

THE GAZETTE-DEMOCRAT

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News Notes

Items of interest from throughout the Union County area, from social media and beyond...



Happy New Year to all of our readers.

The Union County Sheriff's Office is thanking all of the participating businesses and those in the community who helped to make Christmas a little brighter for kids by supporting the office's Santa Cop program.

The National Weather Service office in Paducah shared on social media that some of the wind chills in the region early Monday morning included 5 degrees in Carbondale and Cape Girardeau, 9 in Marion and 12 in Cairo. Wind gusts topping 30 miles per hour and a temperature in the upper teens were reported early Monday morning in the Southern Illinois area.

The forecast for New Year's Day in the Union County area is calling for mostly sunny conditions and a high temperature near 41 degrees.

In the midst of the holiday season, the Anna Police Department shared a reminder on social media which encouraged the public to secure personal items indoors, especially at night, to lock doors and to always double-check that car and garage doors have been closed when leaving home.

Host Cobden and Cairo were slated to face off Monday afternoon for the championships of the boys' basketball Appleknocker Holiday Tournament.

Adventures await at a Stuffy Sleepover event planned Jan. 2-3 at Stinson Memorial Public Library in Anna.

Shawnee Community College campuses remain closed this week for winter break. Offices are scheduled to reopen Monday morning, Jan. 5.

A certified food protection manager course is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Jan. 17 at Shawnee Community College near Ullin. Registration is available online through Jan. 15 at shawneecc.edu.

Winds gusts near 50 mph Sunday evening

Record warmth gives way to storms, return of cold

After record warmth was recorded over the Christmas holiday, winter's chill returned to the Southern Illinois, Southeast Missouri and Western Kentucky region following the passage of a strong cold front on Sunday. On Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and continuing into the weekend, temperatures were 20 to 30 degrees above normal. An abrupt end to the unseasonable warmth started to arrive Sunday evening and continued into the overnight hours.

The National Weather Service office in Paducah advised Saturday afternoon, Dec. 27, that "the unseasonably mild weather will come crashing to an end with a cold frontal passage late Sunday afternoon into the evening. Wind chills by Monday morning will range from 5 to 10 degrees below zero. Similar conditions are expected Tuesday morning. High temperatures on Tuesday will struggle to climb above freezing."

Severe Weather

The end of the unseasonably mild weather was accompanied by a line of stormy weather which swept through the region Sunday evening and Sunday night. At around 5:30 p.m. Sunday, the Weather Service office issued a severe thunderstorm warning for Union County, northwestern Alexander Coun-

ty and central Cape Girardeau County in Southeast Missouri. The warning was in effect until 6:15 p.m.

The Weather Service reported that at 5:25 p.m., severe thunderstorms were located along a line extending from near Grand Tower to near Burfordville in Southeast Missouri. The storms were moving east at 65 miles per hour. Wind gusts up to 60 mph were possible. A radar image posted on the Weather Service office's website at about 5:30 p.m. Sunday showed a line of severe storms in Southeast Missouri and Southern Illinois.

The Weather Service office also issued a tornado warning at 5:28 p.m. for parts of Wayne, Wabash and Edwards counties in south central Illinois.

Prior to the arrival of the storms, temperatures had risen into the low 70s Sunday afternoon in the Southern Illinois area. By around 7 p.m. Sunday, temperatures had dropped into the 50s in the area. Temperatures had dropped into the 40s by around 7:52 p.m. In the Union County area, the temperature was expected to continue falling to a low around 22 degrees by Monday morning.

Earlier on Sunday, the Weather Service had advised that the Southern Illinois, Southeast Missouri and Western Ken-



Just ahead of stormy weather...

...clouds and the setting sun created a colorful display Sunday evening in the western sky over Union County. Not long after the photo was taken, a severe thunderstorm warning was issued for the county.

tucky region faced either a slight risk or marginal risk for severe storms late Sunday afternoon and continuing into the evening. The Weather Service reported at midday that the the potential for severe weather was increasing for Sunday afternoon and evening. A line of showers and thunderstorms was expected to move rapidly eastward across the region from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Sunday. Damaging winds were expected to be the main threat, but a few isolated tornadoes also were possible.

The Paducah office issued a special weather statement early Sunday morning for the region. The statement advised that a "strong cold front will approach and move through the Quad State area this afternoon and evening. Ahead of the front, south winds will

gust to around 35 mph with a few gusts possibly reaching 40 mph at times. A line of showers and a few thunderstorms will also pass through with the cold front, which may produce brief higher wind gusts. Behind the front, winds will quickly shift to the west, then northwest with gusts to 35 mph possible through or just after midnight. Temperatures (continued on page 2)

2025 has been active weather year in region



Damaged utility lines

Utility lines were damaged by a major winter storm which brought ice and snow to the region on Jan. 5.



Heavy rain falls in early April

Water was standing along Illinois Route 146 in Ware even as heavy rain was continuing to fall on April 5 in the region.



Storm clouds

Storm clouds were seen in the sky over Union County on May 16. A significant severe thunderstorm and tornado outbreak impacted the region during the afternoon and evening on May 16.

The National Weather Service, NWS, in Paducah reports that 2025 has been a very active weather year in the Southern Illinois, Southeast Missouri and Western Kentucky region. Spring was a particularly active season.

The year began with multiple winter storms that resulted in significant impacts across the region on Jan. 5 and again on Feb. 18. Right before the second winter storm, a widespread heavy rainfall event impacted the state of Kentucky, with 48-hour rainfall totals of 4 to 7 inches. Significant flash flooding was observed in many areas. Moderate to major river flooding developed on several rivers across the state including the Green River in our area.

The region experienced several high-end, historic severe thunderstorm events during the spring season, with the first of these occurring March 14-15. This event occurred during the late evening into the overnight hours. There were a total of 14 tornadoes confirmed with this system, including six EF-3's: one of these was an EF-4 in Arkansas before weakening slightly as it moved into Ripley County in Southeast Missouri.

Three weeks later, another historic tornado outbreak occurred across the region on the evening of April 2. There were 23 confirmed tornadoes from this event, which broke the record for the most tornadoes in a single event in NWS Paducah history.

This event was also the start of a prolonged flooding event with multiple days of flash flooding which peaked on April 4. Rainfall totals in some areas exceeded a foot during the April 2-6 period. As a result, moderate to major river flooding developed along most area rivers.

Another significant severe thunderstorm event occurred on May 16, with 10 tornadoes, including an EF-4 twister that touched down south of Marion. Very large hail up to softball sized and even larger was also observed with this system. The Weather Service office issued 462 combined warnings (severe, tornado and flash flood warnings) in the spring season,

which broke the record for the most in a single season in our office history.

Well above normal rainfall during the first half of the year likely was a key contributor to record high humidity levels observed during the summer. Several locations, including Paducah, observed a record number of days with dew points reaching 70 and 75 degrees.

One of the longest lasting heat waves on record occurred July 16-30, with heat index readings routinely in the 100 to 110 range. Localized values up to 120 degrees were observed on a few days.

After a very wet first half of the year, the faucet turned off in August and September which resulted in severe drought developing across much of the region.

There were a total of 61 tornadoes that touched down across the area in 2025 (as of Dec. 26), which was the second most on record for a year, only behind the 79 in 2011. The tornadoes covered a total of 574.5 miles, which shattered the previous record for most number of miles of tornado damage in a year (previously 449.8 miles in 2011). There were nine EF-3's, which was the most strong tornadoes in a single year since 1957 (when there were 12). The vast majority of them (47) occurred during three events: March 14-15, April 2 and May 16.

The Weather Service office offered the following look back at 2025 weather events in the region:

Major Winter Storm

A major winter storm impacted the region on Jan. 5. Impacts ranged from heavy snow and sleet accumulations to locations along and north of Interstate 64 in Southern Illinois and southwest Indiana, to a major ice storm across parts of Southeast Missouri, Southern Illinois and northwest Kentucky.

Peak snow and sleet accumulations ranged from 4 to 8 inches. In the hardest hit areas of the ice storm, widespread ice totals of 0.25 of an inch to 0.75 of an inch were reported. (continued on page 3)



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Stinson Library plans ‘Coming Together’ oral history project

As the nation prepares to celebrate its 250th anniversary in 2026, Stinson Memorial Public Library District in Anna recently announced plans for an oral history film project: “Coming Together: A Southern Illinois Story.”

The library is inviting community members to be a part of a record of living history that will feature short, three-minute interviews. The goal of the interviews is to capture the spirit, culture and everyday moments that define Southern Illinois today.

The project hopes to capture the voices and stories of Union County residents – past, present and future. The goal of the interviews is to preserve local memories, traditions and milestones. A selection of those special moments will be sealed

in a Union County America 250 time capsule to be opened by future generations.

Filming is planned at Stinson Memorial Public Library in Anna and in the field. Dates and times were recently announced by the library.

Film dates are scheduled from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 6, and Tuesday, Feb. 3, at Stinson Memorial Public Library, which is located at 409 S. Main St. in Anna. To register for a time, call 618-833-2521.

The library also noted that it can come to meet with businesses and organizations to conduct interviews. Dates for those interviews are planned from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 9, and Friday, Feb. 6. Interviews can be set up by sending an email to swatkins@stinsonlibrary.org.

Weather

(continued from page 1)

will also drop quickly behind the cold front this evening and overnight. Gusty winds will blow around unsecured objects, such as holiday yard decorations, this afternoon and evening.”

The office also issued a wind advisory for the region. The advisory was in effect from 6 p.m. Sunday through 6 a.m. Monday. Winds gusts topping 35 mph already were occurring by midday Sunday in the region. As the line of storms went through Sunday evening, gusts up 39 mph were reported in the Southern Illinois area. The Weather Service office reported a gust of 47 mph at 7:52 p.m. Sunday at the Southern Illinois Airport near Carbondale.

Parts of Southern Illinois, Southeast Missouri and Western Kentucky also were under a tornado watch on Sunday. The watch was issued shortly before 4 p.m. Sunday by the National Weather Service Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Okla. Union County was included in the watch, which was in effect until 8 p.m.

“**Toasty Christmas Eve**”

The Weather Service office reported that records were broken on “a toasty Christmas Eve” in the region. Several locations reached 70 degrees on Christmas Eve, which was Wednesday, Dec. 24.

In the forecast posted for the evening of Dec. 24, the Weather Service office shared that “Santa will only need a jacket tonight across our region, and it will remain very warm for Christmas and on into the weekend with temperatures 20 to 30 degrees above normal.”

