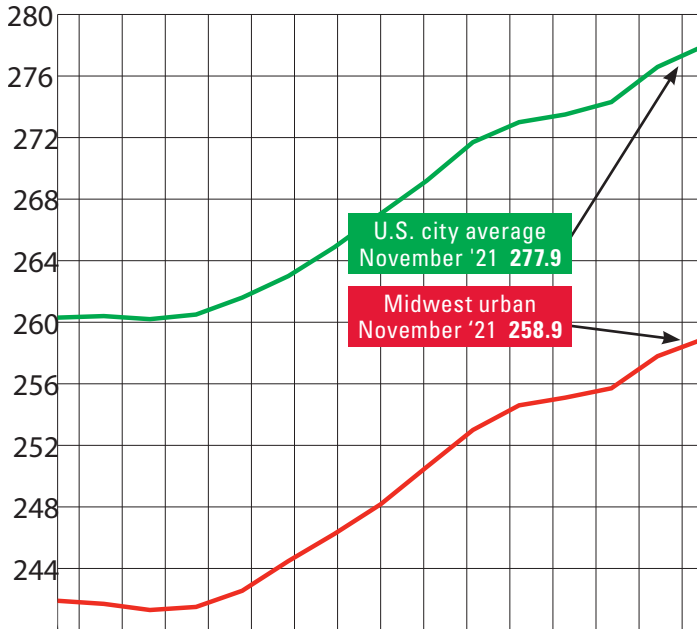
Fast-forward to the present, and schools are back to in-person learning. People are vaccinating and, finally, children are clear to receive the vaccine. But we still have unfinished education. As we approach the end of the first entire in-person semester, teachers have had the opportunity to assess their students. We need to get the volunteers back into the classroom because our students need the help. And we cannot afford to wait any longer. Letting our children struggle now is a failure for all of us in the future.

Starting in February, we will relaunch iRead • iCount. The program will run through early May, training is provided, and we are recruiting volunteers now. Most importantly, and we cannot stress this enough, donating just one hour a week means you can change a child's life trajectory. Go to www.champaigncounty.org/iread-icount and sign up today to be part of the solution.

Laura Weis, President and CEO of the Champaign County Chamber of Commerce, writes for Central Illinois Business magazine. Email her at LauraW@champaigncounty.org.

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 into context, a current CPI of 194.5 means a marketbasket of goods and services that cost \$100 in 1982-84 now costs \$194.50.



Source: U.S. Department of Labor

Prices at the pump

Average price per gallon of regular unleaded gas as of December 9, 2021.

Area	Dec. '21	Dec. '20
Bloomington-Normal	\$3.39	\$2.18
Champaign-Urbana	\$3.45	\$2.18
Danville	\$3.41	\$2.17
Decatur	\$3.24	\$2.17
Illinois	\$3.48	\$2.23
U.S.	\$3.34	\$2.16

Source: aaa.com

Weekly grain prices

Prices for grain crops for the week of July 19, 2021. Figures are for this week and the percentage change compared with a year ago.

C.I. = Central Illinois; (b) = per bushel; (t) = per ton; (100 wt.) = per hundredweight



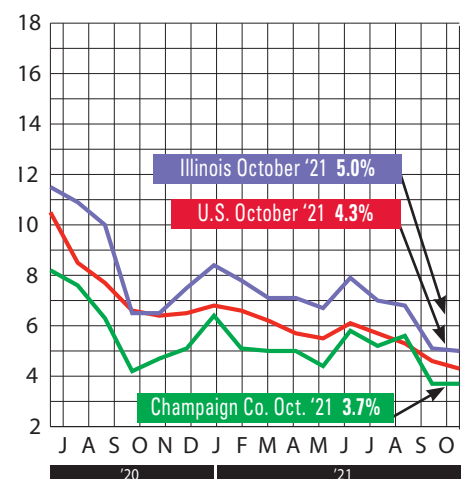
Grain	Date	2020
C.I. Corn (b)	5.73	▲ 39.1%
C.I. Soybean (b)	12.53	▲ 1.6%
C.I. 48% Soybean Meal, Rail (t)	362.50	▼ -1.9%
Hard Red Winter Wheat (b)	n/a	n/a
Truck to Kansas City		
Dark Northern Spring Wheat (b) 14% MN, Rail	11.65	▲ 73.2%
Soft White Wheat Portland (b)	10.83	▲ 73.4%
Sorghum, Kansas City (100 wt.) Rail	10.61	▲ 13.1%

