

CENTRAL ILLINOIS Business

February | March 2023
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HIRE LEVEL

Local Spherion franchisee Cindy Somers has followed in her father's footsteps — in terms of her zeal to both help others find work and be involved in her community

From the editor's desk



With our first edition entirely produced in 2023 comes a new theme for this year: women-owned businesses.

We're starting off by highlighting three in our area that have earned some recognition both for their work and their uniqueness in their fields — Spherion in Savoy, Applied Pavement Technology in Urbana and Reifsteck Reid & Company Architects in Champaign.

The first two feature owners who have enjoyed long careers in the area, while the principals in the third include the two daughters of one of the co-founders, who assumed their top positions just last year.

Their ranks are growing locally and nationally, so we're always happy to get your input on others to highlight.

If you know a worthy candidate, please feel free to reach out; my contact information is underneath my signature.

— Niko

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

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ON THE COVER

Clockwise from bottom, local Spherion franchisee Cindy Somers and recruiters Sherice Lotts, Susan Pulliam and Laura Del Rossi are shown at their office in Savoy.

Photo by Robin Scholz

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TOP LAWYERS

CHAMPAIGN-URBANA AREA

BASED UPON A SURVEY OF THEIR PEERS



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

Delmar K. Banner	Banner Ford LLP	Champaign	217.353.4900	Agriculture; Close/Private Held Bus; RE: Commercial; RE: Finance; Trust/Will/Estate
John L. Barger	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	Agriculture; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; RE: Comm; RE: Residential; Trust/Will/Estate
Robert G. Grierson	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	Agriculture; Banking; Close/Private Held Business; RE: Residential; Trust/Will/Estate
R. Sean Hocking	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	Personal Injury Defense: General; Products Liability Defense
J. Patrick Lee	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	Criminal Def: DUI; Criminal Def: Felonies/Misdemeanors; Family; PI Def: General
John F. Watson	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	Insurance/Coverage/Reinsurance; Medical Malpractice Defense; PI Defense: General
Bruce L. Bonds	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Employment: Management; PI Defense: General; Workers' Compensation Defense
John D. Flodstrom	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Workers' Compensation Defense
Keith E. Fruehling	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Employment: Mngmnt; Med Mal Def; PI Def: General; Prod Liab Def; Prof'l Mal Def
Joseph K. Guyette	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Personal Injury Defense: General; Prof'l Malpractice Defense; Workers' Comp Def
Renee L. Monfort	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Health; Medical Malpractice Defense
Brian M. Smith	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Civil Rights/Constitutional; Commercial Litigation; Employment: Management
Toney J. Tomaso	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Workers' Compensation Defense
Kenneth R. Torricelli	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	ADR: Personal Injury
Daniel P. Wurl	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Commercial Litigation; Insurance/Coverage/Reins; Medical Malpractice Defense
James D. Cottrell	James D. Cottrell Law Office PC	Champaign	217.693.4905	Agriculture; Close/Private Held; Land Use/Zoning; RE: Commercial; Trust/Will/Estate
Larry A. Apfelbaum	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Workers' Compensation
Todd A. Bresney	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1520	Personal Injury: General
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; Commercial Litigation; Personal Injury Defense: General
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	Agriculture; RE: Commercial; RE: Residential; Tax: Individual; Trust/Will/Estate
Denise Knipp Bates	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Elder; Real Estate: Residential
Justin N. Brunner	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Civ Rts/Constitution; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; Med Mal Def; PI Def: Gen; Prof'l Mal Def
James D. Green	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Insurance/Coverage/Reins; Personal Injury Defense: General
Richard R. Harden	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Medical Malpractice Defense; Personal Injury Defense: General
Kenneth D. Reifsteck	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Civil Appellate; Workers' Compensation Defense
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Lott H. Thomas	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Trust/Will/Estate
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.

Gina Couri-Cyphers	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Personal Injury: General
Eric S. Chovanec	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Employment: Management; Labor: Management; Workers' Compensation Defense
Nathan T. Kolb	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Civ Appellate; Insurance/Ins Coverage/Reinsurance; Medical Mal Def; PI Def: General

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Ann Swanson

STORY Jeff D'Alessio **PHOTOS** Robin Scholz

After starting her culinary career working in kitchens at high-end restaurants — Garibaldi's in Columbia, S.C., McCrady's in Charleston, S.C., Bacaro in downtown Champaign — ANN SWANSON's office these days is 10 acres of fertile farmland on North Rising Road, home to Jude and FreeBee, her two “very large” rescue pigs.

One part chef, one part educator, one part innovator, the Monticello High and University of South Carolina grad returned to the area in 2011 and launched a farm program at Hendrick House two years later.



The farm director's role has expanded by the year and entailed a little bit of everything — managing the 10-acre teaching farm and dormitory rooftop garden, partnering with the Champaign Urbana Schools Foundation and other organizations on youth programs, educating food-service workers on locally sourced food, helping feed those in low-income communities, putting on farm-to-table dinners, filming cooking videos, even authoring an book on how to handle, store and prepare fresh veggies.

Her foodie roots trace back to the Sage City Café in her hometown, where Swanson worked while still in high school, and she's stayed on that track ever since.

Reid Hermann's wife and Norman the dog's mom took time out to answer questions from Editor Jeff D'Alessio in the 162nd installment of our weekly speed read spotlighting leaders of organizations big and small.



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My one unbreakable rule of the workplace is ... attitude is everything.

My single favorite moment of all-time in this job was ... the first time children interacted with my rescue pigs — and every time since.

My philosophy on meetings is ... keep them short and direct.

I can't live without my ... unsweet ice tea, my friends, my family and Norman — my shorty Jack Russell.

The hardest thing about being a leader is ... the feeling that you aren't doing enough.

The three adjectives I hope my staff would use to describe me are ... driven, loyal and fair.

On my office walls, you'll find ... a calendar, white board and a lot of Post-its.

My professional role models are ... Kelly Hill, executive director

of the Champaign Urbana Schools Foundation; Rebecca McBride, founder and president of Four Osprey, and Tracy Dace, founder of DREAAM. They are motivated by the needs of others.

I'm frugal in that ... our budget requires us to recycle, reuse and repurpose. It forces us to be creative.

If I could trade places for a week with any other business person in town, I wouldn't mind switching with ... Jordan or Paris Baldarotta — so I could eat at Baldarotta's all week for free.

I wind down after work by ... meeting friends at the Brass Rail for "Jeopardy" on Fridays. I like anything that has to do with water in the summer — swimming, kayaking, tubing.