Records were set in Paducah, Cape Girardeau and Poplar Bluff, Mo. A record was tied in Carbondale. The Weather Service reported the following high temperatures in the region on Christmas Eve:

73 degrees in Paducah, which was a record. The old record was 70, set in 2021. Records have been kept in Paducah since 1937.

70 degrees in Cape Girardeau, which was a record. The old record was 66, set in 2023. Records have been kept in Cape Girardeau since 1960.

76 degrees in Poplar Bluff, Mo., which was a record. The old record was 71, set in 1955. Records have been kept in Poplar Bluff since 1893.

66 degrees in Carbondale, which tied a record set in 2023. Records have been kept in Carbondale since 1898.

Drought Update

The return of cold temperatures was preceded by some much-needed rainfall in the region.

A Dec. 24 update posted by the U.S. Drought Monitor showed that Union, Jackson, Williamson, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski and Alexander counties all were experiencing abnormally dry conditions.

Dense Fog

The unseasonably mild temperatures were accompanied by dense fog for parts of the day on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, Dec. 23-25, and again on Saturday, Dec. 27. The Weather Service office issued several dense fog advisories for parts of the region due to the conditions. At times, visibility could have been less than a quarter of a mile in some locations.

State grocery tax to end, aquifer protections begin

By Ben Szalinski and Brenden Moore
Capitol News Illinois

Illinois’ statewide 1 percent grocery tax will go away on Jan. 1, though many people will continue to pay it at the local level.

Data compiled by the Illinois Municipal League shows that 656 municipalities, a little more than half of the state’s municipalities, have passed an ordinance establishing their own grocery tax. Those communities are home to 7.2 million people, or 56.5 percent of the state’s population. Three counties, Washington, Washash and Moultrie, have also approved countywide grocery taxes.

Gov. JB Pritzker signed a bill in 2024 eliminating the 1 percent statewide grocery tax, which he touted as a measure to ease residents’ tax burden. But because the revenue from the state grocery tax went to municipal governments, rather than state coffers, the measure allowed local governments to levy their own 1 percent tax via ordinance, rather than a referendum to voters.

Here are some other laws that will take effect in the new year:

Drinking Water Protections

Senate Bill 1723 bans carbon sequestration, the process of capturing and storing carbon by injecting it underground, within an area that “overlies, underlies, or passes through” a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-designated sole-source aquifer.

The new law applies to the footprint of the Mahomet Aquifer, which is the main source of drinking water for more than 500,000 people across a 15-county area in central Illinois.

It comes as Illinois, especially downstate, is targeted for carbon sequestration projects due to the state’s favorable geology and the availability of federal tax credits.

Studies, including those conducted by researchers at the University of Illinois, have found minimal risk to water sources from sequestration activity.

But the legislation was a priority for central Illinois community activists, environmental advocates and a bipartisan cadre of local lawmakers with zero risk tolerance due to the lack of a clear alternative water source if the aquifer were tainted.

Safer Gear for Firefighters

Illinois will take first steps towards requiring safer gear for firefighters.

Under House Bill 2409, manufacturers of firefighter turnout gear starting in 2026 must provide written notice if their products contain PFAS, also known as “forever chemicals.”

Numerous scientific studies have linked exposure to PFAS to an increased risk of developing various forms of cancer. Manufacturers will be banned from selling turnout

gear and personal protective equipment containing PFAS altogether starting on Jan. 1, 2027.

Hotel Soaps Phased Out

The phase-out of small, single-use plastic bottles in Illinois hotel rooms continues. Senate Bill 2960, passed and signed into law in 2024, bars hotels from providing toiletries such as shampoo, conditioner and bath soap in less than six-ounce plastic containers unless specifically requested by the hotel guest.

The ban took effect in hotels with 50 or more rooms on July 1 and takes effect for all hotels starting in 2026. Hotels in violation will receive a written warning for the first offense and be subject to fines of up to \$1,500 for each subsequent violation.

The legislation is intended to spur the state’s hospitality industry to reduce its plastic footprint by shifting to either refillable toiletry containers or larger plastic bottles.

Similar laws have been enacted in states like California, New York and Washington.

Squatter Removal

Senate Bill 1563 will make it easier for authorities to remove squatters who are illegally staying at someone else’s residence.

The law clarifies that a court-ordered eviction is not required for police to remove squatters from a person’s home, and police can enforce criminal trespassing charges against a squatter.

Pritzker signed the bill in July after squatters moved into a home next door to Rep. Marcus Evans in Chicago. According to ABC-7, Chicago Police told homeowners they couldn’t remove the squatters from the home and the homeowners would have to go through the eviction process in Cook County court, which can take months.

Lift-Assist Fees

House Bill 2336 allows municipalities or fire districts to charge assisted living facilities or nursing homes for calls to fire departments requesting help lifting a resident when it is not an emergency.

The bill was an initiative of the Illinois Municipal League, which argued the calls to fire departments for the nonemergency service are a burden on local governments and shift liabilities for injuries that happen during the process to fire departments rather than the facility.

Stadium Funding

Senate Bill 2772 adds women’s professional sports to the types of facilities the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority can oversee. Current law only allows the ISFA to oversee sports facilities for baseball, football and auto racing.

The bill is not designed to move any team’s stadium proposals forward, though the Chicago Stars women’s soccer team has previously been reported to be interested in building a new stadium with

help from state funding.

The bill was the only one related to sports stadium funding that advanced in Springfield in 2025. The Chicago Bears committed earlier this year to building a stadium in Arlington Heights but are still waiting for approval from the village and struggling to find support in Springfield for funding.

Public Official Privacy

House Bill 576 allows state lawmakers, constitutional officers and state’s attorneys, among others, to request that their personal information be redacted on public websites.

Public officials would be able to use their campaign funds to pay for personal security services and security upgrades to their home, including security systems, cameras, walls, fences and other physical improvements.

Rewilding

House Bill 2726 allows the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to implement rewilding as a conservation strategy for the state.

This could entail the restoration of land to its natural state and the reintroduction of native species, especially apex predators and keystone species like bison and beavers.

Illinois is believed to be the first state to codify the strategy into law.

Reservation App Regulations

State lawmakers voted this year to crackdown on third-party restaurant reservation apps.

House Bill 2456 prohibits third-party reservation services from selling reservations without a restaurant’s permission. Restaurants are still allowed to partner with the services.

Paid Time Off to Pump Breast Milk

Senate Bill 212 mandates employers to compensate

mothers who take breaks at work to pump breast milk for up to a year after their child is born. The bill prohibits employers from requiring employees to use paid leave time for pumping.

Naloxone in Libraries

House Bill 1910 requires that libraries maintain a supply of opioid overdose medication, like naloxone. This drug is often administered through a nasal spray like Narcan. The law also requires that at least one staff member be trained to identify overdoses and administer the drug.

Police Training on Sexual Assault

Senate Bill 1195, also known as Anna’s Law, requires police officers in training to participate in trauma-informed programs, procedures and practices that are designed to reduce trauma for victims. The bill is named after Anna Williams, a suburban resident who brought the initiative to lawmakers following her own experience with a sexual assault investigation. The bill takes effect in January.

Predatory Towing

Senate Bill 2040 gives the Illinois Commerce Commission new powers to punish predatory towing companies which sometimes tow cars under false pretenses only to charge drivers afterwards. The ICC-backed law allows the agency to revoke towing licenses, impound tow trucks and more.

Jerry Nowicki contributed to this story.

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Shawnee Hills Arts Council announces upcoming events

Special events are planned during the first month of the new year at the Shawnee Hills Arts Council in Anna. The arts council is located along West Davie Street in Anna.

Zumba Class

Starting on Jan. 6, the arts council is planning to offer Zumba classes twice a week. Classes will be led by Amy Sturgeon. All fitness levels will be welcomed. No experience is needed.

The classes are scheduled from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Those who plan to attend are asked to bring water. A \$5 donation is requested for each class.

“**The Odd Couple**”

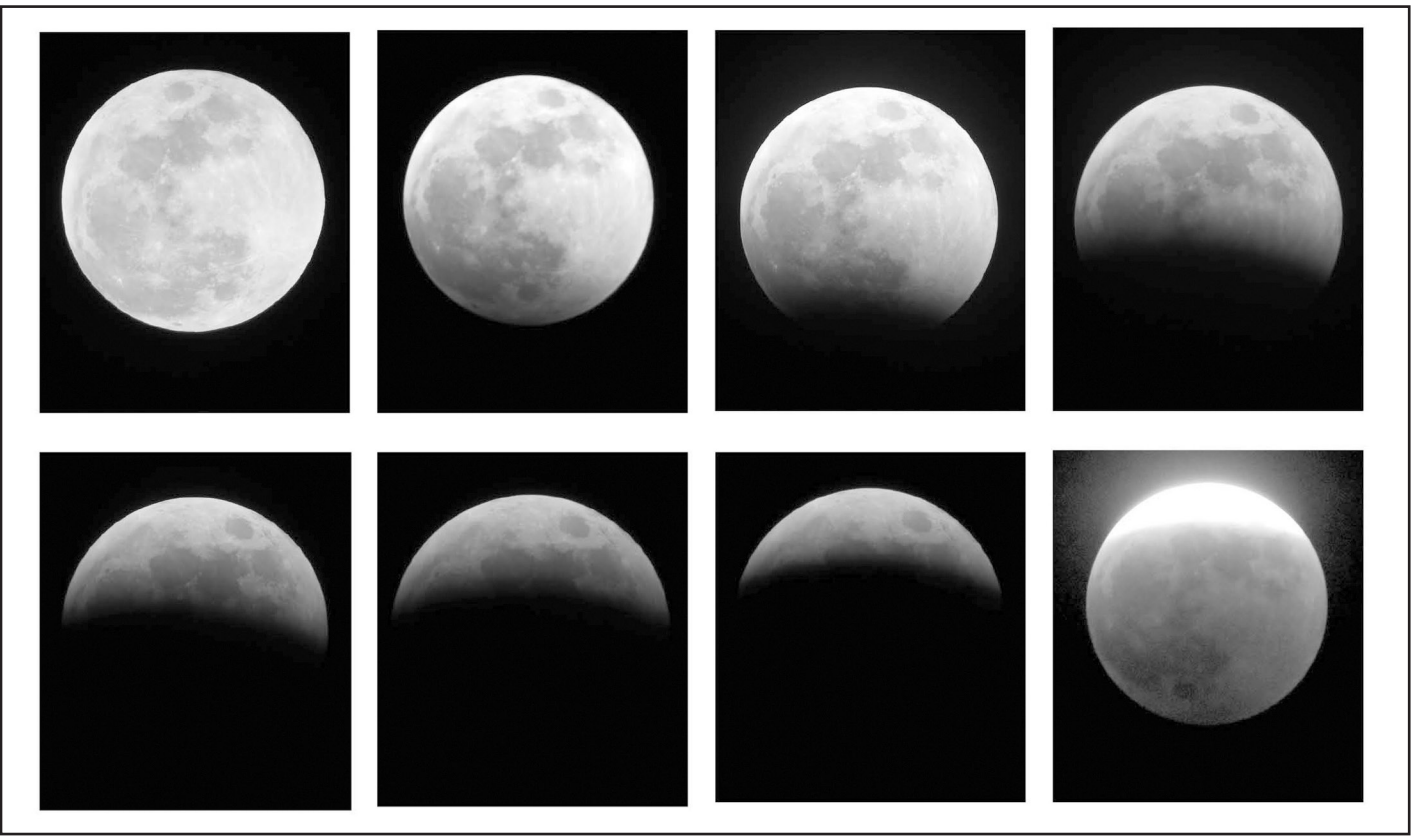
The arts council is planning to present performances of “The Odd Couple.” Performances are set for 7 p.m. Jan. 23-24 and 2 p.m. Jan. 25. Ticket prices are \$15 for adults and \$5 for children 12 and under.