Source: USDA Livestock & Grain Market News

Unemployment rates for Central Illinois counties, state and nation

County	Labor Force	Jobless	Sept. '21	Aug. '21	Sept. '20	Change Month	Change Month
Champaign	112,296	4,108	3.7	3.7	7.6	0.0	▼ -3.9
Coles	23,238	899	3.9	5.7	8.7	▼ -1.8	▼ -4.8
Douglas	101,180	301	3.0	3.0	6.1	0.0	▼ -3.1
Edgar	8,701	293	3.4	3.4	6.6	0.0	▼ -3.2
Ford	6,598	209	3.2	3.3	6.7	▼ -0.1	▼ -3.5
Iroquois	13,734	472	3.4	3.5	5.9	▼ -0.1	▼ -2.5
Macon	46,425	2,831	6.1	6.2	11.2	▼ -0.1	▼ -5.1
McLean	83,212	3,034	3.6	3.6	7.2	0.0	▼ -3.6
Moultrie	7,437	200	2.7	2.7	5.5	0.0	▼ -2.8
Piatt	8,900	258	2.9	3.0	5.8	▼ -0.1	▼ -2.9
Vermilion	32,235	1,634	5.1	5.1	9.3	0.0	▼ -4.2
Region	443,956	14,239	3.7	3.9	7.3	▼ -0.2	▼ -3.6
State	6,263,001	311,052	5.0	5.1	10.9	▼ -0.1	▼ -5.9
U.S.	161,788,000	8,556,000	5.3	5.7	8.5	▼ -0.4	▼ -3.2

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

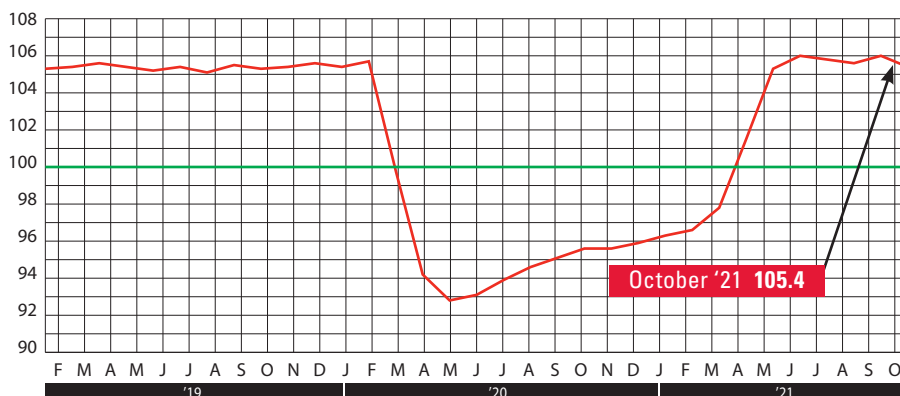


University of Illinois flash index

What is the flash index?

The flash index is an early indicator of the Illinois economy's expected performance. It is a weighted average of Illinois growth rates in corporate earnings, consumer spending and personal income. An index above 100 indicates expected economic growth; an index below 100 indicates the economy is contracting.

Source: Institute of Government and Public Affairs,
University of Illinois



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Champaign County retail sales collections — Q3 comparisons

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	Change ('16-'21)	
Champaign	\$15,468,606	\$10,814,757	\$17,255,397	\$17,088,725	\$16,520,654	\$16,365,053	▼	5.5%
Mahomet	\$871,277	\$631,116	\$735,564	\$761,147	\$698,876	\$618,235	▲	40.9%
Philo	\$112,594	\$71,054	\$105,128	\$111,841	\$89,842	\$86,370	▲	30.4%
Rantoul	\$1,413,578	\$975,303	\$1,525,491	\$1,435,536	\$1,375,921	\$1,390,511	▲	1.7%
Savoy	\$2,130,016	\$1,495,940	\$2,323,105	\$2,434,367	\$2,292,820	\$2,326,158	▼	8.4%
St. Joseph	\$230,854	\$162,375	\$235,632	\$239,371	\$224,224	\$206,971	▲	11.5%
Tolono	\$166,065	\$116,389	\$152,373	\$198,891	\$171,404	\$152,498	▲	8.9%
Urbana	\$4,894,613	\$3,407,519	\$5,584,667	\$5,210,233	\$5,026,102	\$5,012,534	▼	2.4%
Unincorporated	\$1,018,076	\$712,813	\$1,371,459	\$1,427,403	\$1,350,949	\$1,185,550	▼	14.1%
County total	\$26,305,682	\$18,387,267	\$29,288,815	\$28,907,515	\$27,750,792	\$27,343,880	▼	3.8%

Source: Latest statistics available from Illinois Department of Revenue

Home sales

Total units sold, including condominiums.

