SLICE OF LIFE

Monical’s Pizza in Tolono has always been a huge part of Tom and Beth Swigart’s life. For them, it’s a family affair.
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Moe Freedman doesn’t think much of big corporations that only look at numbers and the bottom line. “I was an administrator in rehab care for the elderly for several years up in the Chicago area,” he said. “What I noticed was that the industry was in a constant state of change, and the larger companies were not as good at keeping up with those changes at the pace necessary to stay compliant and provide the necessary care that was required.”

So, in 2017, he began looking for buildings for sale where he could start his own healthcare service. Soon, Accolade Healthcare was created.

Since then, the company has grown to include a skilled care facility in Pontiac (Accolade Healthcare Pontiac), two in Paxton (Accolade Healthcare of Paxton on Pells and Paxton Senior Living), one in Danville (Accolade Healthcare of Danville) and two in the Peoria area (Accolade Healthcare of Peoria and Accolade Healthcare of East Peoria).

“I don’t mean to be disrespectful to the larger healthcare facilities because many of them do a fine job,” he said. “But I identified an opportunity to run a healthcare facility without all of the decision-makers and red tape you have to go through to correct a problem. Sometimes that can take too much time.”

Freedman’s brother, Sam, is the CFO.
“We are family-owned and there are really not a lot of decision-makers,” he said. “I spend my time at the facilities each week and I am invested in my team, and so we can make effective changes right away. We can identify issues and correct them.”

Accolade Healthcare is both Medicaid and Medicare certified. Each location is staffed with a full-time physical therapy team, nutrition specialist and a highly trained team of nurses (RN, CAN, LPN). Their facilities are capable of accommodating more complex medical issues such as those requiring trach care, IV therapy, G tube or wound treatment.

The facilities offer art classes, yoga classes and have recreational activities such as small group games. The restaurant-style menu offers custom meals based on dietary/nutritional needs.

“This field is ever-changing,” Freedman adds. “There is never a perfect science on how to care for people. Individuals have individual needs that can be very unique, and the fact that we operate as a family helps identify issues and combine our resources. Our administrators all know each other and communicate with each other and lean on each other, and I think we do that with our staff as well.”

Being a fairly new company, Freedman says there is still a lot of growth ahead.

“Right now, we are trying to continue to strengthen our foundation as a young company and grow it,” he explained. “We want to strengthen ourselves and come up with more creative ideas. COVID-19 has kind of thrown a wrench into a lot of that at times, but we are focused on fighting the pandemic and dealing with the staffing issues with that and the resident family issues that come along with that.”

He says that it is a calling he and his entire family have always had.

“There is a true genuine compassion and it is an enjoyment of what we do,” he said. “We are not a bunch of suits just looking at numbers all day long. From the top down, we really have a passion for long-term health care and our seniors. That is what has made it possible to get through the pandemic.”

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Have you ever watched a robot vacuum cleaner do its magic? First, it skirts the edges of a room. Then, it goes back and forth across that room, leaving behind those satisfying lines on the carpet. While the lines may give the appearance of a freshly vacuumed room, in reality, the questionable suction power and the sensors do not clean the floors as thoroughly as a human running the vacuum would.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and technology have seemingly made life easier. People carry computers in their pockets (the smartphone) and may have trouble functioning when their phone is not immediately within reach. We have become very comfortable having this singular tool — to add efficiency to our lives and put all the world’s answers at our fingertips. But does technology always help us get the best results?

That likely depends on what you are trying to accomplish. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor’s November Job Openings and Labor Turnover Report, there are 10.6 million open jobs in the United States. But 4.5 million more people left their jobs during the same month. The report also estimates there are only 65 unemployed people for every 100 open positions.

In a nutshell, we have more jobs than we do people. Employers have jobs to fill, and economists say that the war on talent will continue well into 2022. This gap begs the question: Is the AI robot that scans resumes the best singular tool an employer can use to find the best candidates?

Way back when, candidates applying for jobs had to either complete a written application (on paper, no less) or submit their resume. It was simple and straightforward, and an applicant’s skills and experience were what they were. Yes, in those olden times, job seekers actually typed their resumes once (maybe, they had two versions). Then, they took them to the printer to have their resumes professionally printed on the “nice” paper. There was a certain permanence about a resume in those days. It was not an ever-changing document.

Today, if you apply for a job, you are likely scouring the internet to understand ways to “game” the AI-based applicant tracking systems (ATS) that many companies use. According to workforcehub.com, 98 percent of all Fortune 500 companies use ATS to filter job applicants. By comparison, 66 percent of large companies and 35 percent of small businesses use the technology.

So what is ATS? Simply put, it is AI-driven software that companies can use to make their recruitment and human-resource functions more efficient.

This kind of technology is very good at making factual determinations, evaluating data and providing answers based on that data. What AI cannot do is reason. Being based on logic, it fails to see the gray in a situation or, in the case of ATS, the gray areas in an applicant’s experience and skills.

It is understandable why companies would invest in an ATS for their business. When large corporations receive thousands of applications for a single job opening, it is a monumental task for one person to weed through the resumes and identify qualified candidates. Additionally, an ATS can create a smoother transition for a candidate from application to the interview. An employer can also use an ATS to post the job opening to multiple job boards at one time or set up screening questions to sift through the resumes. An ATS converts all resumes into a standard format, thus making it easier for an employer to compare candidates apple-to-apple.

But herein lies the challenge. An ATS will scan characters, numbers, whimsical fonts, resume templates (thanks Microsoft Word), columns, pictures and tables. It will then try to conform all the originality of a resume down into a standardized document.