Photography Group

Starting in 2026, Caleb Hale is planning to take the lead n a new local photography group. The group is scheduled to meet monthly at the Shawnee Hills Arts Council building in Anna. The first meeting is set for 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 29.

The goal of the new group, the Shawnee Hills Photography Collective, is to bring together local people who enjoy creating images across all genres, regardless of their background or experience level. Each of the group will offer opportunities to work without pressure, learn from one another, share conversations about the creative process and occasionally hear from a few guest speakers.

In addition, the group also plans undertake a long-term project to create an original series of photographs that document the people and places of the region for an exhibition in late 2026.



Lunar eclipse in March

Skywatchers had an opportunity to watch a total lunar eclipse in March. The eclipse occurred during the late night hours of March 13 and the early morning hours of March 14. The images were captured as the eclipse took place in the sky over Union County.

2025 weather

(continued from page 1)

The heavy snow and ice, combined with persistent gusty winds, led to widespread power outages over much of Southeast Missouri, Southern Illinois, southwest Indiana and north-west Kentucky. At its peak, over 100,000 residents were without power on the night of Jan. 5 and the morning of Jan. 6.

Prolonged Period of Heavy Rain

A prolonged period of heavy rain brought widespread flooding to Kentucky during the weekend of Feb. 15-16. Widespread rainfall totals ranging from 2 to 6-plus inches occurred, with the highest amounts found from southwest to central portions of the state. The majority of the rain fell from Friday night, Feb. 14, through Saturday, Feb. 15. At least a dozen river sites had preliminary crests within the top five of recorded crests. In addition, a few severe thunderstorms were found across the state bringing large hail and damaging wind gusts.

National Weather Service offices issued a total of 30 flood warnings and 47 flash flood warnings. There were also 11 severe thunderstorm warnings and two tornado warnings. The Weather Prediction Center even issued a rare high risk for excessive rainfall message for Saturday, Feb. 15. The impacts were felt across the state, with 300-plus road closures, 40,000-plus without power and over 1,000 water rescues being performed. There were reports of evacuation of a hospital, a nursing home and an apartment complex. The Weather Forecast Office in Jackson, Ky., was required to shelter in place on generator power when a flooded road cut off its exit route.

Heavy Snow in February

Right on the heels of a major flooding event, which produced rainfall amounts of 2 to 7 inches on Feb. 15, the area was transformed into a winter wonderland when snow quickly spread across the area on the afternoon and evening of Feb. 18. Roads quickly became snow covered due to temperatures only in the teens to low 20s. Parts of I-57 and I-24 were briefly closed overnight due to poor road conditions and accidents.

By the morning of the 19th, most of the region had received anywhere from 3 to 8 inches of snow, and localized higher amounts up to 11 inches were observed in Southeast Missouri. Wind gusts around 25 miles per hour also accompanied the event, leading to some blowing and drifting of the snow which made measuring it a bit of a challenge.

Winter/Early Spring Storm System

A potent late winter/early spring storm system brought widespread severe thunderstorms to the mid Mississippi River valley starting late on Friday, March 14, and continuing into the overnight hours early Saturday, March 15.

The fast moving storms produced a variety of hazards, including several tornadoes, damaging winds and sporadic large hail. Large hail damaged windows, siding, roofs and vehicles in many communities, with the hardest hit being Owensboro, Ky. Numerous areas were impacted by damage to homes, machine sheds, power lines and trees as well.

A total of 14 tornadoes have been confirmed by NWS Paducah with the outbreak. This included five EF-3 tornadoes, five EF-2 tornadoes and three EF-1 tornadoes. A tornado that impacted parts of Ripley and Butler counties in Southeast Missouri was rated EF-4 based on damage that occurred along a part of its track in Arkansas. A total of seven lives were claimed by these tornadoes, in addition to 12 injuries.

Tornado Outbreak

A tornado outbreak occurred across the region during the late afternoon and evening on April 2. The Storm Prediction Center issued a rare high risk message for the region, which was the first time since Nov. 17, 2013, that any part of the forecast area was in this level of risk. There were 23 tornadoes that touched down across the region, which broke the record for most tor-

nadoes in a single event in the history of the Weather Service office in Paducah. The previous record was 21 tornadoes on May 6, 2003.

Multiple Rounds of Heavy Rain, Thunderstorms

Multiple rounds of heavy rain and thunderstorms impacted the lower Ohio Valley beginning on the afternoon of April 2 and continued through the evening of April 5. Lighter showers continued through the day on April 6.

The first wave consisted of a significant severe thunderstorm event and tornado outbreak during the afternoon and evening on April 2. Flash flooding became a greater concern during the overnight as storms trained over the same locations. Additional waves of thunderstorms training over the same area continued over the next several days, with the heaviest falling from the evening of the 4th through the evening of the 5th.

Widespread rainfall amounts of 6 inches to 12 inches were observed over the four-day period, with a swath of 12 inches to 16 inches across Western Kentucky. The Marshall County, Ky., mesonet station received 15.59 inches of rain over a four-day period, which broke the all-time highest four-day rainfall record for any location in Paducah office's 58-county forecast area.

Flash flooding impacted basically every one of the 58 counties in the Paducah office's forecast area at some point during the event. The office issued flash flood emergencies for Cape Girardeau and Carter counties in Missouri on the evening of April 4. Numerous water rescues occurred across the region, with many homes and businesses inundated by flood waters. Countless roads were covered by high water and impassable, some of which still were closed weeks later due to ongoing major river flooding.

Moderate to major river flooding occurred on most area rivers due to the excessive rainfall. Some of the hardest hit river basins included the Big Muddy, Green, Little Wabash and Ohio. Flooding along the Green River in Kentucky was the worst experienced in over 60 years, with Paradise cresting just below its all-time highest crest. The Ohio River at Owensboro observed its highest crest since 1997.

Thunderstorm, Tornado Outbreak

A significant severe thunderstorm and tornado outbreak impacted the region during the afternoon and evening on May 16. Discrete supercells formed across Southern Missouri and Illinois during the afternoon and moved east. These storms produced numerous tornadoes, many of which were strong to violent, along with very large hail.

Several locations observed multiple severe storms since the initial storms developed well ahead of the cold front while another round formed right ahead of it. Eventually, upscale growth led to a more significant damage wind threat with straight-line winds of 60 to 90 mph occurring across portions of Western Kentucky between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m.

In the days following the event, NWS Damage surveys were conducted and determined that 10 tornadoes occurred across the region. Seven of these were strong (EF-2-plus), with the highest rated being an EF-4 that ravaged the southern part of Williamson County, just south of Marion). The Weather Service office issued a rare tornado emergency for this storm.

This was the highest rated damage from a tornado within one of the 58 counties served by the Paducah office since the Dec. 10, 2021, violent tornado that struck Western Kentucky. There were also two EF-3's with this event, one of which caused two fatalities when it struck north of Sikeston, Mo., and the other occurring just south of Morganfield, Ky.

Very large hail also was observed from many of these storms, with hailstones of tennis ball to softball size being reported. Even larger hailstones may have fallen in Ballard County,

Ky., possibly measuring 4 inches in diameter or larger. The largest documented hailstone on record in the Paducah office's 58-county forecast area is 4.5 inches set in Todd County in May of 1995, so this is very close to that.

July Heat Wave

One of the region's longest lasting heat waves in recent memory occurred from mid to late July 20. High temperatures in the low to mid 90s combined with very high humidity levels (dew points in the mid 70s to low 80s) to produce heat index values that were routinely in the 100 to 110 range starting on July 16 and continuing through the 30th.

Some relief occurred across the northern one-third to one-half of the region on the 19th and 21st, thanks to more widespread showers/storms and associated cloud cover. However, as the ridge amplified and coverage of showers and storms began to dwindle, the entire region became engulfed in widespread heat index readings of 100 to 110 from the 22nd through 24th. Localized readings of 115 to 120 were observed during this time across parts of Southeast Missouri and the Jackson Purchase area of Western Kentucky.

The region experienced a slight decrease on the 25th and 26th due to more clouds around, largely limiting heat index readings to the 100 to 105 range. This was then followed by the most oppressive heat of the entire heat wave, with widespread heat index readings of 110 to 120, along with localized higher readings, on the 28th. The heat wave continued through the 30th and then a cold front moving south through the region finally brought relief on July 31st.

The Paducah office had heat advisories or extreme heat warnings in effect for portions of the region on 15 consecutive days from July 16 through the 30th.

Summer 2025 Climate Summary

Summer temperatures in the region averaged above normal by 0.5 of a degree to 1.5 degrees. Both June and July averaged warmer than normal, while August was cooler than normal.

The region waited longer than normal to get into the summer heat, with many areas observing one of their latest first 90 degree dates on record (June 20), including Paducah. However, once it hit, the region

endured "one heck of a brutal combination of heat and humidity" from the latter part of June through mid August.

The region broke several records for the prolonged duration of the high humidity levels. Paducah observed its most humid summer on record in terms of the number of hours with dew points reaching both 70 and 75 degrees.

As conditions dried out during late July through August, humidity levels finally lowered dramatically by the latter half of August. Temperatures also dipped below normal, with some record lows even observed around Aug. 25-27. This was a welcome change after how oppressive the humidity was much of the summer season.