County							Median sales price		
	Oct. '21	Oct. '20	Change	YTD2021	YTD2020	Change	Oct. '21	Oct. '20	Change
Champaign	240	238	▲ 0.8%	2,457	2,265	▲ 8.5%	\$180,000	\$169,763	▲ 6.0%
Coles	48	49	▼ 2.0%	460	454	▲ 1.3%	\$113,500	\$102,500	▲ 10.7%
Douglas	23	11	▲ 109.1%	169	141	▲ 19.9%	\$130,000	\$116,000	▲ 12.1%
Edgar	8	17	▼ 52.9%	126	109	▲ 15.6%	\$82,000	\$76,500	▲ 7.2%
Ford	16	18	▼ 11.1%	156	140	▲ 11.4%	\$111,000	\$84,500	▲ 31.4%
Iroquois	30	24	▲ 25.0%	292	216	▲ 35.2%	\$110,000	\$116,000	▼ 5.2%
Macon	147	157	▼ 6.4%	1,348	1,265	▲ 6.6%	\$112,000	\$105,000	▲ 6.7%
McLean	226	243	▼ 7.0%	2,382	2,241	▲ 6.3%	\$183,000	\$168,900	▲ 8.3%
Moultrie	10	12	▼ 16.7%	91	120	▼ 24.2%	\$99,000	\$95,750	▲ 3.4%
Piatt	23	24	▼ 4.2%	231	223	▲ 3.6%	\$152,000	\$162,000	▼ 6.2%
Vermilion	75	84	▼ 10.7%	652	613	▲ 6.4%	\$91,000	\$79,000	▲ 15.2%
Illinois	15,920	17,889	▼ 11.0%	163,256	143,192	▲ 14.0%	\$252,500	\$225,000	▲ 12.2%

Source: Illinois Association of Realtors



Amtrak total monthly riders

	October 2021	November 2021
Bloomington-Normal	16,693	15,803
Champaign-Urbana	20,871	21,019
Mattoon	2,359	2,365
Rantoul	370	394

Hotel/motel statistics

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

TOTAL REVENUE			
October '21	September '21	Change	
\$357,938	\$434,733	▼ -17.67%	
ANNUAL TOTALS			
2020	2021	Change	
\$1,888,918	\$2,786,730	▲ 47.53%	

Source: Cities of Champaign and Urbana

Willard Airport passenger totals

Monthly totals	Oct. '21	Oct. '20	Change
Enplanements	5,305	2,016	▲ 163.1%
Year-to-date totals	Oct. '21	Oct. '20	Change
Enplanements	42,292	30,130	▲ 40.4%
Annual totals	2020	2019	Change
Enplanements	35,874	105,559	▼ 66.0%



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 Dec. 9, 2021, for the U.S. and for the North Central region, which includes Illinois, and the average rates for the U.S. one year ago.

Mortgage type	U.S. Dec. '21	U.S. Dec. '20
30-year fixed	3.10%	2.71%
15-year fixed	2.38%	2.26%
5/1-year adjustable	2.45%	2.79%

Source: Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.

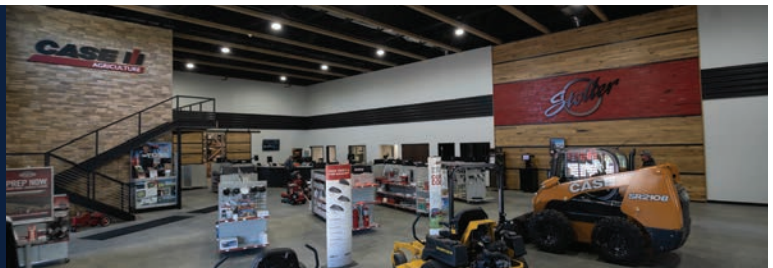
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Sharing and caring



Forty years after its inception, the **Executive Club of Champaign County** continues to have a major impact

Story Carolyn Maille-Petersen **Photos** Robin Scholz and provided

For nearly 40 years, the Executive Club of Champaign County has been a place for working women to support one another in their professional and personal lives, while also advancing the role of women in the workforce. And it all started with a lunch meeting.

The seeds for the ECCC were planted in the spring of 1982 when Sandy Lyon, a marketing director at the time, and June Van Vorst, an investment broker, began discussing the fact that there weren't many opportunities for working women to share their expertise with one another.

"ECCC was founded because professional women didn't have a networking organization to join, such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, and Jaycees, as these organizations didn't allow women as members at that time," says Danielle Runyon, ECCC's immediate past president.

The rest, as they say, is history.

The inaugural meeting of the ECCC took place in October 1982 with Lyon as its first president. Programs that first year



ON THE COVER: Members of the Executive Club of Champaign County, front row, from left, June Van Vorst and Mary McGrath; middle row, Helen Zhang, Shayla Maatuka, Joan Zernich, Becca Guyette and Roaa Al-Heeti; back row, Allison Winter, Janice McAteer and Jayne DeLuce get together for a photo at the Champaign Country Club.

ranged from “Reaganomics” to “Women on the Way Up – Strategies for Success.” The club also held a variety of social events and created interest groups. The group struck a chord with local working women, and its ranks have grown to nearly 200 members.

Over the years, the organization has expanded and evolved in other ways as well. In addition to monthly speakers and networking luncheons, ECCC offers workshops on topics such as résumé building and personal branding, organizes tours of local institutions, hosts happy hours, facilitates interest groups, and provides access to exclusive LinkedIn and Facebook groups.

