

2025



JUNE 14: Bassist Bruce Hall and keyboardist Neal Doughty perform during the 'Honoring the Legacy of REO Speedwagon' concert at State Farm Center in Champaign.

Robin Scholz/The News-Gazette

YEAR IN REVIEW

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

BOB ASMUSSEN

Want to create happiness in 2026? Surprise me



Time to take a deep dive into the dark recesses of my brain with the most complicated question: What makes me happy?

Top of the list: Pleasant surprises:

→ An unexpected gift that turns out to be just what I wanted.

→ A stop at an out-of-the-way joint for a terrific meal.

→ A visit with a new friend that feels like a 30-year relationship.

Sports make me happy. All the time. Especially when the games include ... ta-da ... pleasant surprises.

I've got no historic love for Indiana. If anything, because of the way Bob Knight treated the media, I would have been against the school.

But Curt Cignetti and the miracle he just pulled off winning the College Football Playoff title is a once-in-a-lifetime moment.

Older folks remember where they were when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. I'll always know what I was doing when Fernando Mendoza completed his impossible 12-yard touchdown run.

Best part about the Hoosiers' run: It makes every other program in every other sport — college and pro — realize there are no limits. If Indiana football can do it, literally anyone can. So thanks for that, Coach Cigs. Doesn't even matter if you smile. The scowl seems to be working well for you.

There could be more sports fun coming to C-U later in the winter and spring. Brad Underwood's got a loaded team capable of making a long NCAA tournament run. So does Shauna Green.

Don't say "never." Say "could be."

Another tier

Last year in this space, I asked you to be kind, help



Worth a thousand words

For a look back at 2025, we turned to award-winning Photo Editor ROBIN SCHOLZ, whose best work of the year can be found in these pages and at news-gazette.com.



football program? Cool. Nice to have a scoreboard that can be seen from Tolono.

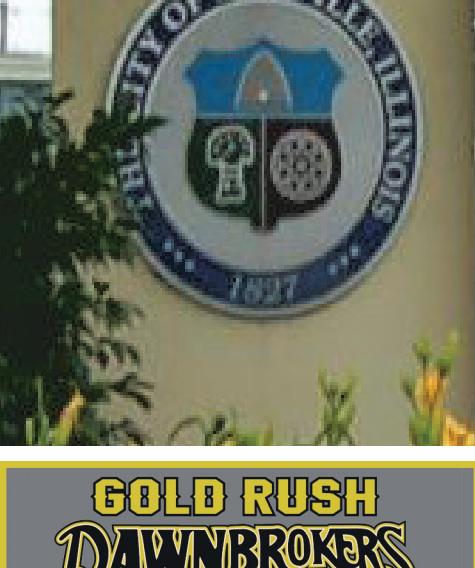
C-U is a place where you come back after a few years away and marvel at all the change. While the old haunts are still there.

We get to see world-class sports and entertainment about a mile from home. Advantage of a college town in the Big Ten. All 17 of them are special (remember, Los Angeles has two schools).

Is C-U perfect? Well, no. What fun that would be? Part of living in a community is being able to complain about it.

We live in a clean, safe, friendly village. Although, I still want more of you to respond when I say "Hello." It is the neighborly thing to do. And it will be another one of those "pleasant surprises."

Bob Asmusson is a college football reporter and columnist for The News-Gazette. He can be reached at 217-393-8248 or asmussen@news-gazette.com.



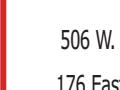
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2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

JANUARY

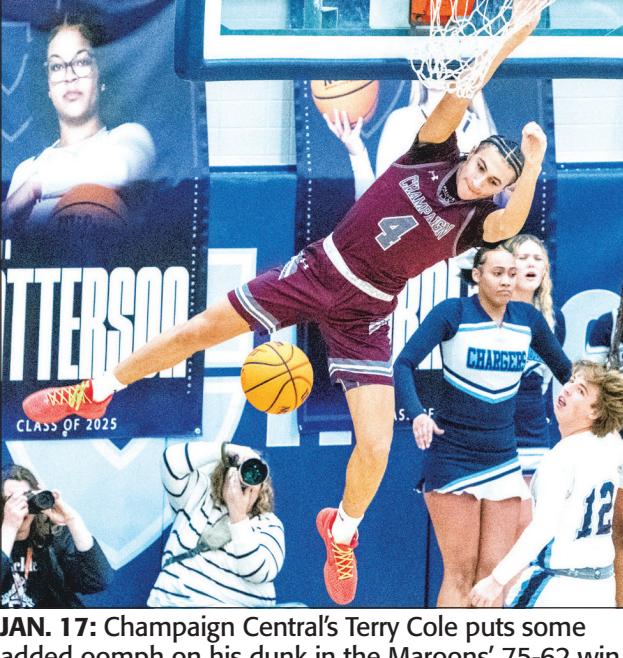


JAN. 16: People gather in front of the new H Mart store in downtown Urbana for a ribbon-cutting and speeches, including lion dancers and traditional Korean dances, at the grand opening of the store in the former Save A Lot building at 220 N. Broadway Ave. It is H Mart's sixth location in Illinois and only one outside the Chicago area.

FOCUS ON FUNDAMENTALS



JAN. 9: First-year coach Caleb Gossett, above in black hoodie and hat, and assistant Michael Schluter, left, work with players on the Armstrong High School boys' basketball team during a practice session at the school gym. The Trojans went 23-10 overall and 9-3 in the Vermilion Valley Conference.



JAN. 17: Champaign Central's Terry Cole puts some added oomph on his dunk in the Maroons' 75-62 win over rival Centennial at Coleman Carrodine Gym.



JAN. 28: Patty Metzler talks about her more-than-47-year nursing career at Carle Foundation Hospital alongside her dog, Max, at her home in Champaign. Metzler retired from Carle on Feb. 14.