Paducah observed eight consecutive days with lows falling

below 60 degrees to end the summer, which broke the previous August record of seven consecutive days set in 2004 and 1989.

Precipitation varied, with amounts ranging from 1 to 4 inches drier than normal in others. The summer started off wet, with June finishing wetter than normal, and a few locations even observed one of their top 10 wettest Junes, including Paducah and Cape Girardeau.

July remained wet across mainly the north half of the region, while those farther south started to dry out. Then August hit and the entire region experienced a flash drought with many areas experiencing one of their top five driest Augusts on record. The wetter areas tended to have amounts ranging from 12 to 15 inches, with localized higher totals, while

the drier corridors registered 7 to 10 inches, along with a few areas that received less than that. For the season, there was a corridor of wetter conditions from the Sikeston/Charleston, Mo., areas into a large part of Southern Illinois and areas of Western Kentucky, particularly those closer to the Ohio River.

Meanwhile, the dry corridors were focused from the Missouri Ozark Foothills northeast into portions of Southwest Illinois (Perry and Jefferson counties in particular). Another zone of drier conditions was in portions of Western Kentucky closer to the Tennessee line along, with a few smaller areas around Owensboro.

The highest observed amount of precipitation in the Paducah office's forecast area was 18.04 inches at a CoCoRaHS station in Massac County.



Jonesboro street

North Main Street in Jonesboro was covered with snow and ice after a major winter storm which occurred on Jan. 5.



Heavy snow in February

Heavy snow covered the landscape around new U.S. Route 51 between Anna and Cobden following a winter storm in mid-February.



Clear Creek bridge

Clear Creek was high in the midst of heavy rain which fell in the region in early April. A bridge carries Illinois Route 146 over Clear Creek.

Obituaries

Roger Dale Jackson

Name a road that you drove on today and chances are, at some point, Roger Jackson either built or worked on it. Roger Dale Jackson, 74, of Anna, Ill., died in Marion, Ill. of cancer on Dec. 23, 2025.

He was born in Anna, Illinois in 1951 to Jewel Jackson and Lucille (Barker) Jackson who welcomed him into their large, loving, rural family.

Roger graduated from Anna Jonesboro Community High School. After graduating from high school, Roger joined his father Jewel as a member of the Laborers’ Local 1330 before later going to work at E.T. Simonds where he became a beloved asphalt foreman before retiring in 2013 after decades of dedicated service.

Roger met the love of his life, the late Debra (Debbie) (Davis) at school in Anna, Illinois. Excited to start their new lives together, Roger and Debbie were married in Anna in 1971. Their love was beyond measure.

Roger and Debbie welcomed their children James (Jimmy/Jim) William Jackson in 1977 and Jason Scott Jackson in 1979. Though the boys’ accomplishments and later marriages to Sarah Marie Dunkel in 2009 and Jamie Lee Craig in 2011 meant the world to Roger and Debbie, their favorite role was that as Maw maw and Pawpaw to their four grandchildren. Cale James Jackson was born in 2011, Delaney Marie Jackson and Charles (Charlie) Marc Jackson were born in 2013, and Lucas (Luke) Scott Jackson were born in 2020.

Throughout his life, Roger built strong and lasting friendships with folks from school, Union County’s Autos Unlimited club, dirt biking, and work at E.T. Simonds. Roger, and his family, were grateful for these relationships.

Roger will always be remembered for his love of family and friends as well as his



sometimes grumpy but always loving nature. Quick to temper and quick to hug, Roger’s family and friends cherish the life he and Debbie built instilling values such as hard work, loyalty, and humble pride in their children and grandchildren.

His grandchildren could not have asked for a better Pawpaw and will miss him every day. Knowing he has returned to the side of his beloved Debbie can bring his family and friends some peace.

He is survived by his children, Jim (Sarah) and Jason (Jamie); grandchildren, Cale, Delaney, Charlie, and Luke Jackson; sisters Doris White-side and Pam Gee; and several other beloved family members. Roger is preceded in death by his wife, Debbie Jackson; his parents, Jewel and Lucile Jackson; brothers, Richard, Ronal, and Gary Jackson; sisters Dorothy Davis and Wanda Smith.

Funeral services were on Tuesday, Dec. 30 at the Rendleman & Hileman Funeral Home in Anna.

Interment will be in the Casper Cemetery.

In honor of Debbie and Roger’s commitment to children and families in Southern Illinois, donations to Pay-It-Forward Union County would be greatly appreciated. Envelopes will be available at the Funeral Home.

To view the obituary and leave online condolences for the family, visit www.rendlemanhilemanfh.com.

Rendleman and Hileman Funeral Home in Anna in charge of arrangements.

Ruth Diane Wiseman-Mathis

Ruth Diane Wiseman-Mathis, age 63 of Wolf Lake, passed away Monday, Dec. 22, 2025 at Saint Francis Medical Center in Cape Girardeau, Mo.

She was born on Nov. 8, 1962 in Anna, the daughter of Carl Lee Wiseman, Sr. and Helen Wiseman-Russell. She married Bobby Mathis.

Diane is survived by her husband, Bobby Mathis; children, Rusty Smith (Sarah Pearl), Bobby Wayne Mathis, CJ Mathis and Catherine Poynor; grandchildren, Hunter (Maddy) Smith, Jake (Cym) Smith, Kelci Lynn Baber, Brantlee Smith, Everett Mathis, Anthony Mathis, Elyjah Mathis and Remmy Mathis; great-grandchildren, Asher, Tatum, Aubree and another due in March; sister in law, Toni (Chris) Livengood; brother in law, Mike (Brooksie) Mathis; nieces, nephews, other relatives and friends.

She was preceded in death by her parents and brothers, Franklin Norris and Carl Lee



Wiseman, Jr.

Diane enjoyed camping, reading and fishing. Her greatest love was her family, especially her grandkids. She will certainly be missed.

Funeral services for Ruth Diane Wiseman-Mathis were held on Tuesday, Dec. 30 at Rendleman and Hileman Funeral Home in Jonesboro with Bro. Bobby Richardson officiating.

Memorial contributions can be made to Rendleman and Hileman Funeral Home to assist the family with final expenses. Envelopes are available at Rendleman and Hileman Funeral Home.

Otis Glen Burris

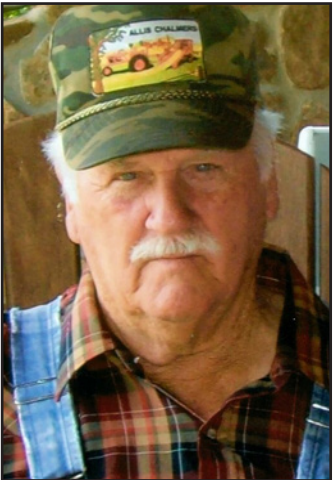
Otis Glen Burris, age 86 of Jonesboro, passed away, Friday, Dec. 26, 2025 surrounded by his family.

He was born Nov. 21, 1939 in Wolf Lake, the son of Francis Mezo. He married Linda Pecord on June 9, 1961 in Mill Creek.

Otis is survived by his loving wife, Linda Burris; son, Rowdy Burris, daughter, Michele Burris, all of Jonesboro; two grandchildren, Corlis (April) Burris of Tamms, Zach Burris (Lindsey Edwards) of Jonesboro; three great-grandchildren, Grant and Tate Burris and Blake Edwards; sister, Sharon Stafford of Alberta, Ala.; uncle, “Brother” Larry (Maggie) Burris of Saraland, Alabama; aunt, Vonnie Burris of Mobile, Ala.; nieces and nephews; other extended family and host of dear friends.

Otis honorably served his country in the United States Air Force. After he returned home, he operated the Standard Station on the Jonesboro Square until the 70’s. He later joined the Teamsters and drove a truck for E.T. Simonds for thirty-six years until his retirement. Otis was very involved in the Teamsters and served as Union Steward until he retired.

Otis never met a stranger; he enjoyed good conversation and talking with good company. Along with his son and



grandsons he enjoyed tinkering with antique tractors and all the wheeling and dealing he did along the way. You might find him out in the shop, at an auction, or visiting a neighbor at his farm, just watching them work.

Funeral services will be at 2 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 2 at the Rendleman & Hileman Funeral Home in Jonesboro with Brent Miller officiating. Interment will follow in the Jonesboro Cemetery. Military rites will be conducted at the graveside.

Friends may call after 11 a.m. and until the service at 2 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 2 at the Rendleman & Hileman Funeral Home in Jonesboro.

Memorial contributions may be made to Shriners Hospital for Children or the American Heart Association. Envelopes will be available at the funeral home.

Cindy Pfau

Cindy Pfau, age 73, of Anna, passed away on Sunday, Dec. 21, 2025 at home surrounded by her family.

She was born on April 15, 1952 to Osa and Alma (Sifford) Lawrence in Poplar Bluff, Missouri.

Cindy was a proud mother and homemaker and she had worked as a social worker where she could carry out her passion to help others. She was an avid gardener and had a true green thumb.

Cindy was an animal lover especially with cats and birds. She enjoyed reading and was a wonderful cook. Selfless and kind were words she lived by.

Survivors include her husband, Kurt; four children, Claude (Rebecca) Wright, Maeve (John) Charles, Jordan (Amanda) Wright, and Alex (Hannah) Wright; nine grandchildren whom she adored, Emma, Lily, Lydia, Lila, Ava Grace, Oliver, Andrew, August, and Willa; one sister, Janice Glenn; along with nieces, nephews, and other relatives. A long with her



parents, she is preceded in death by her siblings Virginia Mitchell, Bette DeJournett, Hester Chipman, Bonnie Nally, Bill Lawrence, and Alecia Quattlebaum.

The family will honor Cindy’s life privately. Inurnment will be held at a later date at Union Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests with gratitude that memorial contributions be made to Union Cemetery, The cremation of Cindy Pfau will be personally handled by the staff of Crain Funeral Home.

Crain Funeral Home in Anna, Illinois is in charge of arrangements.

Ronald Raymond Dillow

Ronald Raymond Dillow, age 92, of Dongola, passed away on Friday, Dec. 26, 2025 at Auburn Creek Assisted Living in Cape Girardeau, Mo.

He was born on March 5, 1933 to Herbert and Eric Dillow in Dongola, Ill. On July 27, 1954, he married the love of his life, Martha Marie Ury, and spent over 62 years together.

Ronald held the distinction and honor of being the oldest member of the oldest Lutheran Congregation in Illinois at St. John’s Lutheran Church where he also served on the church council for many years. He likewise served on the St. John’s Cemetery Board for many years.

A lifelong farmer in the Dongola area, Ronald faithfully worked the land he loved.