Allison Winter, ECCC’s current president, has found it to be a valuable resource because it allows her to interact with women who are leaders in their field.

“I’ve found mentors, job opportunities, professional connections — all supporting working women and female-owned businesses. There’s always someone in this organization who can help coach me up on a new-to-me experience.”

This supportive atmosphere is a hallmark of the group, with older members staying involved and mentoring younger members, says Winter, whose day job is the Director of Development for the University of Illinois’ College of Agriculture, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences. “It’s so



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rewarding to get to be around these leaders who are rooting for the success of others in the organization.”

Of course, despite the strides women have made locally and nationally, there is always more to be done. According to Helen Zhang, ECCC vice president, “There is still a gap in women leadership.”

Zhang, Senior Director of Strategic Business for the UI’s Office of the Chief Information Officer adds that “women — especially women of color — remain significantly underrepresented in leadership.”

As women, underrepresentation is something the ECCC board is keenly aware of; thus, they are looking at their own organization as well.

“In the last two years, our board has been working on making Executive Club more inclusive for female leaders from a diverse array of backgrounds across all industries in Champaign County,” says Runyon, Associate Director of External Engagement for the UI’s College of Applied Health Sciences. “There is still a lot of work to be done, but we are devoted to making this change for women in our communities.”

“We’re inviting people to the table,” says Winter, “and trying to make for a diverse experience so people can see themselves in the club.”

When looking at diversity, they are looking at it from a wide-angle lens, she says, with an eye toward more women of color, as well as women with diverse educational, cultural and religious backgrounds and industry representation.

With increased diversity in membership comes increased diversity of ideas, and that is something the board welcomes, says Winter.

“Considering how women left the workforce in droves last year when the COVID-19 pandemic closed daycares and schools, it’s important to continue to provide this space for working women to network, share ideas, and grow together.”

She wants to see women — specifically the members of

ECCC — be part of the solution when it comes to creating “sustainable and flexible working opportunities” that allow women to keep working and get paid what they are worth.

The ECCC has also worked hard to provide diversified programming, says Winter.

“Each time we get a new program chair, we are exposed to a whole new network of fantastic speakers who grace our group with a candid conversation ranging from personal to professional growth topics.”

But while the ECCC is changing in many ways, what hasn’t changed is the club’s commitment to the working women of Champaign County.

“ECCC has created a network of women in the community who support each other and have supported each other for years,” says Runyon, “such as providing advice on how to manage a difficult situation at work, helping out a family in an emergency situation, providing business referrals, or writing recommendation letters for each other.”

“I think it’s pretty telling about this group that the founding members are still very much involved,” says Winter.

Next year, those founding members and all the women who have come after them will get the chance to celebrate the strides they have made for professional women in Champaign County.

“We are in the very preliminary stages of planning a 40th anniversary celebration,” says Runyon, “and (we) are considering everything from galas to quarterly celebrations, so that we can see each other and acknowledge this milestone together and — hopefully — in person.”

“It’s an exciting time to be a part of this organization and work with this board of ladies,” says Winter. “It’s maybe one of the best boards of which I’ve been a part because of the diversity of experience, age, careers, etc. I know we don’t all come to the table with the same experiences and perspectives, and that’s what’s so great about working with these women.”



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Two Men and a Truck owners, from left, Rene and Dan Shunk.

THEY'RE ON THE MOVE

Story Kevin Barlow Photos Robin Scholz

Dan Shunk always knew that one day he would run his own business. His grandfather farmed and ran some farming businesses on the side in East Central Illinois. His dad was self-employed since before Dan was born. So, his DNA suggests that he had the motivation and drive that it takes to run your own business.

"I always knew I would be working for myself one day," said Shunk, who started his career in sales by selling construction equipment.

He attended the University of Illinois and received his degree in agriculture engineering and married his wife, Rene, who also received a degree in engineering from Illinois. The couple moved to St. Louis where Dan got his MBA from Washington University. They decided to move back to Champaign because they loved the community, but this

CHAMPAIGN

time with a dream of owning their own business.

Then fate intervened.

While researching moving companies to assist with the move, they stumbled upon "Two Men and a Truck." They hired them and were impressed. So impressed that they looked into becoming a franchisee.

"We both worked in a variety of fields and are both engineering graduates from the U of I," Rene said. "But over the years, we decided we wanted to have that control over our work environment and so we set out to create a business where we could have a positive impact on our employees and the community. Dan and I found out that we work well together and complement each other."

Dan had been working in the sales and customer service field as a brand manager in the construction and equipment industry and learned the art of customer service. Rene

was working in research and business development in the agriculture industry. But, the more they looked into starting their own business, the more they studied “Two Men and a Truck” and realized that owning and operating a franchise checked all the boxes they were looking for.