The last luxury in which I indulged was ... my husband and I going on our honeymoon to Puerto Rico in November.

The most beneficial college experience I had was ... working in kitchens. It taught me work ethic, punctuality, time management, humility, responsibility, resiliency and made me tough. That has been more valuable in my life than any college class.

I'm up and at 'em every day by ... 6 a.m. during farm season, 7:30 in the offseason.

My exercise routine consists of ... farming and walking. My job is pretty labor-intensive.

The worst job I ever had was ... at Sprinkles Turkey Farm. We vaccinated the turkeys. I haven't eaten turkey in 27 years. Gross, gross, gross.

The impact of the pandemic has been ... mostly negative. The hospitality industry was really hit hard. I would say one positive is that people seem to care a little more where their food comes from. 



Clearly beneficial

Rantoul Family Sports Complex has created plenty of new regulars who belly up to a uniquely historical bar at ET's restaurant downtown

STORY Dave Hinton

PHOTOS Jim Rossow

The eye-catching bar that adorns ET's restaurant in downtown Rantoul has a unique and local history.

It features a glass top framed in copper. The glass panels, which contain chicken wire, were used as architectural panels in the hangars on the former Chanute Air Force Base.

ET's owner, Eric Thompson, said a friend, Troy Bergman of Colorado, formerly of Rantoul, found the glass panels on his grandfather's farm between Rantoul and Thomasboro.

"We were trying to find ways to incorporate it into the existing space," Thompson said.

An epoxy was placed in the corrugated spaces of the bar, and lights were added.

Thompson said initially, he didn't know where the glass panels originated, until he visited the B-52 Hangar MX motocross dirt track and had an epiphany. The panels had come from the hangars.

"It was architectural in the hangars,"

Thompson said. "It almost looked like they were solar panels, but they just allowed light in. Over the years, they had painted them a number of times, but you could see what it looked like."

The panels are likely about 100 years old. It's a case of old meeting new — the vintage glass being used in the restaurant that was recently expanded into a neighboring building.

ET's has seen an increase in regulars, even from other states, after the opening of the Rantoul Family Sports Complex.

"Our revenue's been quite a bit improved because of the sports complex, especially since the remodeling," he said.

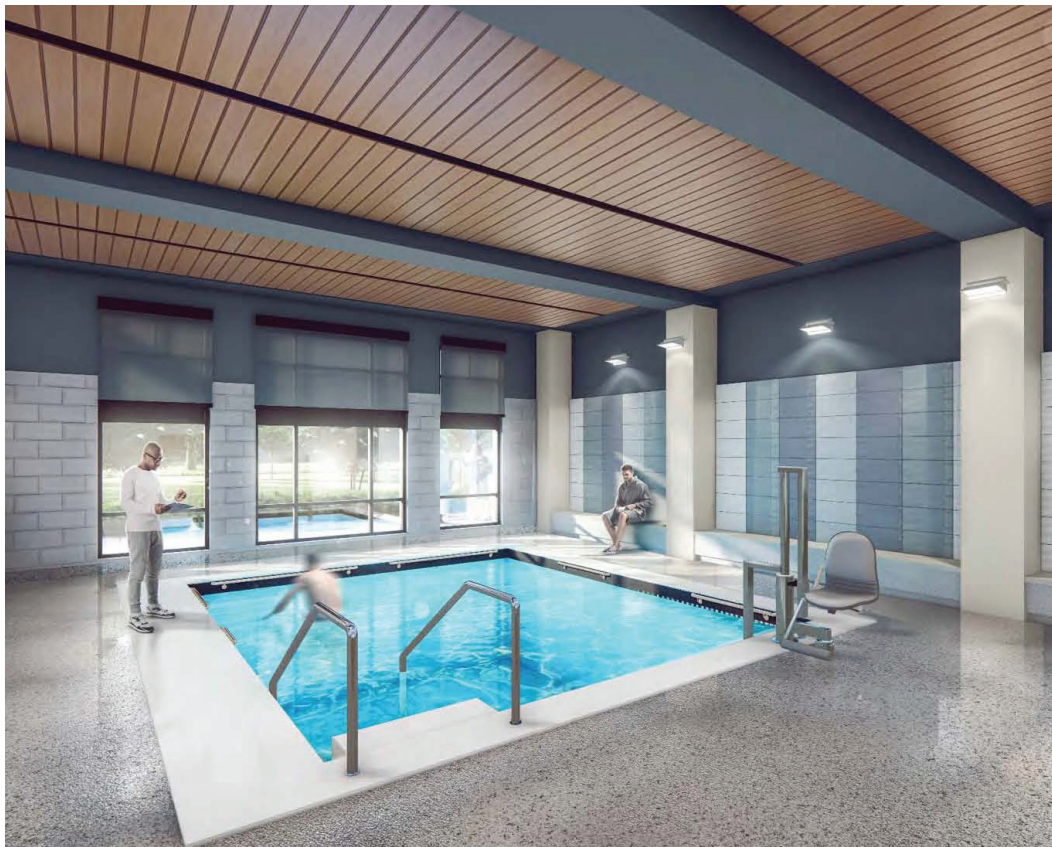
Business had been so good that Thompson expanded the popular restaurant to encompass a neighboring downtown building.

"We actually have regulars already from Wisconsin," Thompson said. "We see people from Michigan, Kentucky, Indiana, Iowa, as well as all through Illinois." ❌





The bar top at ET's restaurant in downtown Rantoul features glass panels that once hung in one of the hangars at the former Chanute Air Force Base.



Healthy growth

Construction wrapping up on newest addition to Kirby Medical Center's campus: 40,000-square-foot Therapy & Wellness Center

STORY Debra Pressey

PHOTOS Provided

MONTICELLO

Kirby Medical Center is poised to grow again, with construction on its new 40,000-square-foot Therapy & Wellness Center on track to wrap up at the end of February.

This is the biggest building project the system has taken on since the new hospital building itself opened in 2011, and it's going to about triple the size of the current therapy department, hospital CEO Steve Tenhouse said.



The new therapy center building, under construction in front of the hospital along Interstate 72, will open with 20,000 square feet on the main level and a similarly sized unfinished basement for future expansion.

The new finished space will provide much-needed larger spaces for the physical-, occupational- and speech-therapy programs, the hospital's dietitians and wellness services, cardiac rehab program, pulmonary rehab program and Stay Active & Independent for Life program, Tenhouse said.

"We have outgrown the space," he said.

The new facility will also come with a new service: aquatic therapy in a new 16-by-20-foot therapy pool, he said.