After serving his country in the United States Air Force for four years, he returned home to the family farm in Dongola and was a 50+ year member of the Farm Bureau.

Ronald was a true Christian family man who also had a deep love for animals.

Survivors include his two daughters, Melissa (Tod) Bound and Rhonda (Kenny) Bramlett; four grandchildren, Nick (Erica) Bound, Taylor (Eric) Simmons, Kegan Bramlett, and Kiersten Bramlett; five great-grandchildren, Brody Fenton, Reed Fenton, Gabe B o u n d , A b b y B o u n d ,



and Caleb Bound; along with nephews and other relatives.

Along with his parents and wife, he is preceded in death by his two sisters, Nina (Clyde Sr.) Stokes and Iris Fay Dillow; and one brother, Harold Neniwah Dillow.

Funeral Services were held on Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2025 with Pastor Chere Riedel officiating at St. John’s Lutheran Church.

Interment followed the service at St. John’s Cemetery in Dongola, Ill.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests with gratitude that memorial contributions be made to the St. John’s Lutheran Church and/or St. John’s Cemetery.

Crain Funeral Home in Dongola is in charge of arrangements.

To view the obituary or to leave an online condolence for the family visit www.crainsonline.com

View Obituaries Online at annanews.com

News from

Anna Nazarene Church

Sunday, Dec. 28
The morning worship service was held at 10:35 a.m. on Dec. 28. Announcements were given by Jessica Elkins. The worship service was led by Pastor Wright and the worship team. The message “When God Calls, He Provides” was brought by Pastor Wright from Luke 2:39-40 and Matthew 2:13-23.

There was no evening service on Dec. 28.

Celebrating birthdays this week are: 31st Curt Lyerla, 3rd Ed Grisham.

Celebrating an anniversary this week is: 1st Robert and Nancy Smith.

Wednesday, Dec. 31 at 7 p.m. New Year’s Eve Celebration.

Bring your favorite snacks and games and join us for a great time of fellowship as we begin the New Year.

Sunday, Jan. 4
Breakfast - 9:00 a.m.
Sunday School - 9:30 a.m.

Morning Worship Service-10:35 a.m
No Evening Service
Wednesday, Jan 7
Wednesday Night Service will be held at 6:30 p.m. in the sanctuary.

Youth Group in the Fellowship Hall at 6:30 p.m.

You may contact the church by calling the church office at 618-833-6702 and leaving a message if necessary or by calling Pastor Wright at 618-534-7103

Illinois State Police welcome new Troopers

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois State Police, ISP, on Dec. 19 welcomed 21 new Troopers from Cadet Class 151 at a graduation ceremony at the Illinois State Police Academy in Springfield. The new Troopers were to have reported to seven ISP Troop locations throughout the state on Sunday, Dec. 21.

Cadet Class 151 marked the 23rd cadet class graduation under Gov. JB Pritzker and ISP director Brendan F. Kelly. Since 2019, 713 troopers have joined ISP.

Cadet Class 151 was a lateral entry academy class in which 21 certified police officers who previously graduated from an accredited law enforcement academy and had at least two years of experience while employed as a full-time officer completed an 11-week ISP program.

The program consisted of physical and classroom instruction, which includes training in cultural diversity, procedural justice, domestic violence, critical incident response, de-escalation tactics, firearms, first responder cer-

tification, control and arrest tactics, the Illinois Vehicle Code, criminal aw, motor carrier safety, juvenile law and more.

In addition to the 11-week academy training, the Troopers are required to participate in one-on-one mentoring with field training officers in their assigned Troop as part of the 14-week field training program, expanding their total training to 25 weeks. Troopers who successfully complete the field training program advance to solo-patrol status.

The new officers were assigned to the following areas of the state and began their patrol duties: Troop 10 Du Quoin/Ullin, three Troopers. The Troopers assigned to Troop 10 are Trenton Wilson, Michael Swift and Jordan Holland.

Troop 2 LaSalle/Moline, 2 Troopers. Troop 3 Chicago, 4 Troopers. Troop 4 Macomb/Metamora, 3 Troopers. Troop 5 Pontiac/Ashkum, 2 Troopers. Troop 7 Pesotum, 2 Troopers. Troop 8 Collinsville, 5 Troopers.

Kathryn “Kathy” J. Glasco

Kathryn “Kathy” J. Glasco, age 67, of Chaffee, passed away at her home on Saturday, Dec. 20, 2025.

She was born on Nov. 14, 1958 to Wendell George and Mabel (Merriman) Carter in Anna, Ill.

On Dec. 5, 2002, she married Ricky Glasco and have shared over 23 years together.

Kathy had worked for 33 years in the Circuit Clerks office administrating probate for the elected judges.

She enjoyed sitting around a campfire and being outdoors. Kathy was a homebody and loved her family.

Survivors include her husband, Ricky of Chaffee, Mo.; aunt and uncle, Bob (Suzie) Kessler of Anna, Ill.; step-daughter, Jennifer (Bruce) Hill of Sparta, Ill.; step-grandchildren, Damian Lanton,



Reagan Hill, Samara Hill; along with nieces, nephews, and cousins.

Along with her parents, she is preceded in death by her step-son, Carl Glasco in 2002.

Funeral Services were held on Monday, Dec. 29, 2025 with Carl Dillow officiating at Crain Funeral Home in Anna.

Interment will follow the service at McGinnis Cemetery. Crain Funeral Home in Anna, Illinois is in charge of arrangements.

Jack W. Womick

Jack W. Womick, 84, of Littleton CO, formerly of Carbondale, passed away on Sunday, Dec. 7, 2025, at his home.

He was born in Anna on Jan. 23, 1941, to William E. and Helen L. (Jones) Womick, who preceded him in death. Jack was a graduate of Anna-Jonesboro Community High School.

In his early years, he owned and operated a trucking company alongside his father and brothers.

He spent most of his career as a legal investigator for Womick Law Firm, working closely with his brothers John and Jim. He also possessed a real estate broker's license.

He married AR Rice in 1960 and she survives. He is also survived by his daughter Jayne (Mark) Bales; sons Joel (Robin) and Luke ; brother John (Jane); sister Debra (Ruane) Tanner; four grandchildren, Jack and Sam Bales and Reece and Jackie Womick. Also, he was a special Uncle to Janet, Jim, Jerry and Joe and John W., Julie and Jill and their families. Can't forget to include, his little feline friends, Stella and Lucy.

Jack was preceded in death by his son Bill; daughter-in-law Melinda ; grandson Casey and brother and sister-in-law Jim and Rosaria Womick.

In accordance to his wishes, there will be no services.

Gateway Green Conference scheduled in Collinsville

COLLINSVILLE, Ill. – Natural resource professionals play a key role in protecting our communities’ environmental assets. With ongoing research and changing conditions, it’s increasingly important to adopt responsible stewardship, manage new diseases and pests and apply sustainable practices that safeguard the future.

Industry professionals and land stewards interested in this intersection of agriculture and sustainability can register for the 2026 Gateway Green

Conference hosted by University of Illinois Extension. The March 4 event, scheduled at the Gateway Convention Center in Collinsville, will provide a platform for those who attend to access current research findings and explore best practices to responsibly care for Illinois’ natural resources and cultivated outdoor spaces.

Sessions are scheduled to run from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. across three main tracks: building sustainable landscapes, conservation steward-

ship and tree care. Organizers said that those who attend the conference will gain insights from industry experts and researchers.

Through the building sustainable landscapes track, presenters will share information on interconnected landscapes, stormwater and rain gardens, understanding soil test results, shade gardens and invasive plant management.

Through the conservation stewardship track, participants will learn about the

mushrooms of Illinois, managing wildlife species, prairie ecosystems and the ornate box turtle, and alternative tools for conservation.

An added bonus planned for the conservation track is a presentation by Heather Holm, a pollinator conservationist, biologist and award-winning author known for her influential books like “Pollinators of Native Plants, Bees, and Wasps.” Through her work, Holm has been educating gardeners and the public about supporting

native bees and insects by using native plants and creating habitats.

The tree care track covers topics such as pruning shade trees, managing trees in decline, diagnosing oaks, shade tree species selections, breeding and selecting woody plants, and Tree City USA and community forestry grants.

Registration is available online at go.illinois.edu/2026GGC. Early registration on or before Feb. 27 is \$80 per person; registration after Feb. 28 is \$85 per person. Certified Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists with a current ID card or letter of active status from their supervising Extension county director can register for \$50 per person.

Continuing education units will be available for professional association members maintaining certification through the International Society of Arboriculture, Illinois Park & Recreation Association, and Certified Golf Course Superintendent

The sponsors on this page urge you to attend the church of your choice.



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The Present of God's Presence



Photo Credit: iStockphoto.com/SharonRose

Christmas is here again, presents are being wrapped; it's a fitting time to consider God's greatest gift to us, Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate. He gave us another present, one that we cannot see, hear, or touch. Yet, we can feel it unmistakably. God gave us the present of His presence. All we have to do is ask Him for it. It can never be surpassed; His presence is a priceless gift of joy and peace. This Christmas, accept His greatest present; fill your life with the awe of the Father, the wisdom of His Son, and the illumining presence of His Holy Spirit.

Weekly Scripture Reading						
Luke 1.1-25	Luke 1.26-56	Luke 1.57-80	Luke 2.1-20	John 1.1-18	John 1.19-34	Luke 2.21-40

Scriptures Selected by the American Bible Society

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The Gazette-Democrat

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LEGAL NOTICE

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIRST JUDICIAL CIRCUIT UNION COUNTY, ILLINOIS IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF JOE H. MCMAHAN Deceased. Case No. 2025PR24 NOTICE OF DEATH, INDEPENDENT ADMINISTRATION AND CLAIM DATE Notice is given of the death of Joe H. McMahan, of Anna, Union County, Illinois. Letters of Office were issued on the 12th day of December 2025, to Joseph McMahan, of 4890 State Route 146 E. Anna, Illinois 62906, and Randy McMahan, of 4980 State Route 146 E. Anna, Illinois 62906 as Co-Executors,

Shawnee College announces fall semester honor students

Shawnee Community College has recognized the achievements of fall 2025 semester honor students. Students who maintained a grade point average of 3.5 or better while enrolled in an associate degree or certificate program are considered honor students.

The President’s List recognized students with a 4.0 grade point average for the semester. Students on the Vice President’s List earned a grade point average of between 3.5 and 3.9.

Twenty-five student athletes were recognized. Six were on the President’s List and 19 made the Vice President’s List. They are noted with an asterisk.