JAN. 23: Illinois forward Morez Johnson Jr. celebrates with fans in the first half of the Illini's 91-70 loss to Maryland at State Farm Center in Champaign.

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

FEBRUARY



FEB. 3: Players take advantage of unusually nice weather at the John Street pickle ball courts in Champaign.



FEB. 7: Holy Cross bowling coach Nate Oliveira, whose son plays on the seventh-grade boys' basketball team, energizes the crowd during an all-school pep rally in the gym in Champaign to support his son's team, which was headed to the state tournament. The Crusaders came up just short, falling in the IESA Class 7-1A state title to West Lincoln-Broadwell.



FEB. 19: Larry Dallas, selected as The News-Gazette's 2024 Farm Leader of the Year, is shown among the grain bins on his farm in rural Tuscola.



FEB. 11: Illinois center Tomislav Ivisic, back, hugs guard Kylan Boswell after Boswell hit his free throws to seal the Illini's 83-78 victory over UCLA at State Farm Center in Champaign.



FEB. 15: Former Illini men's basketball star Terrence Shannon Jr. watches as the banner of his jersey unfurls upside-down during a ceremony to retire it and hang it in the rafters of State Farm Center at halftime of the Illini's 79-65 loss to Michigan State. Shannon later released a T-shirt that read 'When life has you upside down, turn it around,' with all proceeds benefiting the Boys and Girls Club.



FEB. 14: At Champaign's Edison Middle School, the eighth-grade boys' basketball team got a send-off to the IESA state tournament featuring a parade through the halls led by the jazz band and including cheerleaders. The Comets fell in the first round to eventual Class 8-4A champions Michelle Obama School of Technology and the Arts of Park Forest.



FEB. 11: From left, Michael Ujcich, Lou Liay and Brad LaPayne pose with a red ribbon they placed on a tree they want to save along Prospect Avenue between Church Street and University Avenue in Champaign. The trio placed the ribbons on trees they thought would be taken down as part of a state plan to widen that section of Prospect.

MARCH



MARCH 18: Owner George Papametro checks his messages in the former Home Theatre building in downtown Rantoul. Papametro fixed up the building's roof and marquee and was working on interior renovations. He wasn't sure yet what it would become, but he said showing movies again wouldn't be financially feasible.



MARCH 14: Mary Henson, wife of late Illinois men's basketball coaching legend Lou Henson, settles in for a group photo with members of the Lanark (Eastland) Cougars, who visited her at her home in Champaign while they were in town to play for the Class 1A IHSA basketball title that weekend. They came up short against Chicago Hope Academy, falling 71-38 to take state runner-up.



MARCH 2: Illinois guard Adalia McKenzie, right, comforts teammate Genesis Bryant after senior ceremonies at the final home game of the season against Michigan at State Farm Center in Champaign. The Wolverines ruined the seniors' send-off, prevailing 78-69 in a come-from-behind victory.



MARCH 12: Then-Champaign Superintendent Shelia Boozer updates community members on the progress and direction of the district's strategic plan at a meeting at Champaign's Salem Baptist Church. In May, the newly elected school board voted 5-2 to end her tenure, which began in July 2021. A permanent successor was expected to be named by the end of January.



MARCH 12: Mark Brown with Experience Champaign-Urbana turns on the marquee lights as Tara Nickole of Luxe Balloons & Backdrops prepares a display during preparations for the IHSA boys' basketball state tournament at State Farm Center in Champaign.

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

APRIL



APRIL 1: People walk past signs posted in front of a polling place at Leonhard Recreation Center in Champaign on Election Day.



APRIL 11: Construction continues on the Garden Hills drainage project along Hedge Road in Champaign.