An ATS cannot, however, translate the information on a resume. The system does not read or comprehend it. Thus, it may rank and rate an applicant as being not viable for a position. You may actually be the perfect candidate for the...
job, but an ATS doesn’t care. It will boot the resume, and a human will likely never see it.

On average, an ATS will reject up to 75 percent of the applications submitted for a position.

So, what is an applicant to do? The job seeker has to figure out how to beat the computer. Applicants now rewrite their resumes every time they submit one electronically. The ATS looks for the keywords in the job description. If it says “experienced at invoicing vendors” and the applicant’s résumé says “accounts receivable experience,” an ATS will not recognize that these phrases describe the same skill and experience. A trained human resource professional would. This mismatch in words is likely to get the resume rejected before a person ever reviews it.

Suppose the candidate simply regurgitates the job description on their resume. Shouldn’t this raise the concern that an applicant is no longer genuinely reflecting their skills and experience to the employer? Is there confidence that the applicant is the best-skilled person for the job just because they understand how to elevate their resume in an automated system?

Who is being left behind?

If your company struggles to find talent and uses an ATS, perhaps the old-school approach of reading stacks of resumes is worth reconsidering. The return of the human factor may allow for the discovery of hidden gems, leading to more perfect matches, and reducing turnover.

In this war for talent, maybe the efficiency will come from actually reading the grey in a resume.

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

BUILDING PERMITS

The following building permits have been issued recently by Champaign County and incorporated jurisdictions of Champaign, Mahomet, Rantoul, Savoy, St. Joseph, Tolono and Urbana. The Mahomet permits listed have been applied for but not yet approved.

In Champaign, Rantoul, Savoy and Urbana, only permits for all commercial and industrial work and all new single-family and multifamily residences and all residential remodeling exceeding $25,000 are listed. Permits are listed by applicant, description of work, location and — when available — estimated cost of improvements.

CHAMPAIGN

Armstrong Builders, Inc., new single-family dwelling at 1504 Bluegrass Lane, $214,000.

Armstrong Builders, Inc., new single-family dwelling at 3812 Slate Drive, $214,000.

Larry Joes and Levaie Stroggins, rooftop solar at 4902 Watermark Dr., $27,500.

TK Homes of Illinois — Morgan Martin and Matt Peters, basement finish at 3802 Obsidian Dr., $35,000.

TK Homes of Illinois — Tristan and Taeashia, basement finish at 3802 Obsidian Drive, $35,000.

Mode 3 Architecture — Fairlawn UIUC Fund, LLC, 23 laundry units at 202 Chalmers St., $67,850.

AI Fleener, Downtown Champaign Holding, Surface 51 interior remodeling at 106 S. Neil St., $61,500.

Sub 6 Development Company LLC, renovation of autism center at 2301 W. Bradley Ave., $101,000.

Duzan Architecture and Design, H & H CU Capital, apartment renovation at 307 E. Clark St., $408,000.

JD Sports, Finish Line to JD Sports conversion at 2000 N. Neil St., Unit 604, $100,000.

Duzan Architecture and Design, 300 White LLC, multi-family remodel at 306 E. White St., $250,000.

ADA Architects — National Pizza Company, Raising Cane’s Restaurant renovation at 411 E. Green St., $2,574,359.

Mode 3 Architecture — RSMH Beta Ground LLC, 6-story MF and mixed use at 202 E. Daniel St., $20,721,332.

Andrew Fell Arch & Design — Haroun Trading LLC, Strip Mall Shell Building at 409 Town Center Blvd., $705,000.

Green Trac LLC — American Water SSC, Illinois American Water Mechanical Building restoration at 1609 N. Mattis Ave., $36,000.

Signature Construction, Inc. Willis Trace, LLC, new single-family dwelling at 2009 Max Run Drive, $400,000.

Rave Homes, IUVO Constructum, LLC, new single-family dwelling at 1803 Peppermill Ln., $296,900.

Sun Pro Solar, Nina Gulvzunshi Tosia, rooftop solar at 507 Isabella Ave., $1,998,380.

Vonderheide Construction, Inc., roof repair or replacement at 2810 E. Castlerock Dr., $70,150.

Motif, LLC, multi-family residence at 302 W. Locust St., $36,000.

Broeren Russo Builders, commercial alteration at 221 N. Broadway, $146,175.

ServiceMaster – DSI - Pat Krell, single-family residence at 2016 S. Boudreau Dr., $110,920.

Vision Contracting Services – Bill Bochte, commercial alteration at 602 N. Cunningham Ave., $86,520.

Petry Kuhn Co., commercial alteration at 509 W. University Ave., $778,994.

New Life Surface Solutions — Cody Steen, single-family residence at 506 S. Maple St., $1,170,740.

URBANA

KC Home Solutions, LLC, single family residence at 105 E. Florida Ave., $48,143.

BTB Contracting Inc., commercial — exterior alterations at 1006 E. Airport Road, $60,000.

Habitat for Humanity, single-family residence at 1308 W. Dublin St., $102,000.

Signature Construction, new single-family residence at 1909 N. Venturi Court, $350,000.

Signature Construction, new single-family residence at 602 N. Beacon Hill Circle, $850,000.

Stephens Homes, single-family detached at 1309 Ravenwood Drive, $300,000.

Signature Construction, Inc., single-family detached at 620 Rapp Drive, $200,000.

Unlimited Construction & Development, Inc., single-family attached at 628 Rapp Drive, $200,000.

Unlimited Construction & Development, Inc., single-family attached at 628 Rapp Drive, $200,000.

Unlimited Construction & Development, Inc., single-family attached at 626 Rapp Drive, $200,000.

Unlimited Construction & Development, Inc., single-family detached at 626 Rapp Drive, $200,000.