Honors students from the Union County area follow, as announced by the college and listed by their hometowns:

President’s List

Anna: Natalie Aldrich, Clayton Barnhart, Jeremy Boyd, Daylon Butler, Morgan Casey, Riley Cruse, Kayma, Dawson, Alexis Nekola, Hunter Partain, Maddie Piercefield*, George Stearns, Klayton Taylor.

Buncombe: Grayson Heath, Alexis Peeler, Madilyn Robinson, Hai-

Illinois expands job-protected leave for parents with newborns in NICU

By Brenden Moore
Capitol News Illinois

Illinois workers with a newborn in a neonatal intensive care unit will soon have additional access to job-protected, unpaid leave.

Gov. JB Pritzker signed House Bill 2978, dubbed the Family Neonatal Intensive Care Leave Act, earlier this year and it takes effect Jan. 1. It requires employers of between 16 and 50 workers to provide up to 10 days of unpaid leave to employees who have a child in the NICU. Larger employers must provide up to 20 days.

The law applies to both part- and full-time workers. It covers a broader swath of workers than the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, the law requiring public agencies, K-12 schools and private companies with at least 50 employees to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave per year. Workers eligible for FMLA must exhaust

that leave first before utilizing NICU leave.

Employers covered under the law must maintain their employee’s health insurance benefits and guarantee their reinstatement upon the conclusion of leave. Employers can’t force workers to exhaust their paid leave instead of unpaid NICU leave, though employees can take it if they choose.

Violations may result in fines of up to \$5,000.

Here are some other new labor laws that take effect in 2026.

AI in Employment Decisions

An amendment to the Illinois Human Rights Act, House Bill 3773, prohibits use of AI in employment decisions such as recruitment, hiring and promotion if that use results in discrimination due to race, religion, sex and age.

The law, which goes into effect Jan. 1, will require employers to disclose use of AI in employment decisions. The measure, however,

could potentially run afoul of a recent order that limits how states can regulate AI.

Domestic Violence

House Bill 1278 prevents employers from disciplining employees for using work devices to document domestic violence, sexual violence, gender violence or other forms of violence against them or a family member. Employers also have to grant employees access to such documentation and communications stored on the devices.

The law was inspired by a New York woman who used her work device to document domestic abuse committed by her husband. She was disciplined by her employer and later murdered by her husband.

Workplace Transparency

House Bill 3638 amends the Illinois Workplace Transparency Act to broaden the definition of “unlawful employment practice”

to include any act prohibited by the Illinois Human Rights Act, the federal Civil Rights Act and any other state or federal law covering employment issues.

Employment contracts can also no longer include terms that limit an employee’s ability to engage in “concerted activity” like collective bargaining. And it prohibits contract stipulations that shorten the statute of limitations for employee claims, apply the law of another state to claims or require claims be resolved outside Illinois.

Paid Leave for Organ Donors

House Bill 1616 extends paid leave requirements for organ donors to part-time employees.

Under the law, workers can use up to 10 days leave per year to serve as an organ donor. Part-time workers’ pay for these days will be their average daily pay rate over the previous two months.

Military Honors

Under Senate Bill 220, employers with more than 50 workers must offer up to eight hours of paid leave per month, capped at 40 hours per calendar year, for employees to participate in a military funeral honors detail. It is in addition to regular paid time off.

Unemployment Benefits

House Bill 3200 allows for someone who voluntarily leaves their job for mental health reasons to be eligible for unemployment benefits. It is a three-year pilot program that sunsets Dec. 24, 2028.

Maggie Dougherty contributed to this report.

Capitol News Illinois is a nonprofit, nonpartisan news service that distributes state government coverage to hundreds of news outlets statewide. It is funded primarily by the Illinois Press Foundation and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.

Regional tourism efforts receive benefits SIU program celebrates 50 years of preparing students for hospitality field

By Christi Mathis
news.siu.edu

CARBONDALE, Ill.

– Imagine having an exciting career that takes you to Greece and Beijing to work as a chef and dining coordinator for an athlete village. Or having a high-level career as a property developer, strategic planner and troubleshooter for Marriott Bonvoy. Those are the lives that Southern Illinois University Carbondale’s Hospitality, Tourism and Event Management program, HTEM, has made possible for graduates.

It all began with a food systems management bachelor’s degree offered by SIU’s food and nutrition program in the College of Home Economics in 1975. Half a century later, SIU’s Hospitality, Tourism and Event Management program offers the perfect choice for adventurous, people- and service-oriented careers in one of the largest industries in the world. Graduates work in national and state parks and systems, trade shows and conventions, at culinary locales and casinos, in agritourism, within restaurant, hotel and venue management, and virtually anywhere people and events are found, said Niki Davis, professor of practice.

“Our students learn from faculty who have actually worked in the field and remain active, who bring real-life experience to the table,” Davis said. “They teach in the areas of their professional experience and provide a real-world perspective

that prepares graduates to become leaders in their professions.”

Marking Milestone

As the program recognizes its 50th anniversary, Davis and the rest of the faculty and staff are creating an on-line celebration.

Former and current students, faculty and staff are invited to submit their favorite memories from their time with the program. In addition, HTEM Saluki alumni are welcome to share photos and “Where are you now?” updates. Send all submissions to hospitality@siu.edu for posting on a special webpage being created.

Experience That Counts

With a student to faculty ratio of 13:1, students and their professors, who have a total of more than 100 years’ experience in the industry, closely interact and connect.

“This program is very flexible and customizable,” Davis said. “Students can complete courses on campus or online, they can earn an HTEM minor or an event planning and management certificate, and we have independent studies and special projects classes.”

And since the program’s earliest days, regardless of what name it went by, a special experience-oriented mantra was adopted: “The community is our classroom.”

“We want to make sure our students have ample opportunities for real-world experience through their coursework, as well as with internships and externships,” Davis said. “Experiential learning is a big part of our curriculum because that ensures our students are better prepared for career success and more marketable upon graduation.”

There are seemingly countless places where SIU’s HTEM students get hands-on learning. Within the campus environment, you’ll find them working and

learning, helping with Student Center events, Touch of Nature Outdoor Education Center, Saluki Athletics, Events and Outreach and more.

Through off-campus partnerships, students obtain valuable experience with Carbondale Main Street, the Varsity Center for the Arts, the Shawnee Hills Wine trail and individual wineries, Black Diamond Harley Davidson and other sites.

Trish Welch, faculty emerita in the program, is credited as the HTEM “matriarch” as she oversaw its launch, and for many years, its development, and she established the community as a classroom ideal. For many years, her students hosted “Fabulous Fridays” at the Student Center’s Old Main dining room. The themed feasts were planned, including complete cost analysis, menus, purchasing supplies and more, and executed by the students, who also worked with University Housing dining staff to learn how to prepare for large-scale events.

Hands-on experiences like this ensure students learn to think on their feet and adapt quickly, she said. For instance, during one meal a student was carrying an entire tray of desserts and accidentally dropped it, but the Salukis quickly re-evaluated resources and improvised, switching up the menu to offer diners a selection of desserts.

“We also utilized local hotels, restaurants and other businesses in Carbondale, Marion, Murphysboro and beyond as our classrooms,” Welch said. “It’s a wonderful town and gown partnership that benefits everyone.”

Teams of four or five students have worked with enterprises, doing complete analyses of their strengths, weaknesses, assets, business models and more and then present formal business plans incorporating suggestions for ways to improve profitability, grow and ex-

pand.

“Graduates are equipped with valuable skills, critical thinking and a large bag of tricks to help them succeed in an ever-changing, exciting and intense industry,” Welch said.

The proof of “community is our classroom” concept’s effectiveness is the numbers and the career successes. Accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration and an institutional member of the International Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education, the program had a remarkable 85.7 percent retention rate for the 2023-2024 academic year, the most recent for which the statistics are available.

Perhaps even more notable is the fact that 100 percent of the students are typically employed in the HTEM industry or are continuing their education with graduate school within 90 days of graduation.

While completing her master’s degree, Davis was Welch’s graduate assistant, she is proud to say. SIU has paved the way for students to own restaurants, travel agencies and other businesses both locally and around the world, become managers of large hotel and serve as the chief purser for Norwegian Cruise Lines, among other myriad positions in hospitality, Welch and Davis note.

Quite a Journey

Since its inception, the HTEM program has continually adapted, Davis said.

When Welch arrived on campus, there was only an undergraduate dietetics program in the College of Home Economics. From the first food and nutrition classes, focusing largely on restaurant work, the program moved to the agriculture college in 1983. The program became food systems management, as it became obvious that there was a need for profes-

sionals not only in food and nutrition, but in managing restaurants and other places food is served, including hotels, hospitals and other venues.

Four years later, it was known as hotel, restaurant and travel administration. By 2009, the program was known as hospitality and tourism administration. In 2018, HTEM was born, and four years ago, event planning evolved into a certificate.

Davis said HTEM is also looking toward the future by working to establish a food and beverage management certificate and collaborating with the School of Journalism and Advertising on plans to create a food and travel media certificate and with the School of Forestry and Horticulture to create a sustainable tourism certificate.

“This whole program has evolved over time as different aspects of the hospitality industry have changed and expanded,” said Welch, who grew up in the business as her father owned three restaurants.

For instance, the tourism industry has exploded in the region as the winery business has boomed and there are farms for pumpkins, cut flowers, apples and more. Throw into the mix the beautiful scenery and the region’s other amenities, and it’s a big hospitality, tourism and event management draw that the HTEM program is teaching students to tap into for careers.

“The hospitality industry is in a growth phase not only globally, but in Southern Illinois, which provides our graduates, many of whom are local, with career opportunities right here in the region,” Davis said.

For more information about the HTEM program or the online 50th anniversary commemoration, visit the website at academics.siu.edu or email hospitality@siu.edu.

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SIU Board of Trustees approves honorary degrees, Distinguished Service Awards

Senior U.S. District Court Judge J. Phil Gilbert and Southern Illinois University Carbondale Saluki men’s basketball Hall of Famer Mike Glenn will receive honorary degrees, following recent approval by the SIU Board of Trustees. They are two of five individuals recommended by SIU Chancellor Austin A. Lane for honorary degrees and Distinguished Service Awards.

The board also approved an honorary degree for three-degree alumnus James J. Miller, founding director of the National Spaced-Based Positioning, Navigation, and Timing Advisory Board appointed by NASA, and granted Distinguished Service Awards to Kathleen Pericak-Spector, retired SIU Carbondale professor of mathematics, and posthumously to alumna Cheryl F. Green, whose more than 30 years in higher education included serving as Governors State University president.