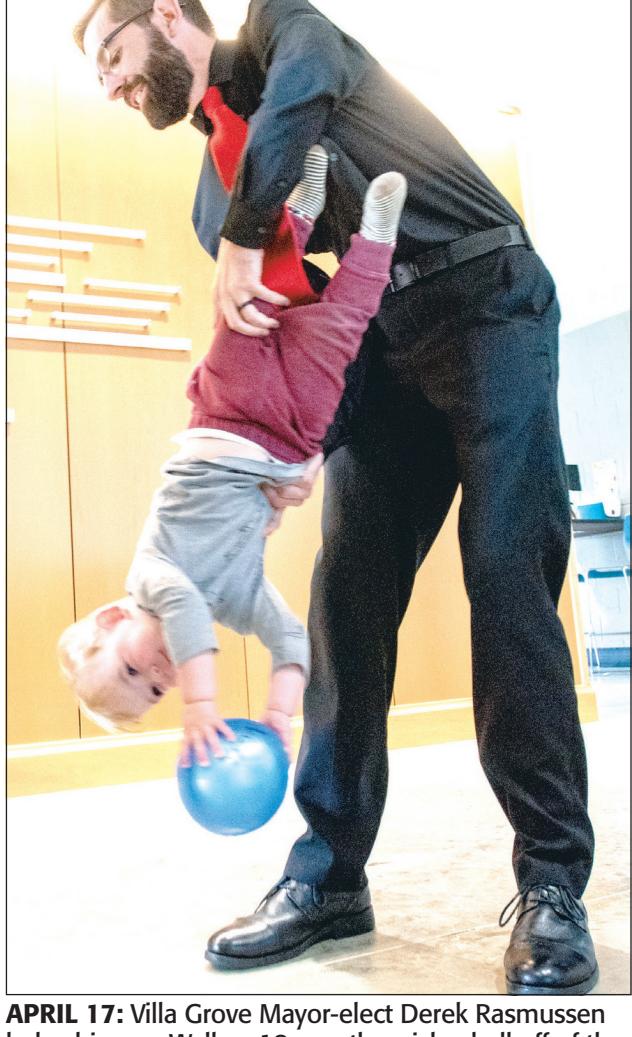
MAKING THEIR VOICES HEARD



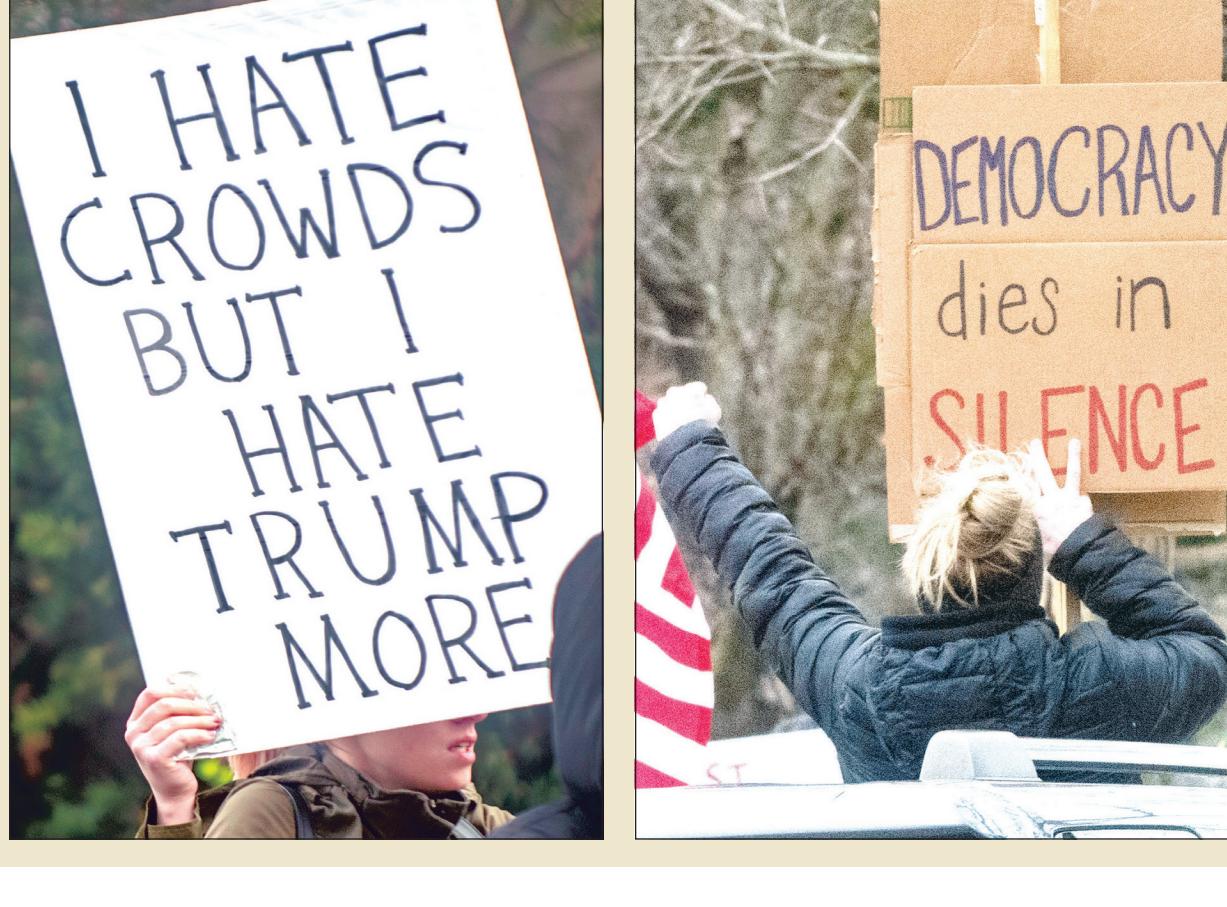
APRIL 5: People hold up protest signs during Champaign County Indivisible's 'Hands Off!' rally at West Side Park in Champaign. Well over 1,000 people attended the rally and listened to speakers as part of a nationwide protest. Speakers included Champaign County Indivisible co-organizer Jeff Dougan; Ricardo Diaz, interim director of the New American Welcome Center; Julie Pryde, administrator of the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District; retired nurse Jennifer Todd; Cynthia D'Angelo, University of Illinois assistant professor of educational psychology; and Claudia Lenhoff, executive director of Champaign County Health Care Consumers. Some protesters formed a line along University Avenue to hold signs and chant for cars that honked as they passed, while others marched around the perimeter of the park.



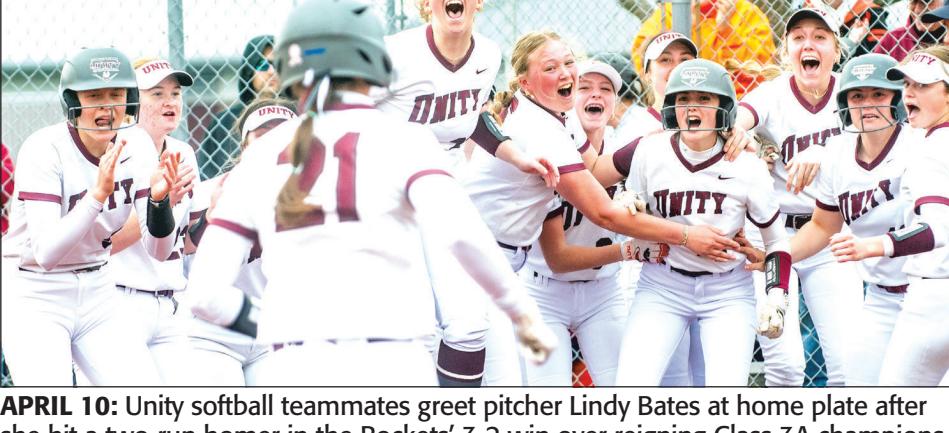
APRIL 2: Selvia Aprovita of Chicago takes photos of the blossoms as the 50 trees in the Sen Cherry Tree Allée start to bloom at Japan House on the University of Illinois campus on Lincoln Avenue in Urbana.