The remainder of the finished space will house the hospital's CrossFit gym and related programs and classes, which will double in size from its current home in a separate building on the main campus, Tenhouse said.

Driving this \$14.5 million project has been a growth in use of the hospital,

which draws patients not only from Piatt County but also from Champaign and Macon counties, Tenhouse said.

With new procedures being added, the hospital's surgery department has grown, he said.

"We are finding surgeons like the environment here, the staff and the facility," Tenhouse said.

Last month, Kirby Medical Center began a new master facility planning process and will be evaluating future space needs over the next five and 10 years, he said.

That will include looking at the best use of the space being vacated by therapy services, with one possibility being the addition of a fixed MRI unit, which "has been on our wish list for a couple of years now," Tenhouse said.

Currently, MRIs are provided by a mobile unit twice a week, and hospital officials have been evaluating the volume of use the mobile unit gets.

"We think we're close to needing one," he said. "If we had one here full time, it would get used more."

While many area construction projects have been delayed by supply-chain and employment issues, Tenhouse said good planning has helped avoid significant delays on the Therapy & Wellness Center.


Work on the exterior is nearly completed, with most of the work now underway being done inside the building, he said.

Plans call for moving to the new site over a two-week period in the first half of March, with possibly just a day of down time for therapy services before the final move.

Kirby Medical Center also recently completed an extension of its campus wellness trail, from 1 mile to 1.6 miles.

"It's been very popular," Tenhouse said.

The concrete path for such activities as walking and biking was originally built in 2015, and with the addition now also loops around the new Therapy & Wellness Center.

The construction can be viewed live online at bit.ly/KirbyRehabConstruction. 



By LAURA WEIS
CIB contributor

Artificial intelligence: A new frontier

“This is the world now. Logged on, plugged in, all the time.”

This quote from “The Terminator” may not be the most recognizable, but it could be the most prophetic.

The movie is about a cyborg sent back in time to assassinate a woman before she gives birth to a child whose destiny is to save humanity from destruction after an uprising of intelligent machines. The commonality of the movie and this column is the theme: The power of artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines. These machines can be programmed to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as understanding language, recognizing images and patterns, and making decisions.

AI has the potential to greatly enhance many industries and make many tasks more efficient. However, it is also true that AI may displace some jobs as machines and algorithms become better at performing tasks that previously required human labor. However, it is important to note that AI will also create new jobs and opportunities and that it is still in the early stages of development.

It is expected that AI will augment human capabilities rather than replacing them. For example, AI can assist human workers by providing them with more accurate and up-to-date information, or by automating routine or dangerous tasks, thus allowing humans to focus on more complex and creative tasks. AI has the potential to greatly enhance many industries, but it is important to address the potential negative impacts on the workforce and ensure that the benefits are shared widely.

How powerful is AI today? Let’s pull back the curtain. Those last three paragraphs were created by an artificial-intelligence app—not by me. And only 3 percent of that content matches a text fragment in a plagiarism check. ChatGPT (my ghostwriter) is a free online AI content generator. Suddenly, it and other apps like it are at the forefront of the news. ChatGPT has become so popular that the site repeatedly crashes, or users must wait for an email informing them when it is no longer at capacity.

ChatGPT is raising all kinds of concerns. Recent headlines include a story of a college professor’s shock and horror when he discovers a paper written entirely by ChatGPT. A father faced backlash online after using AI to create a children’s book (content and pictures). He was even selling it on Amazon. It was briefly removed as people debated the ethics of letting artificial intelligence do our creative work. And there is the professor who recently reported that ChatGPT earned a B on an exam at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Business.

And with AI content, have we opened Pandora’s Box, which

will let out the terminator of jobs?

As our economy has progressed, so has automation. Employers use technology to be more efficient, address labor shortages, speed up production and save money. As a workforce, we are also used to transitioning to new technology, making life easier for the employee. One would be hard-pressed to find anyone who prefers a mimeograph to the modern-day copier. Modernization in the workplace has helped create the work-life balance many seek. But there’s a difference. AI is a learning technology, whereas most workplace automation is not. We have to feed AI for it to learn and become better. But like our bodies, what we feed it matters.

As the saying goes, “it’s on the internet, so it must be true.” We know this is sarcasm because there’s so much inaccurate material online. So, when a user prompts an AI content generator, it helps make it smarter by sending bots across the web searching for the answers. Without fact-checking what those bots return, there’s no way to guarantee accuracy. Inaccuracy is how the professor referenced earlier learned of the student’s AI-generated paper.

There is also the question of plagiarism. The bot finds other peoples’ work and uses algorithms to rework it as usable content. Content creators, artists and others argue that the work of others is being used to train AI. There is no source for the results, so cross-referencing becomes difficult.

Companies across the globe create content every day. It is done internally in the form of emails, intranet, HR policies, operating manuals, code, social media, presentations, speeches, legal documents, training materials, press releases, even the notes in the refrigerator. This doesn’t even address content created for customers, shareholders or the general public.

As we feed the beast, will business owners cut corners and rely on AI content? It’s plausible. By marrying it with other platforms, there may be less need for human skills. For example, AI’s ability to code and design software like Canva or Adobe might squeeze creative people out of creative roles. There may also be less need for HR staff as AI generates handbook policies. And why use an attorney if AI will develop the documents?

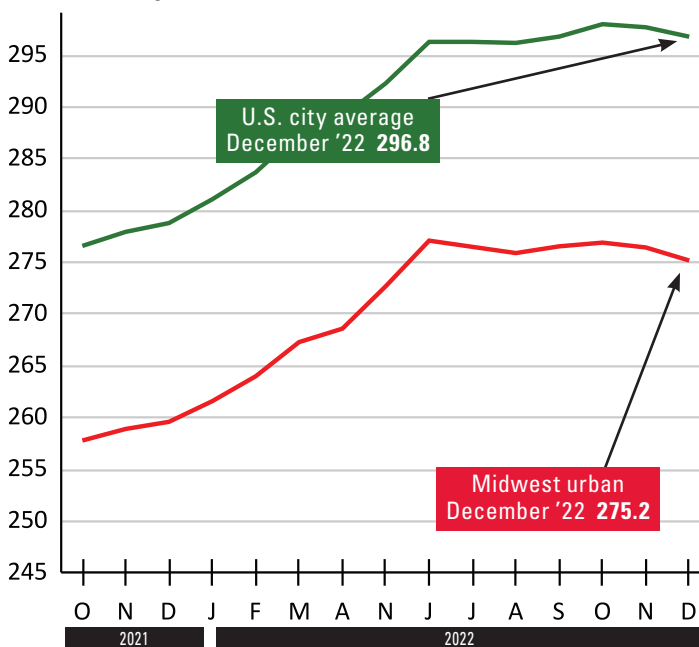
It’s too soon to know how this new technology will affect the workplace. AI content generation is not regulated. It is a powerful tool that needs to learn, and people need to know how to use it to enhance their work—not do their job. As Reese said in “The Terminator,” “the future has not been written.” Unless, of course, you ask ChatGPT. It will write it for you. ✂

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

INDICATORS

Consumer price index

The CPI measures average price changes of goods and services over time, with a reference base of 100 in 1982-84. To put that into context, a current CPI of 194.5 means a marketbasket of goods and services that cost \$100 in 1982-84 now costs \$194.50.