All five honorees will be recognized at SIU Carbondale’s commencement in May 2026 or at a future ceremony.

J. Phil Gilbert, Honorary Doctor of Law

With more than five decades of legal experience as a private attorney, state and federal judge, and higher education leader, Gilbert “has devoted his life to the pursuit of justice, exemplifying integrity, fairness, and an unwavering commitment to public service,” the recommendation states.

Appointed to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Illinois in 1992, Gilbert, a lifelong resident of Carbondale, served as chief judge from 1993 to 2000, and he continues as a senior judge, where he maintains a substantial caseload.

The nomination notes that Gilbert’s judicial career “has been marked by fairness, accessibility, and a deep respect for the law.” Through

his work on the Judicial Conference Committees on Criminal Law and Judicial Security, he has influenced national judicial policy and advanced the integrity and safety of the federal judiciary. Before joining the federal bench, Gilbert served as a circuit judge in Illinois’ First Judicial Circuit and chair of the Illinois State Board of Elections.

In 2009, Gilbert received the Founders’ Medal for Distinguished Service from the SIU Simmons Law School for his “enduring support of legal education and mentorship of students.” Other honors include the Silver Gavel Award for dedication to justice and Loyola University School of Law’s Distinguished Jurist Award.

Gilbert has served on the SIU Board of Trustees since 2015, including seven consecutive terms as chairman. Gilbert abstained from the vote for this particular honorary degree.

Michael “Mike” Glenn, Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

A scholar-athlete and one of SIU’s most celebrated players, Glenn, who graduated in 1976 with a bachelor’s degree in mathematics, was twice named an Academic All-American, played 10 years in the NBA and is still SIU’s fourth-leading scorer. But Glenn’s devotion to excellence, education and service as a respected broadcaster, educator and humanitarian, is also well known.

In 1980, while still playing in the NBA, Glenn founded the nation’s first and only free basketball camp for deaf and hard-of-hearing athletes – a program that continues more than 40 years later. The Mike Glenn All-Star Basketball Camp for the Deaf has transformed the lives of thousands of young athletes by fostering confidence, leadership and inclusion. Glenn’s vision bridged the worlds of athletics and

accessibility, ensuring that every participant, regardless of hearing ability, has the opportunity to learn, compete and succeed.

Glenn is an accomplished author, historian and curator whose exhibitions and lectures illuminate the contributions of Blacks to sports, civil rights and culture. He has written five books, including “My Next Shot Goes In: Ten Sacred Characteristics of NBA Players That Lead to Success.”

James J. Miller, Honorary Doctor of Science

A three-degree SIU Carbondale alumnus, Miller is senior program manager to the chief executive of General Atomics Global Corp. in San Diego. He is an internationally recognized leader in aviation, aerospace and navigation policy and “has devoted his career to advancing the systems that guide, connect, and protect people around the world,” his recommendation states.

Over more than three decades in government, industry and academia, Miller has played a central role in developing and strengthening GPS for civil, commercial and space applications. Before his current position, Miller’s work included being selected by the NASA administrator to serve as chief designated federal officer of the National Space Council Users’ Advisory Group, providing independent guidance to the U.S. government on GPS modernization, resilience and international cooperation. He also held senior leadership positions with NASA’s Space Communications and Navigation program and the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Office of Navigation and Spectrum Policy. Earlier in his career, he helped pioneer GPS integration into commercial airline operations as program manager at United Airlines.

Miller also remains deeply connected to SIU, facilitating the sponsorship of a NASA Wings program through SIU Aviation, which introduced underrepresented students to aviation and aerospace careers. Miller earned his associate degree in aviation flight, bachelor’s degree in aviation management and Master of Public Administration in aviation administration from SIU Carbondale.

Cheryl F. Green, Distinguished Service Award

A two-degree SIU Carbondale alumna, Green served as Governors State University’s sixth president and “devoted her more than 30-year career in higher education to advancing access, equity and student success,” the nomination states.

Green earned both her master’s and doctoral degrees in counseling psychology from SIU Carbondale. She served as GSU president from July 2020 until her retirement in March 2025, one month before her death following a lengthy illness. Prior to Governors State, Green held key leadership roles at the University of Michigan, Chicago State University, Tennessee State University and the University of Wisconsin System, where she served as UW-Whitewater interim chancellor.

While at Governors State University, Green established the Social Justice Initiative, created the Latinx Resource Center and appointed the institution’s first chief diversity officer – all hallmarks of her commitment to equity and inclusion. In 2022, Governors State

University and SIU Carbondale entered a unique 3+3 partnership to allow students to earn both bachelor’s and juris doctor, JD, degrees in six years.

Green received numerous awards recognizing her leadership, including honors from the U.S. Hispanic Leadership Institute, Crain’s Chicago Business and The History Makers.

Kathleen Pericak-Spector, Distinguished Service Award

Over nearly four decades at SIU Carbondale, Pericak-Spector “demonstrated extraordinary dedication to education, outreach, and service throughout her distinguished career and into retirement,” the nomination states.

Pericak-Spector, who retired from SIU in 2017, “advanced mathematics education through inspired teaching, leadership, and sustained community engagement that continues to enrich both the university and the broader Southern Illinois region.” Her commitment to STEM education extended beyond her classroom through successful collaborations with the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the National Science Foundation and the Illinois State Board of Education for grants that provided hands-on science and mathematics learning for teachers and students across the region.

Now living in Michigan, Pericak-Spector has returned to SIU repeatedly, entirely at her own expense, to support key SIU and regional outreach initiatives, including Southern Illinois Regional Science Fair, Math Field Day, Expanding Your Horizons and the Science in the South Conference. She remains deeply involved with the Illinois Junior Academy of Science, serving as state chair, president and adviser to fairs hosted at SIU, fostering the next generation of scientists and educators.

Pericak-Spector’s enduring commitment “exemplifies the spirit of distinguished service – selfless, sustained, and profoundly impactful. Her lifelong devotion to SIU and Southern Illinois continues to inspire students, colleagues and educators statewide.”

VFW post hosting fund raisers

Veterans of Foreign Wars Carroll P. Foster Post No. 3455 are hosting fund raisers to start 2026.

Friday, Jan. 2, the VFW will hold their monthly All-You-Can-Eat Fundraiser Fish Fry from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Fish, french fries, baked beans, cucumbers, onions, pickles, etc. and dessert for a \$15 donation. Attendees will be given the opportunity to nominate a Union County charity for a drawing at 6:30 p.m. to receive 10% of the proceeds.

Carry outs are available. No to-go boxes for eat-in diners.

Star Karaoke will be available from 6 to 10 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 3, Mystify Music will be playing at the post from 7 to 11 p.m.

Tuesday, Jan. 6, the Anna VFW will have a Soup, Potato and Salad Bar from 5 to 7 p.m. Attendees can purchase any two for \$12 or all three for \$15. Soups will be your choice of chili or roasted red pepper gouda soup.

The public is welcome to all these events.

County Line News

(Mill Creek and Upper Elco)

By Suzan Harvel

Happy New Year Everyone! Let us pray that the new year blesses us all.

P.A.S.T. of Union County held their annual Christmas luncheons earlier this month. The theme was “We Wish You...”. Each guest was given a tag to write their wishes upon and we hung them from several trees located in the house. These wishes were for better health, salvation for the lost, peace throughout the world, a cease of tensions within our country, political changes, joy, love, happiness, a mild winter, more family time, and some kind souls wished for blessing on P.A.S.T. and its workers. Let us all pray they come to pass.

P.A.S.T. held its final meeting of the year on Tuesday, Dec. 30. The next meeting will be held Jan. 27, 2026 at 6 p.m. Prospective members or “friends of P.A.S.T.” are welcome to join as we continue planning the new year’s events.

Special events, Sunday Talks, preservation tasks, yard sales, fund raising ideas, participation in America’s 250th birthday celebration, the Annabelle Festival, Color Fest, as well as next year’s Christmas luncheons will all be on the agenda.

If you or your organization would like tours of the Heritage House or St. Anne’s Church, or to participate in any of these events being planned, please contact Suzan Harvel at 573-208-9692, or suzpark58@gmail.com and write PAST in the subject line.

The Daniel Chapman Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution will hold their annual officer’s meeting to work on end of year reports and awards (CMR & CAA) on Monday, Jan. 5, 2026. The meeting will be held at the Vienna Public Library at 9:30 a.m. Members are welcome to attend if they choose. Please bring a beverage and a snack.

The Village of Mill Creek Board met on Tuesday, Dec. 23 for their monthly meeting. On the agenda were the need to finish the annual report (AFR), an extension was filed and it will be completed soon; bills and the cancelling of services were discussed; participation of the village for Union County’s “America 250 Celebration” was also discussed. Winter road work in the village, upcoming bills, continued resident violations, and upcoming work on the internet tower were also discussed. The next meeting will be held Jan. 20, 2026 at 7 p.m..

Junior and Lula Belle Tripp hosted her brother, Jim Dillow, and her other siblings for a

Christmas dinner. Jim’s wife, was unable to attend due to poor health. Jim stayed with Jr. and Lula Belle while in town.

The Tripp’s also made a trip to Effingham this week with their daughter and son-in-law, Barbara and Bob Layman, to meet up with the Layman’s children and all the grandchildren, except one. They spent two days celebrating a belated Christmas with them.

Mill Creek Baptist Church held Sunday services with Brother Bobby Richardson leading the congregation from Isaiah 6. As Brother Bobby has reiterated each Sunday, we [Christians] are the sower of God’s word. We need to see our sin and repent, so that our sin is purged and allows our witness to be worthy so that it’s spread in a manner pleasing to God. Our walk with God needs to be reverent and not influenced by the world, as well. We, like Isaiah, will encounter hardened hearts, but we are to keep sowing the seeds. We don’t know when they will take root, but that’s not our job...ours is to get the word [seed] out there.

The Dukes family welcomed a new member this past week. Nasiyah Noel Dukes was born Dec. 27, 2025 at 3:52 a.m. to Johnny and Jamie Dukes. She weighed 6 lb, 6.7 oz, and was 20 inches long. Big sisters Mahayla and Makynna join their parents, and other loved ones, with being thrilled with the new addition to the family. More babies are coming to our congregation next year, so keep posted.

My family and I were also blessed with the addition of a new great-nephew on the same day. James Colsen Raybon was born Dec. 27, 2025 at 12: 16 a.m. in Augusta, Georgia. He weighed 7 lb, 7 oz, and was 20 inches long. His parents are Heather Parker and James Clifford Raybon, who along with big sister, Starlynn, are thoroughly besotted with their new addition, as are the rest of the family.