APRIL 17: Villa Grove Mayor-elect Derek Rasmussen helps his son, Walker, 18 months, pick a ball off of the floor at the Community Center in Villa Grove.



APRIL 22: Champaign Park District carpenter Bob Ginger waxes the signature thumb of the Roger Ebert statue in preparation for Ebertfest at the Virginia Theatre in downtown Champaign. In September, host Chaz Ebert, Roger's widow, announced that the 2025 edition was the last in Champaign-Urbana, but after surveying attendees, organizers announced in December that it would return this year for one last hurrah.



APRIL 10: Unity softball teammates greet pitcher Lindy Bates at home plate after she hit a two-run homer in the Rockets' 3-2 win over reigning Class 3A champions Pontiac in Tolono.



APRIL 16: From left, Illini men's basketball coach Brad Underwood, Northwestern coach Chris Collins, TV/radio analyst Robbie Hummel and others make their way to the media area at the annual Coaches vs. Cancer event at Gordyville USA in Gifford.



2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

MAY



MAY 2: Outgoing Urbana Mayor Diane Marlin reacts to a speaker's comments on Hotel Royer, which Marlin had a huge hand in securing, at a public retirement reception in her honor at the The Yard on Broadway.



MAY 5: Urbana City Clerk Darcy Sandefur swears in DeShawn Williams as the first Black mayor of Urbana in a ceremony at the City Building downtown.

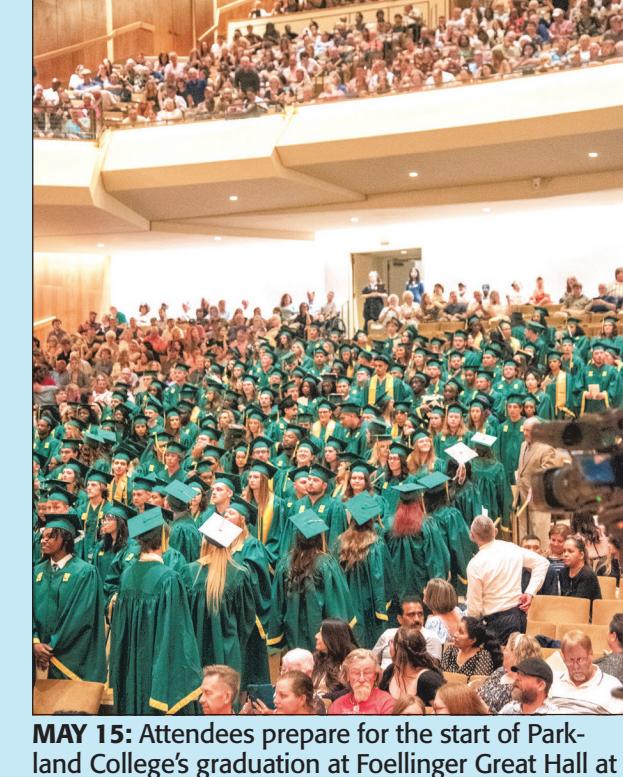


MAY 8: Angela Palivos and her autistic son, Elijah Sisney, 8, play on the trampoline outside their home in Mahomet's Candlewood Estates. Behind them is an abandoned trailer on an adjacent lot. Palivos, an 18-year Candlewood resident, faced a host of issues with new rules imposed by the mobile-home park's new management, which eventually sought to have her evicted for not removing the trampoline and a swing set that her son uses. Late that month, Champaign County Judge Ronda Holliman ruled in her favor.

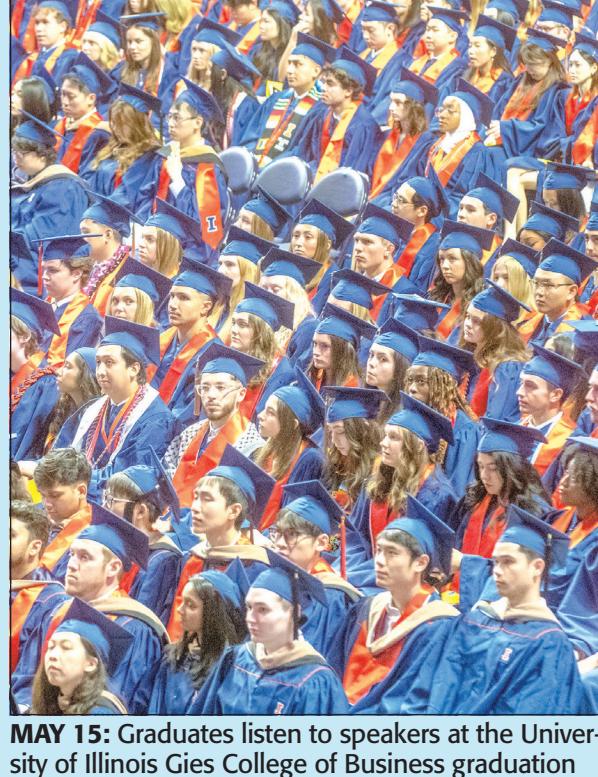


MAY 8: Traffic moves along the newly opened ramp from westbound Interstate 74 to northbound Interstate 57 as work continues on a major overhaul of the interchange in northwest Champaign. Two more flyover ramps were opened in November, and the Illinois Department of Transportation projects that the final phase of the massive, \$251.8 million project, which broke ground in 2021, will be wrapped up by the end of 2027.

TURNING THE TASSELS



MAY 15: Attendees prepare for the start of Parkland College's graduation at Foellinger Great Hall at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts in Urbana.



MAY 15: Graduates listen to speakers at the University of Illinois Gies College of Business graduation ceremony at State Farm Center in Champaign.