Amtrak total monthly riders

	Nov. 2022	Oct. 2022
Bloomington-Normal	17,990	17,621
Champaign-Urbana	17,520	17,246
Mattoon	2,036	2,142
Rantoul	261	227

Weekly grain prices

Prices for grain crops for the week of Feb. 6, 2023. Figures are for this week and the percentage change compared with a year ago.

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

Grain	Feb. 6, 2023	2022
Central Illinois Corn (b)	6.70	▲ 10.2%
Central Illinois Soybean (b)	15.13	▼ -1.4%
Central Illinois 48% Soybean Meal Rail (t)	500.50	▲ 11%
Hard Red Winter Wheat (b) Truck to Kansas City	9.33	▲ 15.6
Dark Northern Spring Wheat (b) 14% MN, Rail	10.84	▲ 0.1%
Soft White Wheat Portland (b)	8.49	▼ -21%
Sorghum, Kansas City (100 wt.) Rail	6.85	▲ 5.4%

Source: USDA Livestock & Grain Market News

Hotel/motel statistics

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

TOTAL REVENUE					
December '22		November '22		Change	
\$375,431		\$477,155		▼ -21.3%	
YEAR-TO-DATE TOTALS					
2021		2022		Change	
\$3,484,218		\$4,617,124		▲ 32.5%	

Source: Cities of Champaign and Urbana

Prices at the pump

Average price per gallon of regular unleaded gas as of Feb. 9, 2023.

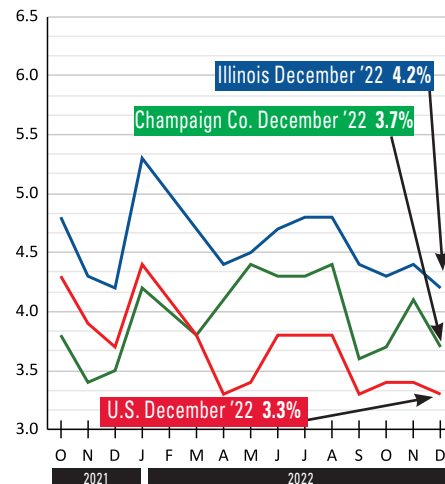
Area	Feb. '23	Feb. '22
Bloomington-Normal	\$3.41	\$3.59
Champaign-Urbana	\$3.49	\$3.60
Chicago	\$4.04	\$3.91
Danville	\$3.49	\$3.58
Decatur	\$3.33	\$3.59
Illinois	\$3.59	\$3.65
U.S.	\$3.44	\$3.47

Source: AAA

Unemployment rates for Central Illinois counties, state and nation

County	Labor Force	Jobless	Dec. '22 (%)	Nov. '22 (%)	Dec. '21 (%)	Change Month (%)	Change Year (%)
Champaign	109,405	3,508	3.20	3.60	3.50	▼ -0.4	▼ -0.3
Coles	22,445	830	3.70	4.10	3.80	▼ -0.4	▼ -0.1
Douglas	10,017	310	3.10	3.10	2.80	0.0	▲ 0.3
Edgar	8,707	264	3.00	3.30	3.10	▼ -0.3	▼ -0.1
Ford	6,222	226	3.60	3.50	3.30	▲ 0.1	▲ 0.3
Iroquois	12,486	497	4.00	4.00	4.00	0.0	0.0
Macon	45,645	2,329	5.10	5.70	6.10	▼ -0.6	▼ -1.0
McLean	87,422	2,632	3.00	3.30	3.30	▼ -0.3	▼ -0.3
Moultrie	7,294	207	2.80	2.90	2.70	▼ -0.1	▲ 0.1
Piatt	8,560	255	3.00	3.10	3.00	▼ -0.1	0.0
Vermilion	31,218	1,509	4.80	5.20	5.00	▼ -0.4	▼ -0.2
Region	349,421	12,567	3.57	3.80	3.69	▼ -0.2	▼ -0.1
State	6,382,192	267,397	4.20	4.40	4.20	▼ -0.2	0.0
U.S.	164,224,000	5,352,000	3.30	3.40	3.70	▼ -0.1	▼ -0.4