Two years later, in 2008, they acquired a license to operate in Illinois and attended a three-week franchisee training session in Lansing, Mich.

“Our kids were 1 and 3 and the four of us lived in a hotel for three weeks,” Rene said. “It was very thorough. We practiced moving. They had a townhouse and a truck and we practiced packing and unpacking and learning all of the secrets of how to operate a good moving company. We learned the business from the ground up.”

In October 2008, the couple opened “Two Men and a Truck” with three employees in Champaign.

“Dan and I shared a desk and our kids had a little play area, but it was all about family and the community,” Rene said. “And it just took off.”

Today, the company employs more than 100 people and in December, will move into the former AT&T building along Bradley Avenue in Champaign.

“We went through some hard times like all businesses do,” Dan said. “But I always hoped we would find a business that would allow us to put our own personality on it and it would

be an extension of us. We found that and are very fortunate that we get to run our business the way we want to run our business.”

The move to the new facility will be “exciting,” Rene added.

“It will allow us to add storage service for our customers and also allows us to add extras for our employees. We will have additional training space, a dedicated break room and it will be a bright, welcoming workplace.”

Among the challenges is hiring good employees.

“Your biggest challenge in running a business like this is always going to be people,” she said. “We want to find the right people for our team, help them grow, get them the training they need and support our core values. We are always hiring it seems, so that can be a challenge, but we like to promote from within and find people who want to help the community as much as we do.”

“Two Men and a Truck” was formed in 1985 by brothers Brig Sorber and Jon Sorber who started moving people in the Lansing, Mich., area using an old pickup truck. Their mother, Mary Ellen Sheets, developed a logo that still identifies the business on every truck, sign and advertisement.

When the brothers left for college, Sheets purchased a 14-foot truck for \$350 and hired a pair of movers to keep the

Two Men and a Truck recently moved into the former AT&T building along Bradley Avenue in Champaign.



business going. That \$350 is the only capital Sheets has ever invested in the company.

"Two Men and a Truck" offers comprehensive home and business relocation and packing services. Now, the franchise has more than 380 independently owned and operated locations worldwide, five of which are owned and operated by the Shunks. In addition to the Champaign location, they also own franchises in Illinois in Bloomington and Springfield, as well as two in Indiana – Lafayette and Terre Haute.

"There are a lot of corn and soybean fields in between all of those towns, but we have a really great team and have embraced technology in all its forms to keep us connected," Rene said. "We visit those locations as often as we can."

But the family is committed to staying in Champaign-Urbana.

"It has exceeded our expectations," Dan said. "You don't know what you don't know until you get into it and then you realize that it could be a lot bigger than what it first appears. There are a lot of people in our franchise system that it is a hobby or an investment and it's not what it is for us."

The success of the franchise in Champaign-Urbana has allowed the Shunks to be good community partners.

"One of the core values of 'Two Men and a Truck' is giving back to the community," said Business Development Manager Travis Blaney. "When I started here in 2014, that was one of the things we talked about and it was definitely a selling point to start a new career with a different company. We have done a little bit of everything."

"Two Men and a Truck" works with about a dozen agencies and organizations in the Champaign-Urbana community and has contributed about \$300,000 with in-kind donations, overall.

"We work with these organizations to move into their events, transport food, and anything to do with moving and packing," Rene said. "We have helped with all kinds of projects and we do what we do best which is moving people so the organizations can do what they do best and their volunteers can focus on what they need to do."

Agencies such as the Eastern Illinois Food Bank and Feeding Our Kids have been helped. The local arts community such as the Champaign-Urbana Ballet have also received assistance.

"It's fantastic," Blaney adds. "I have honestly never worked for a company that cares so much about giving back like that. It's a great opportunity for me, but Dan and Rene are putting their money on the line. I have never been told no when it comes to helping an agency in need. We stay within a budget but it is not common to see moving companies so active in the community. But we can do things that

people forget about. Volunteers don't need to fill up their minivans with items and make five or six trips throughout Champaign-Urbana if we can take one truck, fill it up, and get a bunch of product moved with one trip."

But Dan says it is just a part of being a good community partner.

"We have been able to be a much bigger part of the community than we thought we would ever be," he said. "We do a lot more charity work and work with a lot more charitable organizations than I ever thought we would be able to do and be involved so much more than I thought we would be able to as a moving company. It has really been a blessing to get to meet the people that we get to meet, including customers, employees and people in our community."

Rene adds that it also fits into the core values established by the "Two Men and a Truck" chain.

"Dan and I have always wanted our business to have an impact, not just with customers, but with the community as well," she said "We want to have an impact in a positive way and that is something that is really important to us, as well as to the franchise. We are blessed that we can help out in any way we can."