MAY 9: A graduate takes a pause in the procession to blow kisses at friends in the audience at Mahomet-Seymour's graduation ceremony at State Farm Center in Champaign.



MAY 27: From left, Champaign Central juniors Olivia Perkins and Delilah Mambo do an African celebratory chant with graduates Lauren Payton and Kelecia Maynor at Central's graduation ceremony at State Farm Center in Champaign.



MAY 1: Women peruse purses lined by color on tables around the room before bidding at the annual Power of the Purse, United Way of Champaign County's marquee fundraiser, at Pearl Tree Estates in Champaign.



MAY 6: Participants throw up handfuls of chalk at the start of the sixth annual Color Run fundraiser at Countryside School in Champaign.



MAY 12: Community members pack the room at the second meeting of the newly seated Champaign school board at the Mellon Administrative Center. Many of them spoke in support of Superintendent Shelia Boozer, whom the board voted to cut ties with in a special meeting at the end of that month.

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

JUNE



JUNE 18: Looking like a prehistoric monster, storm clouds float over a bean field south of Rantoul.



JUNE 10: The sun sets behind Middletown Prairie Elementary School in Mahomet, with the wind turbines recently erected between Mahomet and Mansfield in Piatt County in the background.



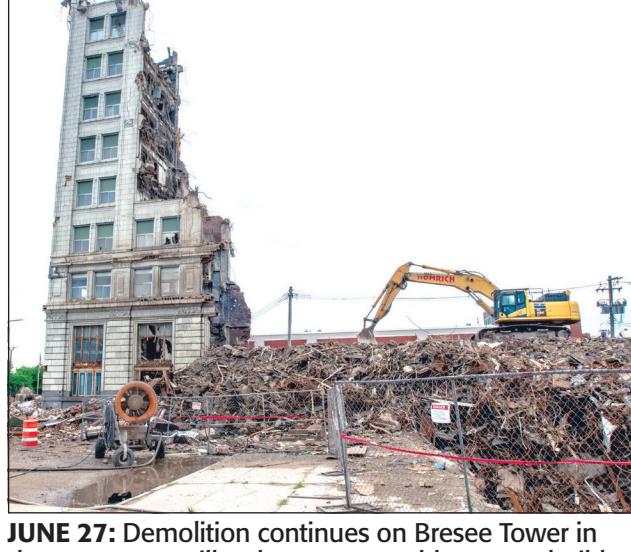
JUNE 14: Timmy Hall, right, sings with his dad, Bruce, bassist for REO Speedwagon, and wishes him a happy Father's Day during the 'Honoring the Legacy of REO' concert at State Farm Center in Champaign.



JUNE 3: Youngsters play on the new mural-covered basketball courts at Douglass Park in Champaign.



JUNE 12: REO Speedwagon drummer Alan Gratzer, left, and keyboardist Neal Doughty stand in the corner room on the second floor of the University of Illinois' Townsend Hall, where the band started during their tour of members' old haunts in Champaign-Urbana.



JUNE 27: Demolition continues on Bresee Tower in downtown Danville. The 100-year-old 12-story building on the northwest corner of Main and Vermilion streets was torn down after being vacant for more than 20 years. Work was completed by July.

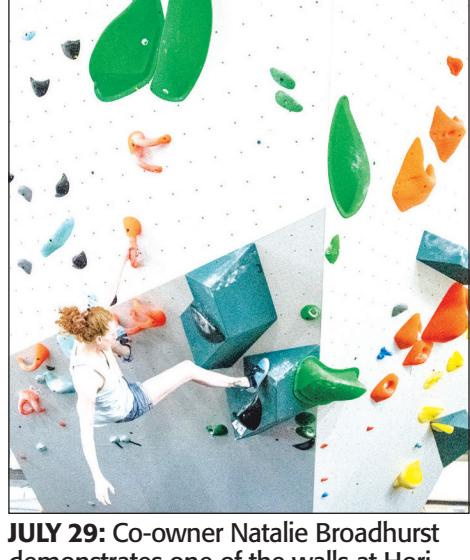


JUNE 17: The remnants of the Family Dollar sign are shown on the recently closed location on Philo Road in Urbana. It was one of several stores that had closed on that stretch of road in the city's southeast, including a Burger King and a Walgreens.

JULY



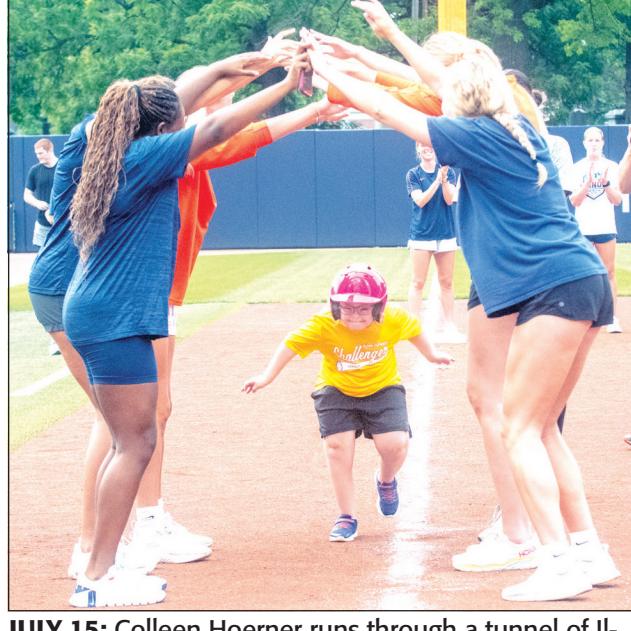
JULY 7: Fencing and a sign are posted at the closed pedestrian viaduct under the Illinois Central Railroad tracks at Main and Walnut streets in downtown Champaign. In September, the Champaign City Council voted on installing a permanent fence with gates on the viaduct.