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



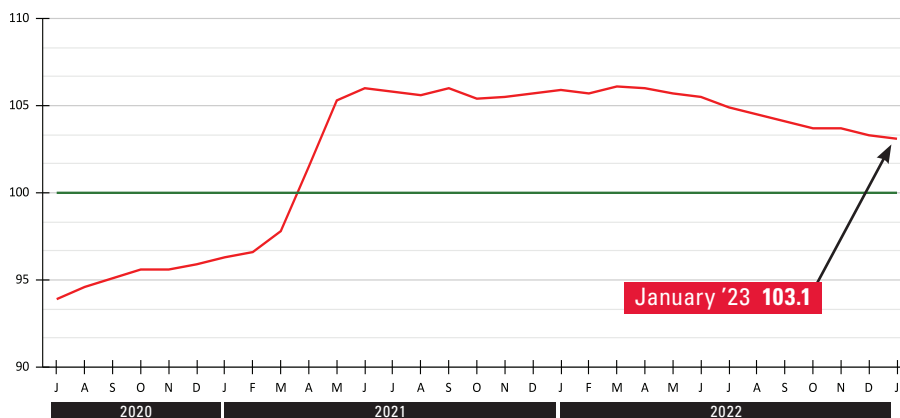
University of Illinois flash index

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

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	Change ('16-'21)
Champaign	\$21,169,808.79	\$16,177,806	\$17,255,397	\$17,088,725	\$16,520,654	\$16,365,053	▲ 29.4%
Mahomet	\$1,168,075.53	\$803,904	\$735,564	\$761,147	\$698,876	\$618,235	▲ 88.9%
Philo	\$150,664.38	\$110,493	\$105,128	\$111,841	\$89,842	\$86,370	▲ 74.4%
Rantoul	\$1,890,124.30	\$1,595,889	\$1,525,491	\$1,435,536	\$1,375,921	\$1,390,511	▲ 35.9%
Savoy	\$2,819,845.62	\$2,414,976	\$2,323,105	\$2,434,367	\$2,292,820	\$2,326,158	▲ 21.2%
St. Joseph	\$316,934.00	241,633	\$235,632	\$239,371	\$224,224	\$206,971	▲ 53.1%
Tolono	\$224,679.43	\$172,196	\$152,373	\$198,891	\$171,404	\$152,498	▲ 47.3%
Urbana	\$6,584,831.41	\$5,478,433	\$5,584,667	\$5,210,233	\$5,026,102	\$5,012,534	▲ 31.4%
Unincorporated	\$1,489,034.06	\$1,089,562	\$1,371,459	\$1,427,403	\$1,350,949	\$1,185,550	▲ 25.6%
County total	\$35,813,998	\$28,084,892	\$29,288,815	\$28,907,515	\$27,750,792	\$27,343,880	▲ 31.0%

Source: Latest statistics available from Illinois Department of Revenue

Home sales

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

County							Median sales price		
	4Q 2022	4Q 2021	Pct. Change	2022	2021	Pct. Change	4Q 2022	4Q 2021	Pct. Change
Champaign	544	677	▼ -19.6%	2,584	2,896	▼ -10.8%	\$185,000	\$178,000	▲ 3.9%
Coles	123	117	▲ 5.1%	460	412	▲ 11.7%	\$110,000	\$108,250	▲ 1.6%
Douglas	32	47	▼ -31.9%	194	194	0.0%	\$97,450	\$121,500	▼ -19.8%
Edgar	23	45	▼ -48.9%	159	165	▼ -3.6%	\$89,900	\$81,000	▲ 11.0%
Ford	43	45	▼ -4.4%	168	185	▼ -9.2%	\$122,000	\$120,000	▲ 1.7%
Iroquois	71	76	▼ -6.6%	317	338	▼ -6.2%	\$112,372	\$115,500	▼ -2.7%
Macon	343	408	▼ -15.9%	1,478	1,615	▼ -8.5%	\$118,000	\$109,450	▲ 7.8%
McLean	556	658	▼ -15.5%	2,473	2,816	▼ -12.2%	\$200,000	\$182,500	▲ 9.6%
Moultrie	28	37	▼ -24.3%	147	118	▲ 24.6%	\$102,000	\$102,500	▼ -0.5%
Piatt	36	56	▼ -35.7%	221	264	▼ -16.3%	\$143,750	\$158,700	▼ -9.4%
Vermilion	173	196	▼ -11.7%	721	790	▼ -8.7%	\$94,000	\$93,000	▲ 1.1%
Illinois	31,766	46,201	▼ -31.2%	160,844	193,744	▼ -17.0%	\$243,000	\$245,000	▼ -0.8%

Source: Illinois Association of Realtors

Willard Airport passenger totals

Monthly totals	December '22	December '21	Change
Enplanements	7,284	5,672	▲ 28.4%

YTD totals	December '22	December '21	Change
Enplanements	63,001	53,375	▲ 18.0%
Annual totals	2021	2020	Change
Enplanements	53,375	35,874	▲ 48.9%

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. 2, 2023, for the U.S. and for the North Central region, which includes Illinois, and the average rates for the U.S. one year ago. The Primary Mortgage Market Survey no longer publishes fees/points or adjustable rates, as of Nov. 17, 2022.

Mortgage type	U.S. February '23	U.S. Feb. '22
30-year fixed	6.09%	3.55%
15-year fixed	5.14%	2.77%

Source: Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.



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THEY IN CH

Spotlighting businesses in Champaign, Urbana

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Y'RE CHARGE

Urbana and Savoy with women at the helm.

Email CLB Editor Niko Dugan at ndugan@news-gazette.com.

'I genuinely want t

Whether it's connecting employers and workers through her business or improving the community through her philanthropy, franchisee Cindy Somers is following in her father's footsteps

STORY Kevin Barlow

PHOTOS Robin Scholz



As pleasing as it is to help an area resident find work, that's not what makes Cindy Somers smile most.

"I love working with adults and helping them find jobs, and I love working with employers and helping them find the people that they need," said the franchise owner of Spherion Staffing and Recruiting, a recruitment and staffing company in Savoy.

SAVOY

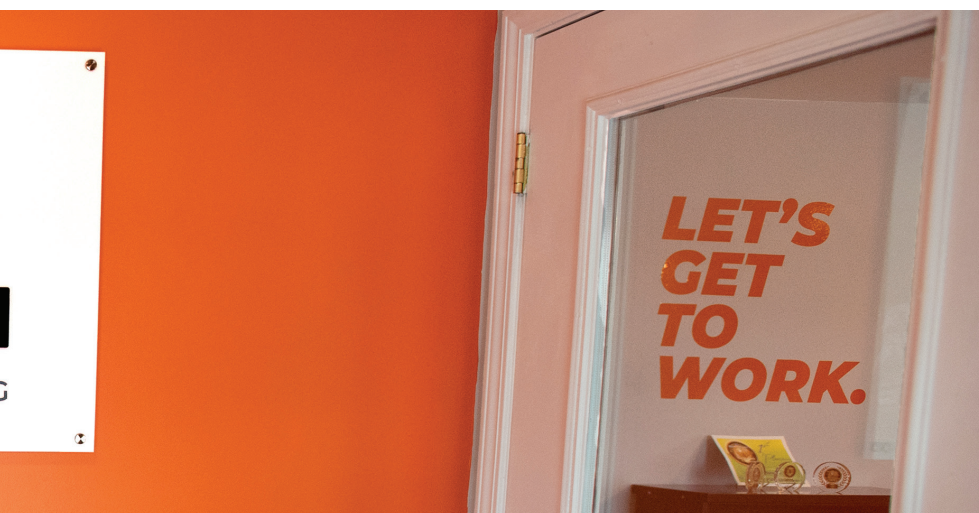
"But I participate in the 'iRead iCount' program with the Champaign County Chamber of Commerce and the schools. I go in once a week and do something like count with the kindergartners. If that doesn't bring a smile to your face, I don't know what would. It's very entertaining."

Somers understands that being successful isn't about staying in the office all day working.

to help'



ABOVE: Spherion franchisee Cindy Somers, right, talks with staffing consultant Susan Pulliam at the company's office in Savoy. RIGHT AND BELOW: Signs in the hallway and entryway.