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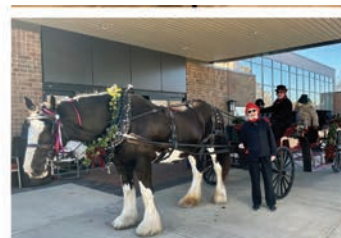
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Allow us to introduce our mission

By WENDY BARTLO, JOAN DIXON, MARIANNE DOWNEY and KATHLEEN HOLDEN
CIB Contributors

A group of community leaders, with support from the Center on Health, Aging and Disability (CHAD) in the College of Applied Health Sciences (AHS) at the University of Illinois, has headed the Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana initiative. This group works toward the goals of fighting ageism, sharing information relevant to older adults, their families, and aging services providers, and working with older adults as an advocate.

Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana began with a presentation at a conference in Boston in 2015. Retired University of Illinois administrator and founding Director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Illinois, Kathleen Holden, was intrigued at the annual Leading Age Conference where she first heard about the WHO and AARP program designed to prepare communities for upcoming demographic shifts.

“I was excited to learn how the private and public sectors in this country and around the world are working together to improve communities for all ages,” she said.

Upon her return from the conference, Kathleen approached Tanya Gallagher, then dean of AHS, about the possibility of partnering to make the Champaign-Urbana community more livable for residents of all ages with a specific focus on older adults. She was referred to Dr. Jeff Woods, a self-described “lab and bench guy” and director of CHAD and associate dean for research. He was intrigued by the idea and eager to grow collaborations with the community to benefit both residents and university research. He concluded CHAD was an ideal partner for Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana “because the mission of the center and its home college (AHS) is to support health and wellness across the lifespan and Age-Friendly also aligns with the broader university land grant mission of providing support to the people of the state of Illinois.”

CHAD has been the logistical home of Age-Friendly since 2016 and is now integrated into the research, education and outreach missions of AHS.

In 2020, AHS won the Chancellor’s Award for Public

Engagement, highlighting what can be accomplished when university departments and community members work together.

Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana, while housed at CHAD, is led by a steering committee of community leaders: representatives from cities and governments, park districts, transportation providers, local health systems, real estate professionals, social and aging services providers, nonprofit organizations and — most importantly — older adults.

Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana has supported many different projects and events during the past five years and moving forward, it has chosen to make fighting ageism, sharing information, and advocacy work its primary focus.

As the COVID-19 crisis disproportionately continues to affect older adults, the group has been heartened by organizations, neighbors, businesses and individuals who have made the safety and health of older adults a priority. However, there is still much work to be done to educate the public about the value of older adults in our community and to work with older adults on these efforts.

There are many pervasive stereotypes about older adults and aging. Often older adults are considered based solely on their chronological age without regard to their racial and ethnic background, gender identity, sexual orientation, income and education levels, occupational background, health and abilities.

There is diversity with respect to all these attributes in our community, and this should be a place where residents of all ages and backgrounds can thrive.

College towns can be attractive destinations for retirees, many of whom have substantial buying power and who look for both housing and amenity options. There are many attributes of this community that make it appealing to older adults, and businesses should consider this.

However, 9.2% of adults in Champaign County over the age of 60 live below the poverty level.

There must be a range of affordable resources and services for individuals at all income levels.

Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana envisions a future for our community where residents of all ages can feel safe, included and flourish.

In the coming year, in a regular feature in Central Illinois Business Magazine, we will continue to highlight existing services, business and organizations focused on older adults, and talk about visions for how Champaign-Urbana can commit to an Age-Friendly future.

We welcome ideas from the community.

The authors are part of the Age-Friendly steering committee. For information, please contact Wendy Bartlo at wbartlo@illinois.edu.