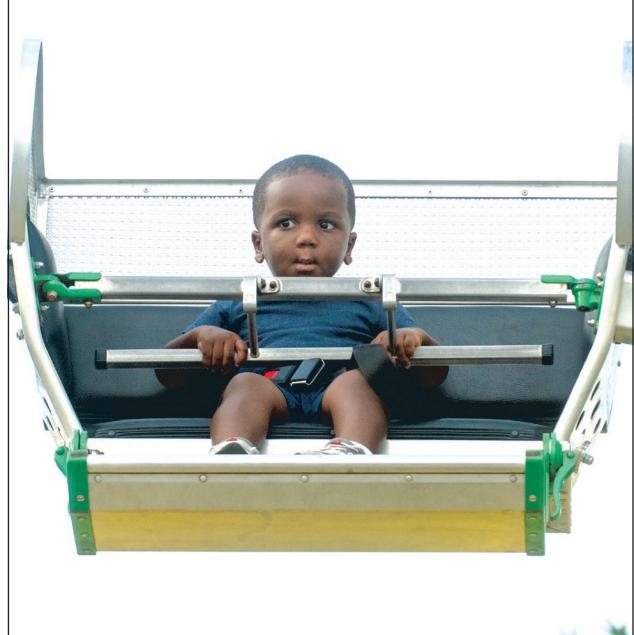
JULY 29: Co-owner Natalie Broadhurst demonstrates one of the walls at Horizon Climbing, a new business opening at 1914 Round Barn Road in Champaign.



JULY 10: Drivers along Newell Road in Danville got a surprise when they came around the curve as hot-air balloon pilot Walter Rudy of Ohio, flying 'Hour Big Bundle of Joy,' chose a field right next to the road to land following his attempt at the Splash and Dash event at the Balloons Over Vermilion festival.



JULY 15: Colleen Hoerner runs through a tunnel of Illinois volleyball players on her way to home plate during the Tom Jones Challenger League All-Star Game at Eichelberger Field in Urbana. It was Colleen's birthday, and she was serenaded by league Commissioner Tom Grey before she batted.



JULY 18: Timothy Brinson, 2, of Texas is stoic as he rides the kiddie Ferris wheel for the first time during opening night of the Champaign County Fair in Urbana. He was there with his grandparents.

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

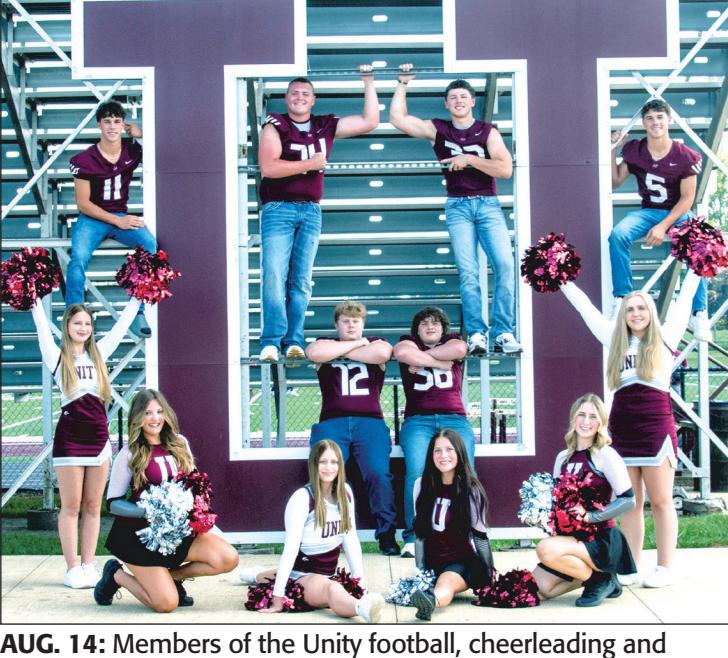
AUGUST



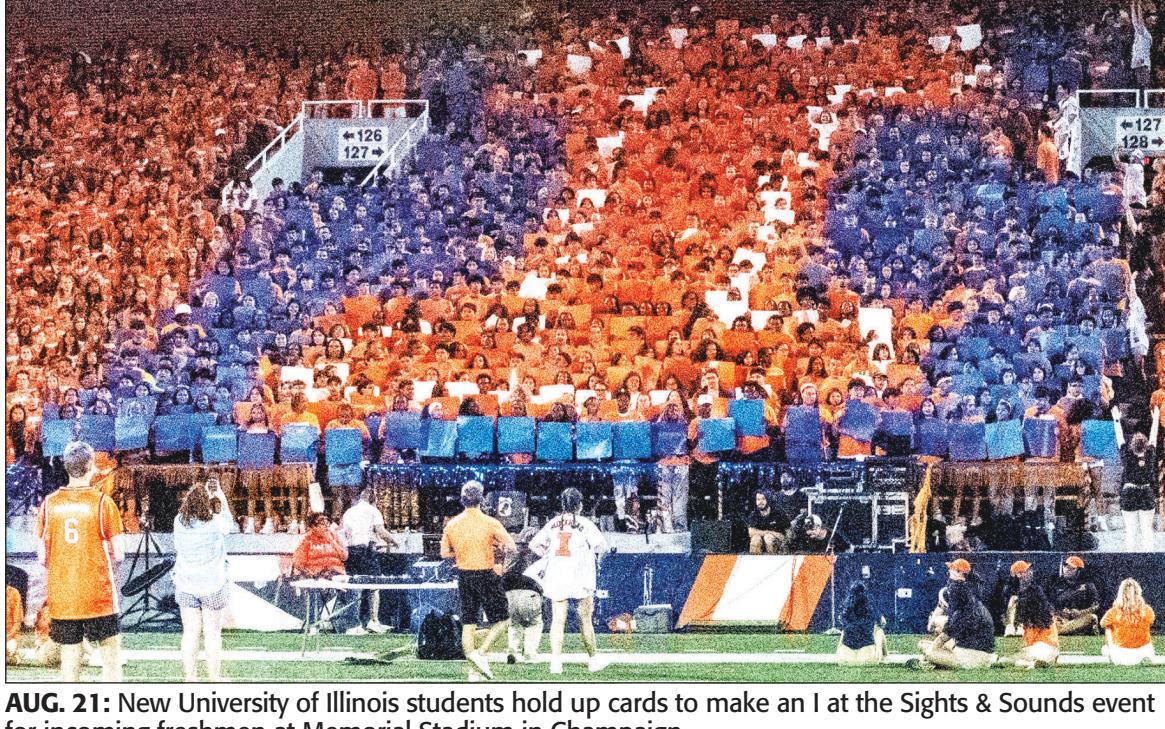
AUG. 6: Martha Sanchez, second from left, slaps hands as she makes her way to sign for Westview Elementary at the Champaign school district's New Teacher Signing Day at Central High School.