Unlimited Construction & Development, Inc., single-family detached at 628 Rapp Drive, $200,000.

Unlimited Construction & Development, Inc., single-family detached at 630 Rapp Drive, $200,000.

Barber & DeAtley, Inc., new commercial construction at 105 N. Neil St., Unit 604, $1,998,380.

Vonderheide Construction, Inc., roof repair or replacement at 2810 E. Castlerock Dr., $70,150.

Motif, LLC, multi-family residence at 302 W. Locust St., $36,000.

Broeren Russo Builders, commercial alteration at 221 N. Broadway, $146,175.

ServiceMaster – DSI - Pat Krell, single-family residence at 2016 S. Boudreau Dr., $110,920.

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Petry Kuhn Co., commercial alteration at 509 W. University Ave., $778,994.

New Life Surface Solutions — Cody Steen, single-family residence at 506 S. Maple St., $1,170,740.

MAHOMET

Todd Boudreau, deck alterations at 1204 Morningside Lane, $25,910.

Tyler and Whitney Mallory, remodel at 507 Isabella Drive, $40,000.

Signature Construction, Inc., single-family residence at 1201 Briarwood Lane, $400,000.

RANTOUL

Martin Bros Logistics, LLC, excavation/foundation at 118 E. Bowman Drive, $45,000.

Lanz Heating & Cooling, Inc., mechanical work at 118 E. Borman Dr., $27,000.
The son-in-law of a local radio legend who could be heard on WDWS for 40 years is closing in on a milestone of his own. May will mark 25 years at the Champaign Park District — 17 as director of recreation, eight in his current role of executive director — for Joe DeLuce, the pride of Toronto, Ohio.

One half of one of C-U’s power couples, the husband of Visit Champaign County President/CEO Jayne DeLuce earned his bachelor’s degree in recreation administration from Kent State in 1980 — and his master’s in the same field from the University of Illinois 21 years later.

The avid racquetball and pickleball player took time out to answer questions in our speed read on leaders of organizations big and small.

Three words I hope my employees would use to describe me are … positive, caring and leader.

When it comes to role models … one of my favorites is Alvin Griggs, one of our former park board members. Al is someone who never met a stranger as he could talk to anyone. We traveled to various parks and recreation conferences and spent a lot of time talking about everything.

Another role model is my father-in-law, Jim Turpin, who had an outstanding career in radio. He has been great to talk to about sports and life.

My philosophy on meetings is … to only have them when they are really needed and try to keep them to a maximum of one hour.
If I could trade places for a week with any other leader in town, I wouldn’t mind switching with … Bret Bielema. I have always wanted to be a football coach. Plus, he makes a pretty good salary.

My one unbreakable rule of the workplace is … don’t be afraid to fail. I would rather see employees try something new and fail than not to try at all.

The hardest thing about being a leader is … I work hard to be as positive as possible, so dealing with negative people is very hard for me.

I wind down after work by … walking my dog, Milo, and playing racquetball. Both help with stress.

I can’t live without my … breakfast at The Original Pancake House. It has been a great place for meeting with friends and family and to hold business meetings.

The most beneficial college classes I took were … all of my graduate classes in Recreation, Sport and Tourism at the University of Illinois.

It took me 18 years to go back to work on my master’s degree. It was a huge learning experience since I was older than most of the professors and students, but I had a lot of experiences so the classes gave a new perspective on the parks and recreation profession.

I also went back a few years later to teach a class on Community Recreation at the U of I, which taught me more than any class that I took as a student.
On my office walls, you’ll find … pictures of Champaign Park District facilities like the Olympic and Paralympic Tribute in Dodds Park, pictures of participants in our programs, and pictures of my daughters participating in our programs when they were younger.

My single favorite moment of all time in this job was … being offered the opportunity to lead the Champaign Park District as the executive director in December of 2013.

As far as my exercise routine goes … my goal is to walk four to five miles per day and play racquetball and pickleball as much as possible.

Most nights, I’m up until … midnight. I am more of a night person than an early morning person.

The worst job I ever had was … painting houses during the summer for $1.50 per hour when I was in high school.

On a 1-to-10 scale, the impact of the pandemic has been a … 10. In 2020, we did not open the Sholem Aquatic Center or the Virginia Theatre and had no large special events like the Taste of CU. It was a really hard year not doing what we love to do every day.
**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.

**Weekly grain prices**

Prices for grain crops for the week of Feb. 14, 2022. Figures are for this week and the percentage change compared with a year ago.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grain</th>
<th>Feb. 14, 2022</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C.I. Corn (b)</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.I. Soybean (b)</td>
<td>15.66</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.I. 48% Soybean Meal, Rail (t)</td>
<td>471.10</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Red Winter Wheat (b)</td>
<td>8.43</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truck to Kansas City</td>
<td>11.46</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Northern Spring Wheat (b) 14% MN, Rail</td>
<td>10.90</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft White Wheat Portland (b)</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Prices at the pump**