Providing a guiding light

Story Kevin Barlow Photo Provided

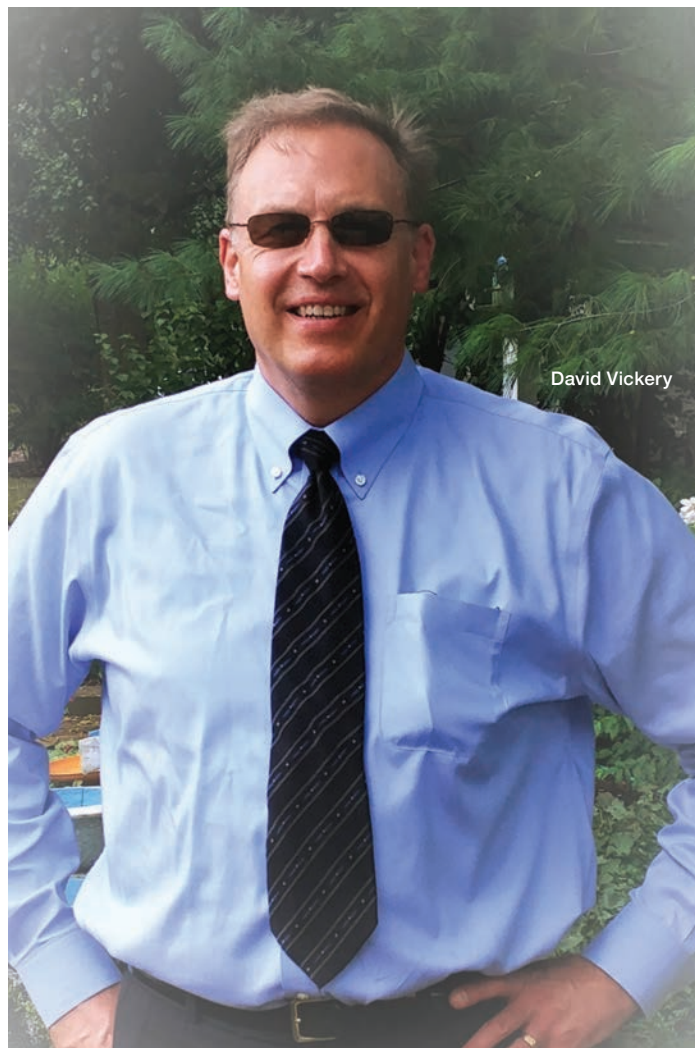
CHAMPAIGN

David Vickery has an understanding that each business is one of a kind.

“Every business has their own unique way of delivering their product or service in their own unique way,” said the founding and managing partner of IT GuidePoint Corporation. “Each business has their own unique way of taking an order and their own unique way of confirming it. They have their own way of manufacturing the product or delivering the service and there is a process to that. Every business still operating after the pandemic should be proud that they are still going and the way they treat their customers is the main reason for their success.”

Vickery grew up in East Central Illinois and attended the University of Illinois. He then joined an information technology consulting firm and saw it rise from a firm doing \$10 million in business per year to \$1.2 billion. But there was something that didn’t feel right to Vickery.

“What I saw was the fact that as we went from dealing with smaller corporations to the larger corporations, we got away from our client focus and we are a client-focus business,” he said. “When recruiting a new business, you can’t bring in your ‘A’ team to get the commitment, and then bring in your ‘C’ team, which may not be your brightest or more experienced employees, to do the work. When I saw that was happening, I looked at it as a positive and saw a real business opportunity.”



He created IT Guidepoint Corporation in May 2008 and still has his hands on as many projects as possible.

“We are a small consulting firm and we are focused on you,” he said. “I still get on the calls with the clients and that surprises some. They appreciate that the founder of the company still takes an active role in the process.”

Vickery believes technology and the associated software should always fit your business needs. IT Guidepoint

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"We have client and employee relationships that are decades long," Vickery said. "This is rare in our industry, and we are proud of always being client-focused and doing what is right. It is just good for business in the long run."

Vickery says the success of the business is attributable to his central Illinois roots.

"I focus on the markets that the bigger companies don't," he said. "When they get asked where Neil Street is, they don't have an answer. I was fortunate enough to go to the University of Illinois and there are a lot of family-owned small- and medium-sized businesses that need our help and we are proud to serve those companies."

Visualization is a key component of his consulting work.

"A picture is worth 1,000 words," he said. "When I show our clients a picture of what their current system looks like, it is usually met with a lot of curse words. I have had people tell me that it makes sense why they are screwed up. Clients in the Champaign-Urbana region hire us because they are tired of the limitations caused by their current business systems and need someone to help them make sense of what they have and what new and improved technology options

are available to them."

Vickery hopes to one day expand in central Illinois.

"My plan is to open a division that provides our clients with a call center of highly trained, local-time zone consulting talent from central Illinois," he said. "Our goal is to train a diverse group on relevant technologies such as Salesforce and Workday to compete with global consultancies that utilize H1B resources that are rife with turnover and lack the consistency of service our clients need for their operation. Our position is that all firms in this region could benefit from utilizing local talent and that the community benefits from having a highly trained workforce that lives and invests in the local economy. Our plan is supported by many local universities and economic development groups. I am really looking forward to seeing this happen."

But Vickery says technology is moving quickly, but the key to staying competitive and unique is to have a plan.

"People get all excited about the technology, but the technology is downstreamed from the way you do each step in your processes," he adds. "We capture each of those steps like a schematic and not like those bad instructions you get for a Christmas toy, but a step-by-step guide to show this is how you build something."



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Matt Riggs

STORY Jeff D'Alessio
PHOTOS Robin Scholz

A young **MATT RIGGS** didn't have to search far to find the local business owner he hoped to grow up to be like one day. He went by Dad.

"My dad, Dennis, continues to amaze me with his work ethic," says the son of the longtime owner of the Dairy Barn, Parkland Distinguished Alumnus Award winner and 2007 News-Gazette Farm Leader of the Year.

Dennis' entrepreneurial spirit rubbed off on sons Matt and Darin — fifth-generation family farmers, ROTC scholars, UI alums and, since 2015, owners and operators of Urbana's Riggs Beer Company.