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LEARN ACTIVELY
PLAY MORE
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LOVE PASSIONATELY
LIVE FREELY
WORK HARD
SHINE BRIGHT
DREAM BIG
RELAX OFTEN
ENJOY YOURSELF



Spherion senior staffing consultant Sherice Lotts, left, and recruiter Laura Del Rossi at their desks.

Spherion is based on a concept of driving careers and growing businesses.

Its goal is to match good, hard-working people with successful businesses in Champaign-Urbana, Savoy and the surrounding communities. Somers also owns franchises in Macon and Vermillion counties.

Being involved in the community is in Somers' DNA. Her mother and father, Barbara and Penn Nelson, got involved in the community as soon as they moved to Champaign in 1968. Penn worked in the clothing business for 18 years and even had the task of measuring the University of Illinois basketball team for custom-tailored blazers during the Harv Schmidt era, then later, for Illinois football coach Bob Blackman.

In 1981, he was approached and accepted the opportunity to open a Norrell, now Spherion, staffing franchise.

Penn became her business role model for a variety of reasons.

"He was an entrepreneur but a very hard worker," she said. "It didn't come easy, but he never gave up. In the end, he made a difference in so many people's lives, and that's all that matters."

He was also a committed volunteer and philanthropist in Champaign-Urbana. He was a president and Paul Harris Fellow of C-U Sunrise Rotary; a member of the Foundation Board for the Don Moyer Boys & Girls Club, where he was also a longtime board member; a member of the Champaign Parks Foundation Board; chairman of the United Way Campaign in 2002; and as a lifetime member of the Optimist Club and Phi Gamma Delta.

"I love being involved in the community," said his daughter, who has won numerous community involvement awards, including a Community Impact award in 2011, the 2012 Athena Award, the 2014 Spirit of Caring honor from the United Way and the 2018 Entrepreneurial Excellence Management from Innovation Celebration.

She has mentored with the C-U One-to-One Mentoring Program and is active in the Champaign West Rotary Club, the United Way board of directors and the C-U Junior Woman's Club.

"I wouldn't do it if I didn't love it," she said. "I learned that from both of my parents. They both volunteered and I grew up with that, so it just comes naturally to me."

Somers didn't always plan on following in her father's footsteps to lead Spherion. She got her undergraduate degree from Indiana University in recreation programming, planning and management. She got a job with the Great Lakes Naval Training Center. She did OK, booking the Marshall Tucker Band for a July Fourth celebration and scheduling a log-rolling exhibition.

But she was having trouble making ends meet, and her father offered her a position with Spherion in 1992.

She started learning about the business from the ground up. One of her earlier tasks was working as a temp herself, as one of Santa's elves at Market Place Mall.

Her plan was to stay for 10 years and then move on. But in 1999, she became partners with her father. In 2009, he retired and she took over, but he still had an office for a time at the headquarters.

He died in May 2019.

"It has been an interesting couple of years," Somers said. "First, my father passed, and then the following year, COVID hits. I think we are all just now getting back to normal, but I think the pandemic has changed the mind-sets of a lot of people. I think a lot of people's ideas and ideals have re-prioritized."

Somers said she leans on her contacts from the corporate offices for assistance.

"Technology keeps changing," she said. "Before, if we were recruiting, we would place an ad in The News-Gazette and get the candidates we were looking for. But now you have to go to people where they are at, and we have found that they are on their phones. Now, it may take a TikTok video to catch someone's attention."

She also credits her staff for the firm's success.

"I have a wonderful staff, and they know what they are doing, and that

allows me the time and opportunity to volunteer and help others," she said.

Adapting with the changes is a necessity to staying successful. So is being involved with the community, Somers said. But she credits one more reason for her success.

"You have to be genuine," she said. "I genuinely want to help people find jobs. I genuinely want to help companies find good employees, and I genuinely want to be involved with the community."

"Yes, it's nice to make a decent living and enjoy things, but it's not about the money. That's not why we do what we do. It's about making our community better and our residents happier."

Somers said running a woman-owned business has changed since she became partners with her father in 1999.

"In the last 23 years, it has become so much easier to be a woman business owner because of all of the support

that is available," she said. "I think of all of the organizations in our community that support women and how many women you can surround yourself with who are doing amazing things in our community — whether you are with Leadership Illinois or Women United or in the Executive Club. There are just a lot of places for women now in terms of the groups they can get into and have that support they need to share."

She has a son and a daughter, both in college now, but there was a time when the balance of being a mom and being a business owner was a lot to handle.

"It is nice to have those support groups available to know that other women are going through the same things and have those resources where you can get referrals or bounce ideas off each other or ultimately just commiserate," she said. 🍷



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Cementing

Applied Pavement Technology Inc. founding President Katie Zimmerman works from home in Urbana under the watchful eye of her dog, Jade.

her legacy

Founding president has earned international reputation for her expertise in civil engineering

STORY Kevin Barlow **PHOTOS** Robin Scholz

URBANA
Not everybody grows up wanting to work with pavements and bridges. “It is an underappreciated line of work,” said Katie Zimmerman, founding president of Applied Pavement Technology Inc., a specialty civil-engineering firm based in Urbana. “People don’t usually grow up thinking about a career in transportation, but once you get into it, you realize how many different types of things you can work on.”

"You can be very technical. You can get into the newest technology. You can get into environmental issues. It is more than just concrete and asphalt, and it encompasses so many different aspects."

Zimmerman has earned an international reputation for her work in the use of asset-management programs for pavements, bridges and ancillary assets to improve transportation agency decisions.

After enrolling at the University of Illinois in engineering, Zimmerman attended an open house for the department.

"I found that civil engineering was the most people-oriented of all of the discipline within the engineering community," she said. "I started out as an undergrad in the structures program, but I discovered that transportation provided more of an opportunity. It resonated with me."

During her career, she has helped agencies determine their needs; assisted companies with using asset data for planning, programming, budgeting and investment decisions; and improve agency and accountability. She is starting to step back from her career, a little at a time.

"I started the company and was president for a long time," she said. "But we decided we wanted to do an internal transition. There were three principal owners that helped found the company and we transitioned, sold off our stock to the next generation, and transitioned out of leadership positions."

"We have been doing that for four years. The company continues to grow and continues to be profitable, and things are looking very good for everyone."

Zimmerman is a licensed engineer and received both her bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering from the University of Illinois.

Running a business as a woman can be a challenge, she says.

"But if you are good at what you do and keep up with the latest technology, you understand that you are helping people," she said. "Everybody needs and uses transportation, and many don't even think about it."

Zimmerman has served in a leadership position for several professional organizations, including as the current chair of the Transportation Research Board's Transportation Asset Management Committee and chair of its Pavement Management Systems Committee from 1994 to 2000.