Average price per gallon of regular unleaded gas as of Feb. 15, 2022.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Feb. ’22</th>
<th>Feb. ’22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bloomington-Normal</td>
<td>$3.56</td>
<td>$2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champaign-Urbana</td>
<td>$3.60</td>
<td>$2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>$3.92</td>
<td>$2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danville</td>
<td>$3.57</td>
<td>$2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decatur</td>
<td>$3.52</td>
<td>$2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>$3.66</td>
<td>$2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>$3.49</td>
<td>$2.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Unemployment rates for Central Illinois counties, state and nation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Champaign</td>
<td>110,366</td>
<td>3,548</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>▼ -0.2</td>
<td>▼ -1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coles</td>
<td>22,594</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>▼ -0.1</td>
<td>▼ -1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>9,923</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>▼ -0.2</td>
<td>▼ -1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgar</td>
<td>8,317</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>▼ -0.2</td>
<td>▼ -1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford</td>
<td>6,158</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>▼ -0.1</td>
<td>▼ -1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iroquois</td>
<td>12,973</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>▼ -0.1</td>
<td>▼ -1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macon</td>
<td>45,712</td>
<td>2,612</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>▼ -0.1</td>
<td>▼ -4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLean</td>
<td>83,212</td>
<td>3,034</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>▼ -0.1</td>
<td>▼ -1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moultrie</td>
<td>7,266</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>▼ -0.1</td>
<td>▼ -1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piatt</td>
<td>8,541</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>▼ -0.1</td>
<td>▼ -1.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vermilion</td>
<td>31,662</td>
<td>1,441</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>▼ -0.4</td>
<td>▼ -1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>346,724</td>
<td>13,041</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>▼ -0.1</td>
<td>▼ -1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>6,320,577</td>
<td>274,077</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>▼ -0.2</td>
<td>▼ -3.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>161,696,000</td>
<td>5,964,000</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>▼ -0.2</td>
<td>▼ -2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Champaign County retail sales collections — Q3 comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Champaign</td>
<td>$15,468,606</td>
<td>$10,814,757</td>
<td>$17,255,397</td>
<td>$17,088,725</td>
<td>$16,520,654</td>
<td>$16,365,053</td>
<td>▼ 5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahomet</td>
<td>$871,277</td>
<td>$631,116</td>
<td>$735,564</td>
<td>$761,147</td>
<td>$698,876</td>
<td>$618,235</td>
<td>▲ 40.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philo</td>
<td>$112,594</td>
<td>$71,054</td>
<td>$105,128</td>
<td>$111,841</td>
<td>$89,842</td>
<td>$86,370</td>
<td>▲ 30.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rantoul</td>
<td>$1,413,578</td>
<td>$975,303</td>
<td>$1,525,491</td>
<td>$1,435,536</td>
<td>$1,375,921</td>
<td>$1,390,511</td>
<td>▲ 1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savoy</td>
<td>$2,130,016</td>
<td>$1,495,940</td>
<td>$2,323,105</td>
<td>$2,434,367</td>
<td>$2,292,820</td>
<td>$2,326,158</td>
<td>▼ 8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Joseph</td>
<td>$230,854</td>
<td>$162,375</td>
<td>$235,632</td>
<td>$239,371</td>
<td>$224,224</td>
<td>$206,971</td>
<td>▲ 11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolono</td>
<td>$166,065</td>
<td>$116,389</td>
<td>$152,373</td>
<td>$198,891</td>
<td>$171,404</td>
<td>$152,498</td>
<td>▲ 9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbana</td>
<td>$4,894,613</td>
<td>$3,407,519</td>
<td>$5,584,667</td>
<td>$5,210,233</td>
<td>$5,026,102</td>
<td>$5,012,534</td>
<td>▼ 2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unincorporated</td>
<td>$1,018,076</td>
<td>$712,813</td>
<td>$1,371,459</td>
<td>$1,427,403</td>
<td>$1,350,949</td>
<td>$1,185,550</td>
<td>▼ 14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County total</td>
<td>$26,305,682</td>
<td>$18,387,267</td>
<td>$29,288,815</td>
<td>$28,907,515</td>
<td>$27,750,792</td>
<td>$27,343,880</td>
<td>▼ 3.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Latest statistics available from Illinois Department of Revenue
Home sales
Total units sold, including condominiums.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Champaign</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>▲ 6.9%</td>
<td>2,898</td>
<td>2,685</td>
<td>▲ 7.9%</td>
<td>$179,000</td>
<td>$166,250</td>
<td>▲ 7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coles</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>▲ 25.9%</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>▼ 0.9%</td>
<td>$87,250</td>
<td>$119,500</td>
<td>▼ 21.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>▲ 125.0%</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>▲ 10.9%</td>
<td>$134,300</td>
<td>$78,000</td>
<td>▲ 72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgar</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>▲ 114.3%</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>▲ 19.7%</td>
<td>$55,000</td>
<td>$70,000</td>
<td>▼ 21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>▲ 30.0%</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>▲ 6.3%</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>$95,000</td>
<td>▲ 5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iroquois</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>▲ 17.6%</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>▲ 31.3%</td>
<td>$104,000</td>
<td>$125,000</td>
<td>▼ 18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macon</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>▼ 9.8%</td>
<td>1,604</td>
<td>1,519</td>
<td>▲ 5.6%</td>
<td>$101,449</td>
<td>$109,000</td>
<td>▼ 7.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>McLean</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>▲ 8.0%</td>
<td>2,814</td>
<td>2,668</td>
<td>▲ 5.5%</td>
<td>$185,500</td>
<td>$108,450</td>
<td>▲ 13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moultrie</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>▲ 25.0%</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>▼ 13.2%</td>
<td>$96,250</td>
<td>$108,450</td>
<td>▼ 11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piatt</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>▲ 1.9%</td>
<td>$137,000</td>
<td>$118,000</td>
<td>▲ 16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermilion</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>▲ 1.9%</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>▲ 7.3%</td>
<td>$95,000</td>
<td>$87,600</td>
<td>▲ 8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>10,221</td>
<td>10,279</td>
<td>▼ 0.6%</td>
<td>193,333</td>
<td>172,867</td>
<td>▲ 11.8%</td>
<td>$238,000</td>
<td>$225,000</td>
<td>▲ 5.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Illinois Association of Realtors

Willard Airport passenger totals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly totals</th>
<th>Jan. ‘22</th>
<th>Jan. ‘21</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enplanements</td>
<td>3,292</td>
<td>1,895</td>
<td>▲ 73.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year-to-date totals</td>
<td>3,292</td>
<td>1,895</td>
<td>▲ 73.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual totals</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>▲ 48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enplanements</td>
<td>53,375</td>
<td>35,874</td>
<td>▲ 48.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.