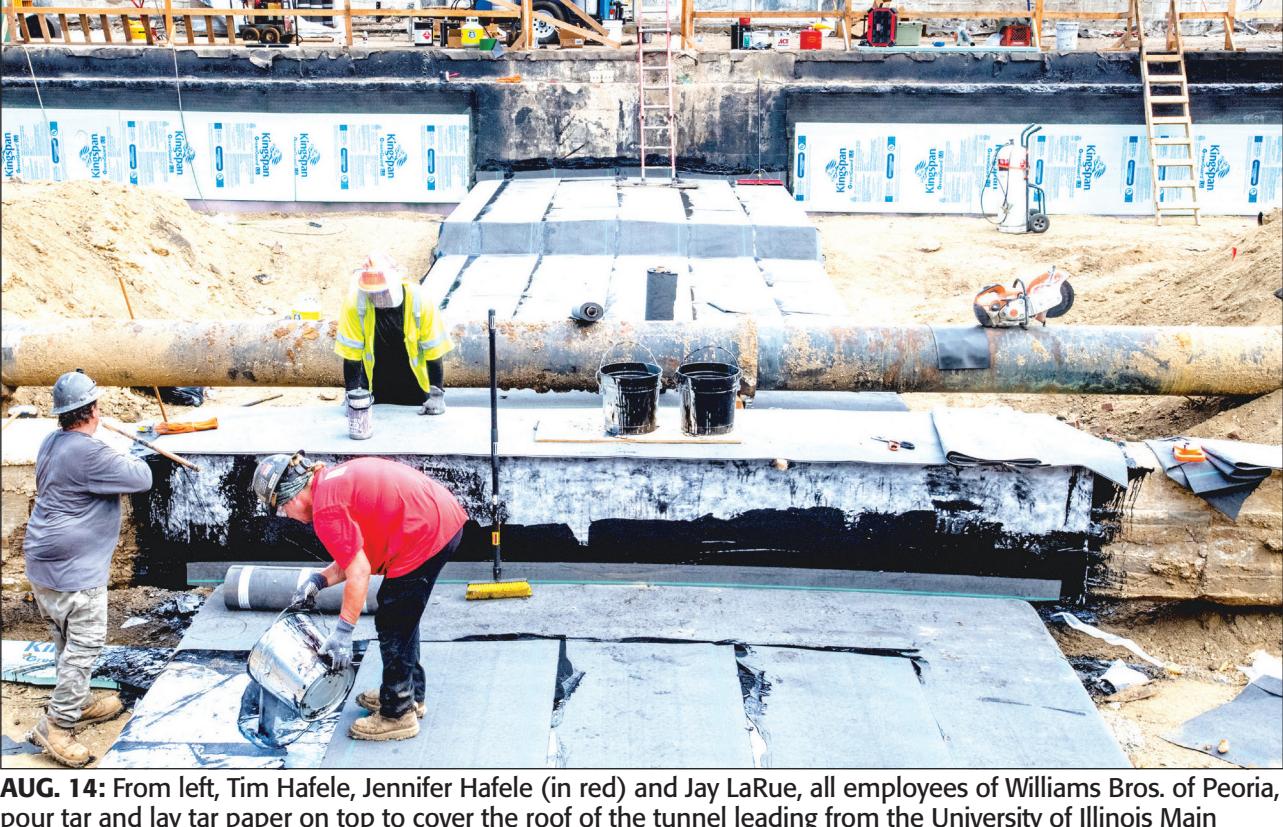
AUG. 15: Braelyn Logesgo, 9, smiles as she hits the paddle manually after it misfired when she hit it with a ball to drop Principal Jake Palmer into the water at a dunk tank at Fisher Grade School's Back to School Carnival. For four years, Partners in Education has hosted the event, which is free for students and their families.



AUG. 14: Members of the Unity football, cheerleading and dance teams gather together by the 'U' sign attached to the bleachers at Hicks Field in Tolono. The Rockets' football team opened its season on Aug. 29 at home against Rantoul.



AUG. 21: New University of Illinois students hold up cards to make an I at the Sights & Sounds event for incoming freshmen at Memorial Stadium in Champaign.



AUG. 14: From left, Tim Hafele, Jennifer Hafele (in red) and Jay LaRue, all employees of Williams Bros. of Peoria, pour tar and lay tar paper on top to cover the roof of the tunnel leading from the University of Illinois Main Library to the Undergraduate Library on campus in Urbana. The work was part of renovations to turn the underground area into the Archives and Special Collections building.



AUG. 28: New University of Illinois Chancellor Charles Isbell is shown with the purple lightsaber belonging to 'Star Wars' character Mace Windu in his office at the Swanlund Administration Building in Champaign.