She was a member of the University of Illinois Civil and Environmental Engineering Alumni Board and served as president from 2002 to 2004. Zimmerman

has been recognized by the National Highway Institute with the Team Administrative Award in 2007 and 2008 and received the Young Alumni Civil Engineer Achievement Award (renamed the Young Alumnus Achievement Award in 2007) from the UI Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering in 1992.

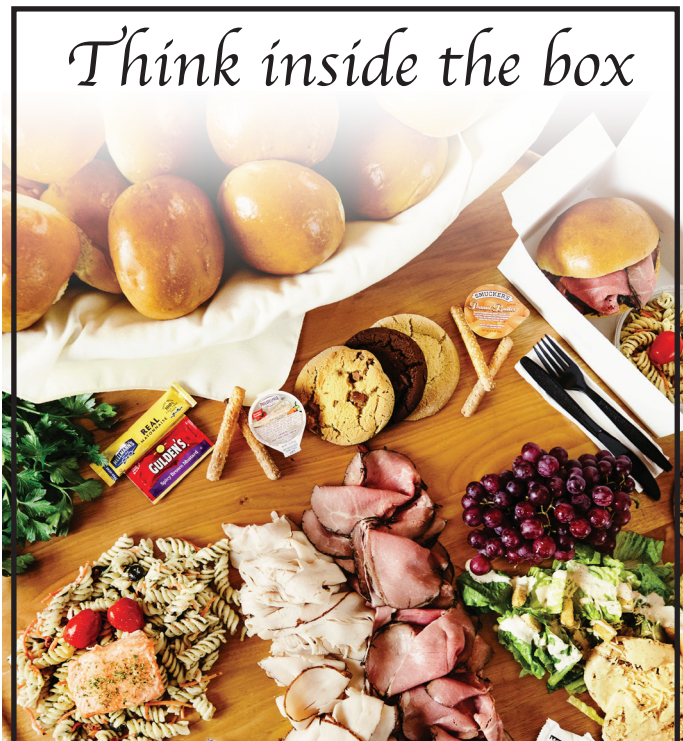
Another thing about transportation, she says, is that there will always be a need for the industry.

"As for the future, I see lots of changes coming," she said. "Technology is certainly making changes in transportation, certainly in the types of vehicles we will be using, the pavements we will be driving on, and the roads we will be taking to get to our destinations. It's also about how your planes will fly and the railroad industry. So many things are changing quickly."

But with change, a sense of normal is also necessary, she adds.

"Sustainability is becoming a huge issue as competition for dollars in transportation agencies becomes more and more of an issue," she said. "People have to be able to use available dollars to make their transportation systems operate safely and efficiently and make sure that the programs they put in place can be sustainable." ✕

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Reifsteck Reid & Company Arc

Something to



Firm's four female principals working to bring structural change to industry

STORY and PHOTOS Anthony Zilis

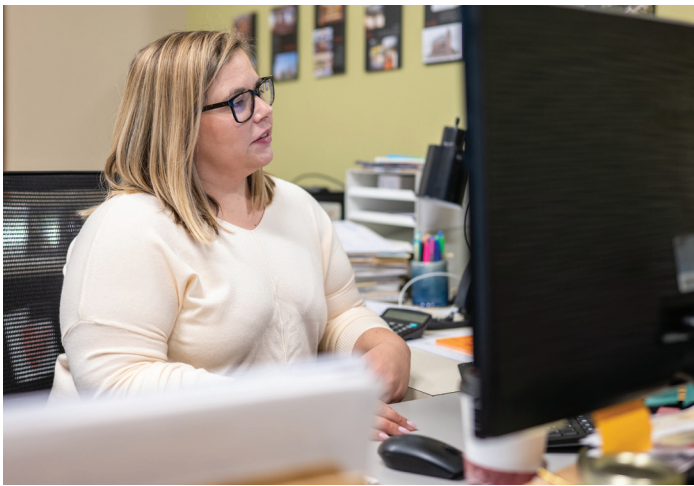
CHAMPAIGN

In the fifth grade, Elsa Reifsteck's class was assigned a project that asked students to build a model of a city.

For most kids, that meant building gaudy structures that had no resemblance to the real world. Not so for the daughter of an architect.

"All of the other students made these extravagant cities, and when I had my dad help me, he said, 'No, it has to be to scale,'" she said. "The buildings were like an inch tall, whereas other kids' were super tall and crazy. It was very practical, I think. It could have actually been built."

As kids, Elsa and her sister, Jhane, both remember looking up as they entered buildings, examining the structures and noticing things those who didn't have an architect for a father might not have.



Reifsteck Reid's four principals, clockwise from top left: sisters Jhane and Elsa Reifsteck, Bridgett Wakefield and Kristen Fanning.



They attended groundbreakings of many kinds, watching as people thanked their dad, Chuck, who owned Reifsteck Reid & Company Architects.

Two decades after that elementary school project, the Reifsteck sisters sit at desks in their father's former office after they — along with two longtime employees, architect Bridgett Wakefield and interior designer Kristen Fanning — bought the company at the beginning of 2022.

Jhane works on marketing materials and corresponding with clients, among other responsibilities. Elsa works to design some of the 15 to 20 projects the company has going on at a given time, including many at the University of Illinois.

Leaning on one wall sits a blueprint of the Washington National Cathedral in the nation's capital, a relic of the

office's former occupant and the sisters' lifelong association with architecture.

Jhane bought the framed poster for her father on an eighth-grade trip.

"That's the type of thing you buy when your father's an architect," Jhane said with a laugh.

The purchase of the company was a monumental event. The firm is now 100 percent female-owned, a rarity in a field in which only 24 percent of licensed architects are women, according to the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards.

"As a young woman, you always want to be respected in meetings, and you are always a little unsure if people are going to take you seriously, not only because you're a woman, but because you're young," Jhane said. "I think it's great to show that we're a capable firm and we're women-owned."



For Elsa and Jhane, appreciation for architecture came early in life, even if their paths to the firm were far different.

Jhane, who is five years older than her sister, worked for the firm on and off since the eighth grade, mainly helping with receptionist duties.

Instead of following in her father's footsteps, though, she went on to pursue a career in broadcast journalism, earning a journalism degree from the UI before working for local ABC affiliate WICD-TV Channel 15, based in Champaign.

After working on both early-morning and late-night shows, though, she began looking for a job with steady hours. Eight years ago, she decided to join the firm, working as its business and marketing manager.