Amtrak total monthly riders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bloomington-Normal</td>
<td>14,541</td>
<td>124,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champaign-Urbana</td>
<td>17,069</td>
<td>147,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattoon</td>
<td>2,429</td>
<td>19,892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rantoul</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>3,760</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL REVENUE</th>
<th>December ’21</th>
<th>November ‘ 21</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$269,763</td>
<td>$414,305</td>
<td>▼ -34.89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANNUAL TOTALS</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$2,214,585</td>
<td>$3,487,977</td>
<td>▲ 57.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cities of Champaign and Urbana

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 Feb. 10, 2022, for the U.S. and for the North Central region, which includes Illinois, and the average rates for the U.S. one year ago.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mortgage type</th>
<th>U.S. Feb. ‘22</th>
<th>U.S. Feb. ‘21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-year fixed</td>
<td>3.69%</td>
<td>2.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-year fixed</td>
<td>2.93%</td>
<td>2.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/1-year adjustable</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>2.79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.
For well-known businesses in Tolono, Champaign and Tuscola, it's all relative.

Have a family business we should know about, email CIB Editor Mike Goebel at mgoebel@news-gazette.com.
For well-known businesses in Tolono, Champaign and Tuscola, it’s all relative.

Have a family business we should know about, email CIB Editor Mike Goebel at mgoebel@news-gazette.com.
There is a lot of history at the Monical’s Pizza in Tolono.

Take the owners, Tom and Beth Swigart, for example. The two met as teenagers, working their first jobs at the pizza place in 1979. “We were in high school, but that is where we met and started dating,” Tom said. “We eventually got married. The rest is history.”

But there is a little more to it than that. “He was my boss at one point,” Beth said. “He thought he was something else. I had delivered papers and also had some other odd jobs, but it was my first real steady job with a paycheck.”

Even at that age, Tom displayed a strong work ethic and a drive to succeed. After the two were married, Tom, who grew up on a farm and was still involved in farming, came home one day in 1995 and told Beth of his dream. “I want to buy the Monical’s,” he told her. “What?” was the reply. The Monical’s he was talking about was the one...
where they had met and fell in love. At that time, it was owned by Virginia Wood, the sister of the founder, Ralph Monical.

Ralph was a 1952 graduate of Unity High School. He served in the Army and returned to Tolono and worked in the insurance business. He also operated a billiards room called “Sidepockets.”

Ralph had purchased the billiards room as a hobby and, to make extra money in 1959, he took his mother’s pizza recipe, made a few minor changes and began cooking pizzas in an oven at the business.

People began to notice, and soon they were coming for the pizza instead of the pool.

That led to the opening of Monical’s Pizza in Tolono, which today is a regional pizza chain with over 60 locations in Illinois, Indiana, Missouri and Wisconsin.

Ralph, who passed away in February 2022 at age 87, sold his interest in the company in 1982, but in 1995, his sister owned the property, which moved to the current location at 102 W. Vine in 1968. Tom and Beth both worked for her and were good friends, and they all agreed to a deal to purchase it. The Swigarts took over on July 7, 1996.

“The history means a lot to us,” Beth said. “With this being the original Monical’s, it’s special.”

Tom and Beth’s daughter, Megan, also worked at the restaurant before moving to
Normal to attend school at Illinois State University. There, she worked at the Normal Monical’s, and history repeated itself when she met and married a co-worker.

“I guess it’s a family tradition now,” Beth said. “But Monical’s is so much a part of my life, of our lives.”

But it’s not the only part. She owns and operates a salon in Champaign, and Tom also has outside interests. Tom, whose father and grandfather both farmed, got out of farming to run Monical’s in 1996 but continued to help another farm family. Two decades later, he jumped back into the ag industry as a corn and soybean farmer.

“We both are working a lot more at Monical’s than we did mostly because of the labor shortage,” Tom said.

Working with your spouse is rewarding, Beth said. “We get along fine,” she adds. “I am kind of the one who has to smooth things over. He is running 1,000 miles per hour and is like ‘Do this. Do that.’ I am the one who says ‘Calm down, we will get through it.’ But we work great together. We each have our strong points and our weak points, but we balance out.”

Among the most rewarding part of the 26 years of owning the restaurant, Beth says, is the role they have played in the lives of the employees who have worked for them.

“We have employed thousands of kids, many of them working their first job like Tom and I did,” she explains. “Sometimes I sit back and I see them grow up and have children of their own, and it makes me realize I have been here a long time. They will often come back and some will say that Tom was a little hard to work for, but they learned a lot about the ins and outs of holding down a job and they learned a lot about what a good, strong work ethic can do for you. A lot of them started when they were 15 or 16 and so we feel like we have a second family because of them.”

Along the walls of Monical’s are memorabilia relating to Tolono and the high school.

“We just love being here with the community and working with the schools,” she said. “It is such an honor or maybe even a gift. We are very fortunate to have the employees we have had. Everybody struggles. We struggle too, and businesses are closing right and left, but we still have a strong core of local residents who support us. It is great being in a small town and such a big part of the small-town community. It means a lot to us.”

Tom agrees. “We are loyal to this community and do everything we can,” he said. “It is our duty. It is part of our history.”