Matt, who also holds a German Master Brewer certification from Doemens Academy in Munich, took time out to answer questions in our speed read spotlighting leaders of organizations big and small.

The biggest business risk I ever took was ... investing all of my savings to start Riggs Beer Company. I even sold my beloved 1974 Jeep J20 pickup truck to help finance the brewery.

Man, I'd like to get that truck back someday.



I'm frugal in that ... I've never owned a TV or new car.

My philosophy on meetings is ... I try to limit the number of internal meetings we have to no more than one per month. When we do have meetings, I have a written agenda that is distributed to each participant. The agenda keeps us focused and brief.

Most topics are better covered through one-on-one



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wife and I have two fully automatic coffee machines at home. One for regular, one for decaf. They are expensive, but they make amazing coffee.

For my exercise routine
... I try to do a 1-mile timed run at least once each week.

When it comes to the worst job I ever had ... on the whole, I've enjoyed literally every job I've ever had. But there's no such thing as a job without rough days or weeks.

On a 1-to-10 scale, the impact of the pandemic has been an ... 8. The pandemic forced us to quickly shift into canning our beer. It's also made operating the tap room more stressful on us and our staff.



conversations and the development of standard operating procedures.

My single favorite moment of all-time in this

job was ... watching the sun rise on a solo early shift.

I'm up and at 'em every day ... always between 2 a.m. and 7 a.m. It depends on the

production schedule.

I can't live without my ... coffee.

As far as luxuries go ... my





STORY Kevin Barlow

PHOTOS Jim Rossow

Simply SMASHING

Sundays were a special day for Drew Smith and his family. During the warm spring, summer and fall seasons, the family would haul their Blackstone 36-inch flat-top grill from the garage and fire it up in their driveway. Drew would then start preparing burgers — what he called “smashburgers,” the art of pressing the meat down on the spatula to improve contact with the heat source.

Neighbors noticed.

“We really enjoyed just making cheeseburgers for the

neighbors and our friends,” said Drew’s wife, Jessica. “At one point, we began to consider the fact that we could probably make something out of this.”

Drew, a bar manager at Bunny’s Tavern in Urbana, has been in the service industry for two decades but always had the desire to start his own food business.

“My uncle, Daryl, owned one of the first food trucks in the area for several years,” he said. “I wish I had paid a little more attention to that business when I was younger, but it still made an impression on me.”



Customers line up at the Smith Burger Co. food truck outside Carle Foundation Hospital in Urbana.

Drew and Jessica started a family which includes two young daughters, but their passion for owning a food truck or trailer intensified during the coronavirus pandemic.

“It was kind of an eye-opener for me because all of the restaurants had to adapt,” he said. “But with a food truck or trailer, it’s a little bit easier.”

They looked at options, but when a friend put his trailer up for sale, Drew inquired about it.

“We had looked at trailers and trucks, but never really found anything that fit,” Jessica said. “When you look at something, you always get excited, but this particular one seemed to fit our needs for what we wanted to do.”

The pandemic was still going strong. Restaurants were rebounding and getting busier, but the move made sense for the Smiths.

“We kind of took advantage of the pandemic and instead of falling into the same kind of pit that a lot of other businesses were falling into, we decided to make the best of it,” she added.

The trailer was purchased in August and the Smiths opened the Smith Burger Co. on Dec. 13. They have never looked back and were recently voted the top food truck in the area by The News-Gazette’s People’s Choice. The menu includes a variety of double beef burgers. The location of the trailer is made in advance on the company’s Facebook or Instagram pages.

“It definitely hasn’t gone the way we anticipated,” Jessica said. “But that is a good thing. We never expected to be at the volume we are at. We never thought it would be so successful right off the bat. We planned to operate with just

one or two of us during the first year, but we have five people on the truck at all times (including oldest daughter Leah) now because we are so busy and the demand for our trailer has been so high. We have been blown away by the support of the community and had no idea it would be this successful.”

Because of that, the Smiths plan to expand their fleet by adding a second trailer soon. There are discussions about opening their own restaurant at some point.

“The brick and mortar has pros and cons, and right now, we are just riding the wave that we have going,” Jessica said. “There are a lot more restrictions and requirements and also a lot more expenses. You are set to a schedule, and with a young family, we enjoy the flexibility. If we need to take a day off or need to take a short break, we can do that. It has been discussed and we discuss that idea from time to time, but now is not the right time.”

Both still work full time — Drew at Bunny’s and Jessica for the University of Illinois. The Sunday cookouts have slowed.

“This is our second full-time job, but there is a passion involved when you are working for yourself,” she said. “It’s your product and you are responsible for it. You put your name on it and so you want to be proud of it and do your absolute best. Then, when people start coming back as repeat customers and you get to know them, it makes it worthwhile.”

“It gives me the freedom to do what I want and when I want,” Drew added. “It is a longtime dream, and we have really been enjoying this ride. It is amazing how quickly it has grown and the support we have received from the community.”



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