While Jhane was outspoken and confident, Elsa, both sisters say, grew up with both an artistic and mathematical mind. After earning her master's degree from the UI, she began working at her father's firm.

Right away, she fit in.

"Sometimes you have people that come in that everybody fights to have them be on their project, everybody wants them because they get it right away," Wakefield said. "You can tell them something once, and then they apply it properly somewhere else."

"And she's also extremely creative. And she was always the one that everybody wanted. So it's not just a daughter. She was the right person to come into this position."

At 30 and 35, respectively, Elsa and Jhane know they're relatively unseasoned. Wakefield and Fanning's involvement has been invaluable in that respect.

After growing up the daughter of an engineer, Wakefield earned her master's in architecture from the UI in 1998. Four years later, she began working for Reifsteck Reid.

After taking an interest in children in college, including writing her master's thesis on designing classrooms based on the differences in children of each age, she began leading the firm's increasing number of school projects in recent years.

While earning her master's degree in interior design from

Illinois State University, Fanning began working at Reifsteck Reid in 2001, primarily as a receptionist.

Her knowledge of the drafting software the company used gave her the ability to provide input in other areas.

"I was like, 'I've got to get my foot in the door,'" she said. "And I kind of pushed myself into more of a drafting position and just kind of worked my way up."

Wakefield and Fanning developed into such dependable, seasoned employees that Chuck Reifsteck eventually offered them a small portion of the company. And when he decided to give up the reins last year, the combination of talent and experience between the four new principals made him confident he could hand over his company to them.

"They were doing a lot of the work when I was around," he said. "One of the reasons I got out was you see your worth diminished as more and more people do what's required to get a project out the door."



While they're still imbalanced, demographics in the field of architecture are steadily changing. According to the registration board council, 46 percent of the prospective architects testing for their certification in 2021 were women.

Jhane hopes the existence of firms like Reifsteck Reid leads to more change in the industry.

"It's refreshing to see more women taking on ownership and project-management-type roles," she said.

Being female-owned does help the firm in tangible ways. In contracting engineers and architects, UI trustees set a goal of using at least 30 percent minority- and female-owned businesses, which has already helped the company bring in more business, Elsa said.

But it also comes with its difficulties. When she stepped into her new role with the firm in January, Elsa was also preparing for a new role at home. She was seven months pregnant with her first child.

"I was worried that people would judge me, not only because I'm a woman, but also because I'm pregnant, and you can't help but wonder if they feel differently about you," said Elsa, whose husband is a freelance architect who stays home with the couple's daughter during the day. "So, you have to overcome that. I've heard that many women drop out of the workforce, and I don't blame them, because it's really difficult after you have a child. I think it's cool that women can have children and deal with all that comes with that and still be great at their jobs."

In years to come, she hopes a firm like Reifsteck Reid won't be so unique.

"I think we can easily connect with other women, we're great listeners, and I just don't see any difference" in terms of ability, she said. "I think it will absolutely change." ❧



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Time to get your hands dirty in the garden



Among the options for community gardens in the area is the Eddie Albert Community Garden at Dodds Park on the Parkland College campus in northwest Champaign.

Photo provided

By WENDY BARTLO, JOAN DIXON
and MARIANNE DOWNEY

For many experienced gardeners — and many who pledge that this is the year they will finally start gardening — now is the time to start planning the garden, ordering seeds and start plants that will be transferred outside when weather permits.

Gardening can be done “on the fly,” but like many things, the results are often better with some advanced planning. Such planning is noticeable at the local centers that are offering discounts on holiday goods to make room for the plants, mulch, pots,

fertilizer and other items that will soon be used.

“These winter months are a great time for planning for gardeners and landscapers,” says David Geeseman, vice president of nursery operations at Country Arbors in Urbana. “Many of our customers spend this time preparing and looking forward to their planting time in the spring. They even make sketches.”

According to the 2021 Garden Media Garden Trends Report, American gardeners spent a record \$47.8 billion on lawn-and-garden items at retailers.

A study from psychologists at the University of Queensland in Australia

found that older adults who engaged in home or community gardening reported they had enhanced self-esteem, productivity, social engagement and exercise.

A review of research on gardening and older adults revealed that gardening can promote overall health and quality of life, physical strength, fitness and flexibility, cognitive ability, and socialization.

Some of the health benefits are related to positive aging, including physical activity and socialization and relieving stress by connecting with nature. There is research that shows that because gardening is an outdoor



Another option for seniors who wish to garden but don't have a space of their own is the Randolph Street Community Garden next to Stratton Academy for the Arts in Champaign. Provided

activity requiring some physical exertion, it can help prevent osteoporosis, reduce the risk of some cancers and Type 2 diabetes, and help reduce depression and heart disease.

recent post on the blog of Bria Communities, a group of senior-living facilities in British Columbia, Canada, noted the benefits of gardening.

Gardening is an ideal physical activity for seniors, since it's likely they will feel motivated to keep up with it on a daily basis ... It requires lifting, bending, reaching, and other movements that are ideal for older adults to do," the post said. "Many seniors will spend an hour or more out in their garden each day planting new plants, pulling weeds, tilling the soil, fertilizing the plants and more.


Everyone needs a goal. ... Even having small goals helps immensely," it continued. "Gardening gives older adults a goal to work towards. They will have new goals as they move through the steps: They'll plan out the garden, purchase supplies and materials, then work toward keeping the garden happy and thriving. If they grow produce, there is plenty to do after the harvest, and they might become more interested in cooking or canning."

If the decision is made to "dig" in to gardening, make sure that the materials purchased will work for you. Think about ergonomics, lightweight materials, a wheeled cart for moving plants and tools, and raised planting beds. Containerized gardening may be as simple as pots on the front porch or as elaborate as containers on wheels with drip irrigation systems. All things to think about until the weather warms up.

Gardening locally

Master Gardeners, a program of University of Illinois Extension, is a great local resource. They have gardeners available to answer questions, training programs to become a Master Gardener, a speakers bureau, a lecture series and educational events.

For those who do not have a yard or an appropriate spot for a garden, there are garden plots available for rent throughout Champaign-Urbana. They go quickly, so don't wait too long. Some of the options:

- Eddie Albert Community Garden in Dodds Park (Champaign Park District)
- Meadowbrook Garden Plots, Victory Park (Urbana Park District)
- Orchard Downs Garden Plots (University of Illinois)
- Randolph Street Community Garden in Champaign (Church of the Brethren) 

Wendy Bartlo, Joan Dixon and Marianne Downey are members of the Age-Friendly Steering Committee. For information, please contact Bartlo at wbartlo@illinois.edu.

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