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As the executive director of the Tuscola Chamber and Economic Development Inc., Brian Moody knows the local business community better than anyone.

He points to the Tuscola Home Center as a “key business” in the community.

“I think its very existence says something about the strength and vitality of Tuscola,” he said. “It is an essential partner to our business community, providing the parts and materials and essential items which allow so many to keep moving their own projects forward. It provides our citizens and businesses with a center for supplies and keeps the dollars from their purchases local, circulating in our local economy. So many small communities struggle to reduce leakage when residents and businesses make purchases from outside our area.”

On Oct. 1, 1970, Jim and Kay Higgins opened their doors to serve the public for the very first time.

“I had a friend, and his parents owned the Western Auto Store in Tuscola at the time,” Jim said.

Western Auto was a specialty retail chain of stores that supplied auto parts and accessories. The Tuscola store was one of about 1,200 stores across the United States.

“My friend and I went to college together and then started working at Firestone in
Owners Jim and Kay Higgins in the appliance and decor area at the Tuscola Home Center.
Decatur,” he said. “He moved to Detroit, but one time he came home to visit, and I found out his parents were interested in selling the store.”

Jim had a degree in engineering, but he didn’t feel that was his true calling.

“My problem was that I wasn’t a team player,” he said. “Many times with those big companies, you are just a number. I knew I would be better off being in business for myself.”

Jim and Kay bought the business but knew they would have to adapt. They started selling hardware and lumber.

“Back then, there were K-Marts all over the place, and they were doing big business,” he said.

“Walmart was not as big as they are now, but then slowly, the big box stores started coming around,” he said. “The Menards and the Home Depots and the Lowe’s were popping up everywhere. We learned to live with them. They are tough competition, but we can survive with them.”

Jim says he appreciates the loyalty of his customers.

“Back a long time ago, you had loyal customers,” he said. “Your service meant something. That’s gone for the most part. There are still people in their 60s and 70s who remember, but it is going away fast. It won’t be there much longer. But there was a time when people appreciated your service and they were loyal. They would give you a chance. They may not always buy from you, but they would at least give you a chance. They would get a price from you. But today, there is not so much loyalty. There is some, but not like it used to be.”

The Tuscola store underwent a number of changes and eventually became the Tuscola Home Center. It now includes a full-service lumber yard, home decor design, in-stock flooring, appliance and appliance repair, outdoor power equipment and service, equipment rental, Carhartt clothing and Redwing shoes, and one of central Illinois’ largest selection of in-stock grills and the hardware needed for any home or home repair. And not forgetting their roots, automotive parts and service are still available.

“This business has so much to offer to not only our Tuscola community but also surrounding communities,” said Tuscola Mayor Dan Kleiss. “If you are needing building products for your home or even material to build a new home, they have it; if you need kitchen appliances, they have it; cleaning products, automotive products and repair, they have it. Tools and machinery to buy or rent, they have it. Probably one of the biggest areas that I think is important is providing customer service, something that is hard to find at other big box stores, plus lower sales taxes than most big box stores.”
Jim said that over the years, he has learned what the residents of Tuscola and Douglas County need.

“I think that we are a very well-rounded store,” he adds. “All of this has grown about because Tuscola is only 4,300 people and the county is only 20,000 people, and so you couldn’t make it on just one thing. We still work on cars. That is a carry-over from the Western Auto days in the 70s. But a car is the second-most expensive thing you own besides your house and so it is important.”

Kay is president of the corporation that owns the store, and she still works there.

“It makes me feel good that we have been able to do so much for Tuscola over the years and that our residents know they can count on us,” she said.

The couple has been married for more than 56 years.

“It’s rewarding to work with your spouse on something so good for the community,” Jim said. “I know it might not work for everybody, but we work together on the decisions.”

Kleiss said both have been a tremendous benefit to the community.

“Jim and Kay started business over 50 years ago in Tuscola and have relocated a few times while adding new products and expansion of their facilities over the years,” he said. “They are invaluable resources, especially whenever our community gets hit with some sort of disaster, because they are the first ones to open their stores to see how they can help out. I know that they are continually donating their time, products and resources to many organizations almost weekly. They have been and continue to be a vital part of our community, and we are very grateful that they selected Tuscola over 50 years ago to raise their family and open a business. Tuscola is lucky to have them.”

Moody says the ties run deep.

“Jim and Kay have come through time and time again for our community,” he adds. “They are continuously investing here and continuing to grow here. They provide the essential items we need every day and especially when disasters, both small and large, have impacted us. They are always working in the background, providing some key resource or function that allows a new business to thrive or a new resident to find a home. They are always supporting our various community organizations and activities. Jim and Kay have always been strong supporters of our economic development efforts, encouraging us to pursue projects and build our community. They are always pushing forward, making investment, building our people and contributing to our local economy. We are blessed to have them.”

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Colony Square Cleaners

‘It’s not just about the cleaning business, it’s about people.’

STORY Kevin Barlow
PHOTOS Robin Scholz
When you drop off your cleaning at Colony Square Cleaners in Champaign, there is a good chance that a member of Alvin Griggs’ family will play a part in being responsible for it at some point.

Griggs, the founder and president of the dry cleaners at 701 Devonshire Drive, said that it truly is a family-run business.

“We have had almost every family member work here at one time or another,” says Griggs, who still is active in the business he started at the same location in Colony Square in 1979. “My nephew (Terrance Jones) is the general manager. But his grandson, my grandson, his nephew, both of my sons, my wife, his wife, I mean the list is endless. It has always been that way. We had family come up from the south and visit during the summers and work for us. I am very proud.
of that.”