SEPTEMBER



SEPT. 3: Reindeer Kris Kringle, right, and Dolly show off their fuzzy antlers at Hardy's Reindeer Ranch in Rantoul, which just opened for its 30th year and is still on the market. In November, the ranch and its reindeer were featured on ABC's 'Good Morning America,' with a crew broadcasting live from the location.



SEPT. 9: Workers from FieldTurf change the wording on the field in front of a banner during the announcement that the University of Illinois' football home would be renamed as Gies Memorial Stadium in honor of a \$100 million donation from alum Larry Gies to the athletic department.



SEPT. 4: Campbell Coker, left, and Grace Herbst perform for a selfie cam under the watchful eye of co-founder Ellinora Krannert during the opening night of the biennial Ellinora: The Guitar Festival at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts on the University of Illinois campus in Urbana.



SEPT. 30: A farmer harvests soybeans from a very dry field along Rising Road in rural Champaign.

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

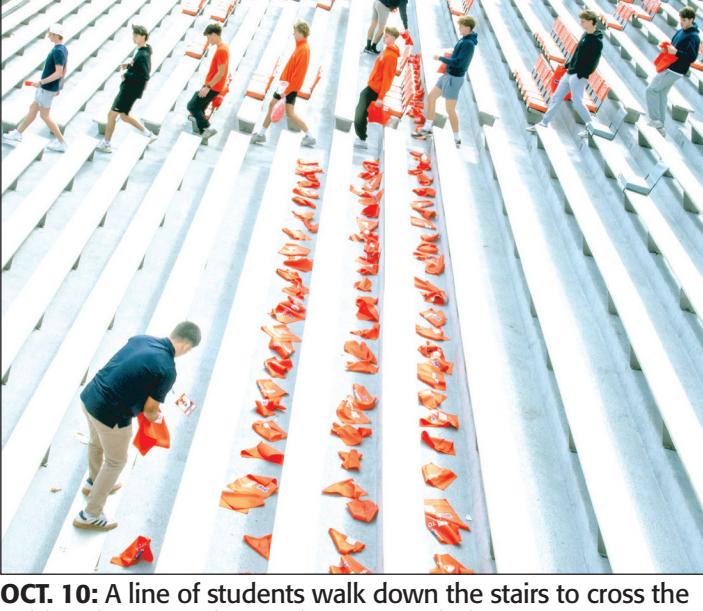
OCTOBER



OCT. 15: Odysseus Demers, 3, of Watseka sits next to the luminary he decorated for his little brother, Sinclair, as he and his family attended community events in conjunction with the annual International Wave of Light, a worldwide lighting of candles at 7 p.m. on Pregnancy Loss and Remembrance Day, at The Forum at Carle Foundation Hospital in Urbana.



OCT. 22: SaltFork Paintball co-owner Luke Myers, right, and his dad, Jim, work on the new 'Western Town' battlefield at the business in Rantoul.



OCT. 10: A line of students walk down the stairs to cross the field to the east side as volunteers, including Forrest Reyes, front, cover the bleachers at Gies Memorial Stadium with 50,000 orange rally towels in preparation for the Illini's game against No. 1 Ohio State.



OCT. 2: Garrett Jones welds a large pipe at A&R Mechanical Contractors in Urbana. The business was marking its 100th anniversary.



OCT. 28: Union workers at the Starbucks on South Neil Street in Champaign walk the picket line during an informational picket that was part of a nationwide effort to push officials with the chain to come back to the bargaining table. The union had begun voting to authorize a strike.

NOVEMBER



NOV. 20: St. Joseph Middle School students gather for an all-school picture in the gymnasium. The school was celebrating its fourth exemplary report card from the Illinois State Board of Education.



NOV. 5: The 'Royal Donut' sign is shown above the well-loved shop's new Champaign location at 1105 Windsor Road. It officially opened on Nov. 11.



NOV. 12: Vicky Dunn takes a break from working to play with grandson River Madden, 3, at her restaurant, Lazy Day Cafe, in Villa Grove.



NOV. 18: The upper tiers sing and dance to 'YMCA' during the annual Field Trip Day at the Illini women's basketball game against Murray State at State Farm Center in Champaign. Illinois prevailed, 84-64.



NOV. 12: A car is shown at the newly opened Taco Bell at 2004 Patton Drive in Mahomet.

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

DECEMBER



DEC. 11: Becky Dey, left, and Shell Thornton ring bells alongside the Salvation Army kettle outside the Harvest Market grocery store in south Champaign. Dey said she has been a bell ringer for over 10 years, while Thornton said she had been doing it for over 20.



DEC. 1: Pedestrians and traffic navigate a snowy landscape at Sixth and Green streets on the University of Illinois campus in Champaign. The storm that struck just after Thanksgiving blanketed the area in 8.4 inches of snow, leading to the cancellation of Champaign's Parade of Lights and forcing the city's public-works trucks to interrupt their leaf-collection activities to clear the roads of snow.



DEC. 18: Legendary News-Gazette columnist Loren Tate talks with Illinois quarterback Luke Altmeyer while presenting him with the third annual Loren Tate Media Award, given to the player who not only is the most cooperative with the local media but also exhibits professional integrity in all interactions, at the Smith Center in Champaign.



DEC. 3: The future home of Doug Altenberger's hotel is shown at the corner of Hill and Neil streets in downtown Champaign. Altenberger said the hotel, which had its ceremonial groundbreaking in 2019, is now expected to be part of the collegiate-themed Graduate by Hilton brand rather than Marriott Aloft, and the goal is to open by August or September 2027.



DEC. 9: The Stephens Family YMCA and the field where it plans to build an expansion are shown in southwest Champaign.



DEC. 4: The new Dutch Bros. coffee shop is shown on the site of a former Circle K gas station at Lincoln Avenue and Green Street in Urbana.

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