Griggs moved to Champaign-Urbana in the early 1960s to attend graduate school at the University of Illinois. His wife, Mildred, completed her Ph.D., and Griggs received his master’s degree and administrative certificate. He worked in Unit 4 schools as a teacher, coach and administrator, including terms as an assistant principal at Centennial and principal at Edison Middle School.

“We had two sons, and I thought there was a need to get involved in a business venture,” Griggs said.

After saving some money, Griggs followed his passion.

“I wanted to be in radio,” he said. “I used to wake up listening to the Silver Fox on WDWS. But I came from the south, and we had all of these sunshine stations which had a lot of community information, they had a lot of Black music, and I wanted to bring that here.”

He hired a lawyer in Washington, D.C., and had discussions with the FCC about purchasing one of the available frequencies in the area.

“But it is so expensive for the licenses and the antennas and everything that goes into it, so we gave up on it,” he said.

Even then, the family connection was strong for Griggs, who had a cousin who owned a dry cleaning business back home in Meridian, Miss. Griggs’ mother, Mabel Holloway, had worked for him, and as a youth he hung around the facility often. He also worked for the Mississippi Independent Linen Association for a year. The experiences between the two were enough to start his own dry cleaning business in Champaign.

“But when we opened, the economy wasn’t good at all,” he said. “It was 1979 and inflation was going crazy. Interest rates were raised and we got by with the help of a couple of banks in town, and after we got through that, things started moving really well.”
He also had the help of a partner, Bill Renfro. “He had worked at every dry cleaners in Champaign-Urbana,” Griggs said. “He came out of the Navy and served in World War II. So he was the manager that took over the team. We were partners until he retired.”

But the influx of family members had already started. Jones moved from Tuscaloosa, Ala., to Champaign in 1981. “I was about 22 years old,” he said. “I was familiar with being here because when I was in high school I would come up here and spend the summers with my uncle. He was my mentor and I would learn different things about the business. I met my wife here and thought it was a great place to raise a family.”

In addition to working at Unit 4 and running Colony Square Cleaners, Griggs has served as president or chair for the Urban League of Champaign County, Habitat for Humanity Champaign and Piatt County, Champaign Park District and Workforce Investment Board of East Central Illinois. He also served as a member of the Champaign County Design Conservation, Community Collaboration for Economic Development, and NAACP. He has served as the chair of the Workforce Investment Board and as an elected park district commissioner. He was elected for 2007-08 by his peers to co-chair the Illinois Association of Park Districts/Illinois Park and Recreation Association Joint distinguished Agency Committee, among others. “I guess serving the community has always been a part of me,” he said. “I grew up in a community where we did volunteer work at an early age. I was in Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, and serving and volunteering was part of being a Scout. I had people who helped me, like my high school football coach, who was a mentor all of the way through high school and college. I had people who really helped me out and so I just kept it going.”

Manager Terrance Jones, right, waits on customer Thom Moore of Urbana, who said he has been coming to Colony Square Cleaners for 20 years.

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After arriving in Champaign-Urbana, he was asked to serve on an Urban League youth group. “After that I just started working for different groups, and pretty soon you have a network of people and groups, and I have always enjoyed it,” he said.

Family members aren’t the only ones who have worked for the business. The family has a deep history of helping those with disabilities. Jones’ son works for the Pavilion, a residential treatment center that provides long-term treatment for children with severe and emotional, psychiatric and addictive diseases.

In 2021, Developmental Services Center, a Champaign-based agency that provides programs and services to developmentally disabled individuals who are residents of Champaign, Ford, Piatt and Iroquois counties, honored Colony Square Cleaners as their Employer of the Year.

Colony Square Cleaners began working with DSC after receiving a phone call from a DSC Employment Services Specialist. Colony Square Cleaners was already open and familiar with the idea of hiring someone with a disability. Fair employment is one of the values in their mission statement, and they had previously employed a friend of the family with a disability, who had since passed away, and left an impact on their family.

“We try to keep family involvement central to our business, but we have also hired a lot of other young people,” Jones said. “We have a heart and a passion for helping young people grow and learn a good work ethic, as well. “It’s not just about the cleaning business, it’s about people. This is what our family is about. It’s about helping people.”

Colony Square Cleaners offers full on-site dry cleaning, shirt service, fluff-n-fold laundry, commercial laundry, alterations and repair, suede and leather cleaning, shoe repair and garment storage.

“Things have changed over the years,” Griggs said. “We are not doing as much dry cleaning as we used to because of the popularity of casual wear. Not as many people wear suits and ties anymore. They put on blue jeans and wash them at home. Even at church now, people wear blue jeans and casual wear, and that used to be something where everybody wore suits.”

Griggs and his family adapted. “Things changed, and so we did, too,” he added. “We made adjustments. We moved into commercial dry cleaning and commercial laundry, and that helped us.”

Now past 80 years old, Griggs has no intention of slowing down. “He is still sharp, and we still learn things from him,” Jones adds.

“Colony Square Cleaners has been a good thing for the community and the family,” Griggs says. “It is still working, and we hope it will continue for future generations.”

Customcare Equipment of Peoria technicians Michael Johnson, left, and Randy Owens repair a washing machine.
Aging, accessibility and economy in Champaign County

By EVAN ALVAREZ and MIMI HUTCHINSON
CIB contributors

It comes as no surprise that as the population ages, older adults are driving less. Between the cost of owning a vehicle and the fact that roughly one in four older adults have some form of disability, many are choosing to drive less or not at all. This is pushing people to find new, creative options for themselves and loved ones to access medical care, grocery shopping and recreation — as well as combat isolation.

For many, the best solution is found in public transportation options provided by the human services sector.

What does this have to do with the business world? The answer may be more than you think. Dollars spent by adults aged 50 and older account for more than 40% of the country’s total GDP. A 2019 AARP study showed that the same group added more than $9 trillion to the economy that year. And despite how much older adults already contribute to the economy, those numbers are likely being held back by factors like age discrimination and, yes, accessibility issues.

Americans are learning more and more that it’s a smart move to cater to the needs of older adults. And that means addressing transportation concerns.

Public transportation, in addition to being a healthy and convenient option for older adults, is a major part of our national infrastructure. According to the American Public Transportation Association, every dollar invested in public transit delivers another $5 back into the economy by spawning employment, spending and commerce. Transit is no unnecessary expense; it’s one of the key indicators of a healthy, accessible community.

The main tool in the public transportation toolbox is the traditional fixed-route bus system. The Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District provides unlimited rides for adults over age 65, as well as passengers with disabilities through the DASH Card program. Passengers applying for a DASH Card can go to Illinois Terminal during business hours, visit the customer service desk and show an ID with proof of age.

MTD also has a customer service department dedicated expressly to answering questions and helping make transit more accessible for new riders.

For passengers who are unable to access fixed-route transit, all transit agencies are required to provide paratransit service. MTD’s version, ADA Paratransit, exists to help people with disabilities access the community, including changes in ability level related to aging.

While many people associate services like ADA Paratransit with transportation to and from the doctor, paratransit is designed to help passengers access the full range of trips possible by the traditional bus, including trips for shopping, employment and recreation.

For older adults living outside of urban areas, rural transit may exist as an option. In Champaign County, the Champaign County Rural Transit System (C-CARTS) provides a combination of fixed-route and demand-response service for general populations living or traveling outside of C-U. Many C-CARTS riders are older adults and/or have a disability.

While all C-CARTS riders can use the service for any trip purpose, 40% of annual trips are medical in nature, another 40% are employment trips, and the rest are related to shopping, educational and personal needs.

Between MTD for in-town riders relying on fixed-route service, ADA Paratransit for those who are unable to access the bus, and C-CARTS for rural residents, Champaign County’s robust transit landscape enables older adults to stay active and engaged in the community regardless of barriers that might traditionally have limited their mobility.

But despite all of Champaign County’s transportation options, service gaps still exist. For example, buses don’t serve the entire community 24/7. Paratransit services generally require trips to be scheduled days in advance. Rural transit agencies sometimes must deny a rider’s trip request due to logistical challenges.

All communities operate as part of a larger ecosystem, and understanding the factors that exist in that ecosystem can lead to multiple layers of benefits. Being aware of accessibility issues and planning around them — whether in our jobs, personal lives, or other endeavors — allows for the inclusion of people who might have been left out before. As a rising tide raises all boats, investing in mobility and accessibility for older adults and people with disabilities increases opportunity for everyone.

Evan Alvarez is the special services manager for the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District and Mimi Hutchinson is the human services transportation planning coordinator for the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission. The authors are part of the Age-Friendly steering committee. For information, please contact Wendy Bartlo at wbartlo@illinois.edu.
Public gatherings took a hit in 2020 and again in 2021. But a Champaign developer says events such as wedding receptions and celebrations are returning this year — and he has just the place to host them.

Hans Grotelueschen opened Carmon’s at 804 N. Neil St., C, as a 10,000-square-foot entertainment venue last fall in the property known as The Blue Line Station, which also features residential and commercial spaces.

“Things are going well,” Grotelueschen said. “We have had several weddings and fundraisers, and many more are booked for the spring and summer.”

Carmon’s can host over 700 guests for an event, he said. “It has the look of a refined, finished warehouse,” he said. “The look and feel of the space is different. More than 100 years ago, this was a trolley barn maintenance facility, so it has a lot of history to it, and we have restored it to that end.”

The Blue Line Station building originally was called the Hickory Street trolley barn and housed the streetcars that operated in Champaign-Urbana until 1936. The C-U street railway system existed from the late 1890s to the 1940s.

“We’re not a museum, and there are no trolley cars in here, but there is a great sense of history,” he added.
Grotelueschen said the facility is highlighted by polished floors, wood and industrial elegant decor, custom lighting and sound.

“It’s your event, your way,” he adds. “Your vision, your way. For your day. There is so much space and room that we can adapt to whatever you want or need.”

Grotelueschen says in addition to weddings, the venue can be rented for celebrations, fundraisers, galas, live-music events, networking events or workshops.

On March 6, couples preparing for a wedding can check out the venue during the Inspire Your Wedding Showcase, hosted by wedding planner Amanda Jean.

“Since it is a brand new venue, and we needed a place to host the showcase, we decided to work together and it will be perfect,” Jean said. “We are excited to host such an event at such a wonderful place.”

More than 40 vendors are expected.

Carmon’s features open space, polished concrete floors and a 25-foot lofted sassafras ceiling.

“Your event is only limited by your imagination,” Grotelueschen said.

The name comes from the old Carmon’s building located at 415 N. Neil St. in downtown Champaign. Grotelueschen and partner Jeff Mellander purchased the former restaurant building that started in 1947 as the home of Carmon’s Restaurant, first operated by Carl Monen. It closed in 2012.

The building was sold, but Mellander asked to keep the Carmon’s iconic sign. It was put into storage but eventually refurbished with new materials.

The time is right to open a new entertainment venue, Grotelueschen says. The pandemic has forced the cancellation of several large events, but that is changing, he explains.

“You can definitely feel that people are ready to gather for big events, and so, we are excited to be able to offer a new place with a lot of old history,” he said.
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