While we celebrate new life, we are also mourning the loss of others this week: Otis Burris a long-time resident of Mill Creek; Ronnie Dillow; and Roger Jackson. Please remember these families as they deal with the loss of their loved ones. Others added to the prayer list are: Scott Cauble, COPD; Kevin Starr, recovery from surgery; Sue Starr, breathing issues; Mike McLane, Kidney blockage; Wendall Davis, health; Will Roberts, a young man with cancer whose having no luck with any pain relief; Ronnie Barnhart, heart issues; Nikki Bates for good results from an MRI; & Richard Harvel for positive results from health tests.



Happy New Year!
The photo is of just one of the trees at P.A.S.T. of Union County’s Heritage House, in Jonesboro. The tags hanging are those wishes from the guests that attended the Christmas Luncheons the first two weeks in December. We hope all their wishes come true!

Opinion and Commentary

‘Drive Sober’ campaign underway in Illinois during holiday season

During the holiday season, the Illinois Department of Transportation, IDOT, Illinois State Police, ISP, and more than 200 law enforcement agencies joined forces for the national “Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over” campaign.

The campaign reminds the public that law enforcement will adopt a zero-tolerance approach, focusing not only impaired drivers but also seat belt violations, speeding, distracted driving and other traffic offenses. From rural routes and small-town streets to suburban neighborhoods and busy expressways, the goal has been to keep everyone on the road safe and sound over the holidays.

“The holidays should be a time for celebration and creating memories, not grief and loss caused by preventable crashes,” said Stephane B. Seck-Birhame, IDOT’s bureau chief of safety programs and engineering. “By taking some simple precautions, like driving sober and wearing your seat belt, you can help keep your holidays bright.”

The stepped-up enforcement got underway with the start of holiday season festivities. IDOT and ISP encouraged everyone to make plans for a sober ride, to buckle up and to obey the speed limit to ensure the holidays remain a time of joy rather than tragedy.

According to IDOT data, in 2024 there were 1,177 traffic-related fatalities. Seven lives were lost in six crashes on Dec. 24 and 25. As of Dec. 18 this year, there had been 1,123 traffic fatalities in Illinois, a decrease of 12 lives lost compared to the same date in 2024.

“If you plan on partaking in holiday spirits this season, make sure to have a designated driver, use a ride share or call a sober friend,” said ISP Division of Patrol Col. Chris Owen. “You don’t want the spirit of Christmas Present to lead to a grim spirit of Christmas Future.”

Some important tips to avoid a tragic crash or an arrest during the holiday season and the rest of the year include:

- If it’s your turn to be the designated driver, take that role seriously...your friends and family are relying on you.
- Use your community’s sober ride program if available, call a cab, use your favorite ride-sharing app or transit.
- See a friend or family member who is about to drive impaired by alcohol, cannabis or drugs? Take the keys and plan to get them home safely.

The increased enforcement was made possible through federal funds administered by IDOT and supported by ISP and local law enforcement. The effort coincides with IDOT’s “It’s Not a Game” radio, digital and TV campaign, which reminds the public of the consequences of impaired driving as well as distracted driving, work zone safety, pedestrian safety, motorcycle awareness and occupant safety.

Volunteer Fire Assistance grant funding available

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources, IDNR, is accepting applications for Volunteer Fire Assistance, VFA, grants through Feb. 16, 2026.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service VFA federal grant program provides matching funds to aid fire departments in the purchase of new equipment and helps fund training. Funding is passed through IDNR to local fire departments and fire training academies.

The VFA grant program reimburses 50 percent of the recipients’ project costs up to \$10,000. Grant recipients must make the initial financial outlay for the projects before being reimbursed.

In 2025, the program awarded \$322,893 for 48 Illinois projects. The types of projects that have been funded under previous grants include radios, hoses, self-contained breathing apparatus, turn-out gear, wildland personal protective equipment, hand tools, chainsaws, backpack blowers, modifying federal excess vehicles and equipment and other equipment.

Additional information about grant requirements and opportunities can be found on the IDNR grants website at dnr.illinois.gov and the Illinois Catalog of State Financial Assistance.

The Cat's Meow

by Cobden Spay and Neuter Coalition

Happy New Year!! Let us look forward to a new year of peace, love, kindness and prosperity.

We at CSNC have high hopes and plans for a year of compassion and easing the suffering of the many, many feral cats in our community. We know that you share our concerns and will continue to support our work.

We continue to plan our Chili Cook-off on Saturday, Jan. 24 at Fuzzy’s in Cobden from 4 to 7 p.m. A fun new development—we will have a silent auction during the cook-off, hosted by the Green Mug, right next door to Fuzzy’s.

We are now accepting your donations of items, big or small, for this event. You may drop items off for the silent auction at the Cobden Village Hall or at KiKi’s Coffeehouse in Anna. We plan to put together a number

of great gift baskets for the silent auction. Hope to see you there!

Please visit our website, cobdenspayneutercoalition.org, or our facebook page to see what we’re up to.

You may drop off, call in, or send donations to our account at Meller-James & Associates, or mail them to CSNC, P.O. Box 542, Cobden, IL 62920. CSNC is a 501c3 nonprofit organization, and donations are tax-deductible.

Please Spay/Neuter/Adopt companion animals. Meanwhile, if you see a companion animal in need, in trouble, or suffering, please, please call someone before it’s too late for them.

Call your local animal control office, the police, or the Sheriff’s Dept. It IS your business if an innocent being who cannot speak for himself needs your help!

Please read this...

Lots of Critter Sightings to end the year...

As this week’s gem is being crafted on the afternoon of the 28th day of the last month of 2025, the sun is attempting to make an appearance...which...given the forecast...might not be such a good thing.

I’m looking out a window in our humble abode. An oak tree is swaying in winds which are blowing up to around 40 miles per hour. We already have a wind advisory in place...now...a tornado watch has been added. Time for a break to take care of a chore. We’ll get back to this shortly...

Chore completed. Now, I see we have a severe thunderstorm warning. Guess the tornado watch felt lonely out there all by its lonesome. Wind gusts of 60 miles per hour are possible. 5:24 p.m. Sunday. I think our lights just flickered...

The storm passed through quickly, with some rain, lightning, thunder and gusty winds. The winds are continuing to blow...and apparently will be doing so all night. One last check. 7:52 p.m. The temperature apparently has fallen into the 40s. Winds are gusting at around 47 mils per hour.

And to think...just a few days ago...the word was that severe weather was not likely in our little corner of the world. Sigh... Meanwhile...

From a dearth to a veritable plethora...that would describe recent Critter Sightings on The Journey Through Life.

We’ll start with a rather unexpected sighting on Christmas Day. One might have expected to see a reindeer. Or, more likely, a squirrel or two. Instead...

“Armadillo,” The Other Half declared while she doing some work to set up her new gardening enterprise.

The Critter was wandering through a neighbor’s yard. It stayed around long for a few photographs before finding a safe place to hide. We were kind of surprised how fast the armadillo moved. Then again, most of the armadillos we see around here are not moving much at all...

Then there was what I think was a young bald eagle that was spotted on a recent Sunday afternoon journey along a rural road in Union County. As often happens on Sunday afternoons, yours truly went out looking for wildlife. I caught a glimpse of a rather large bird flying over a harvested field of corn. I drove in the direction of a nearby tree line to see if the bird had landed. It had. I did not expect to see what I think was a young bald eagle. Even better, it stayed in places close to the road where photographs were possible.

Another raptor, this time a hawk, was seen during one of the regular visits yours truly makes to the Lincoln Memorial Picnic Grounds in Jonesboro. I fully expected the hawk to quickly fly away when I stopped to take a photo or two. Instead, the Critter stayed put...at least long enough for a grand total of four photos.

During that same visit to the park in Jonesboro, I saw two turtles. In December. I guess the turtles also were happy to see unseasonably warm weather a couple of days after the “official” start of winter.

Oh...almost forgot...we have even seen some lady bugs doing their lady bug thing in late December. I would have thought they had already flown south for the winter.

Meanwhile...

Christmas gift-giving time has come and gone. Over the years, yours truly has been known to give fossils as gifts. Quirky? Probably. However, while doing some recent reading online, I came across an article about a National Football League quarterback was gave fossils as gifts to some of his teammates. Seeing such news made me feel much better about giving rocks as Christmas gifts.

A number of years ago, a fellow traveler on The Journey Through Life gave me a box of rocks for Christmas as a “gag” gift. To be more specific, the rocks were gravel, like you might put in a driveway. The gravel was made out of limestone. Limestone is known to have fossils. And I actually found a fossil or two in the gravel. The rest of the gravel ended up...in our driveway. And, on occasion, I still find a fossil in the gravel.

Well...enough for now. Happy New Year. Here’s hoping 2026 is a good year for you...

First Day hikes set at Giant City, state forest

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources, IDNR, invites everyone to step into 2026 with a First Day Hike at an Illinois state park on New Year’s Day.

IDNR is hosting self-guided hikes at 17 state parks across Illinois on Jan. 1. The free, family-friendly hikes are open to the public.

The First Day Hike program is an initiative in partnership with America’s State Parks Foundation. The organization began the event in 1992 in Massachusetts. The campaign encourages participants nationwide to hike, bike and engage in activities in state parks on the first day of the new year.

This year, the program is highlighting America’s 250th anniversary in 2026 and the outdoor places that have shaped the country’s past and present.

“IDNR invites Illinoisans everywhere to take time on Jan. 1 to explore our beautiful state parks and consider what conservation and public lands may look like in the future,” IDNR director Natalie Phelps Finnie said in a news release “There’s no better way to clear your mind after the holidays and look ahead to a

new year than to explore the outdoors.”

State parks throughout Illinois plan to have stickers and special photo opportunities for hikers.

Giant City State Park near Makanda is planning to be among the participants. A First Day hiking opportunity also is planned at the Trail of Tears State Forest in Union County. On Jan. 1, hikers can visit the outdoors display at the Giant City State Park visitors center or the white barn at the Trail of Tears State Forest. Maps showing trails to hike will be available.

Before they leave, hikers are invited to log in their miles in books which will be located at the outdoor displays at the park’s visitors center and at the state forest’s white barn. Hikers also will be able to pick up a free First Day Hike sticker.

IDNR also invites hikers to sign in and share photos and videos on social media with the hashtag #ILFirstDayHikes.

Illinois does not charge admission to state parks, historic sites and other locations. More information, can be found online at <https://dnr.illinois.gov/parks.html>.

By Geof Skinner



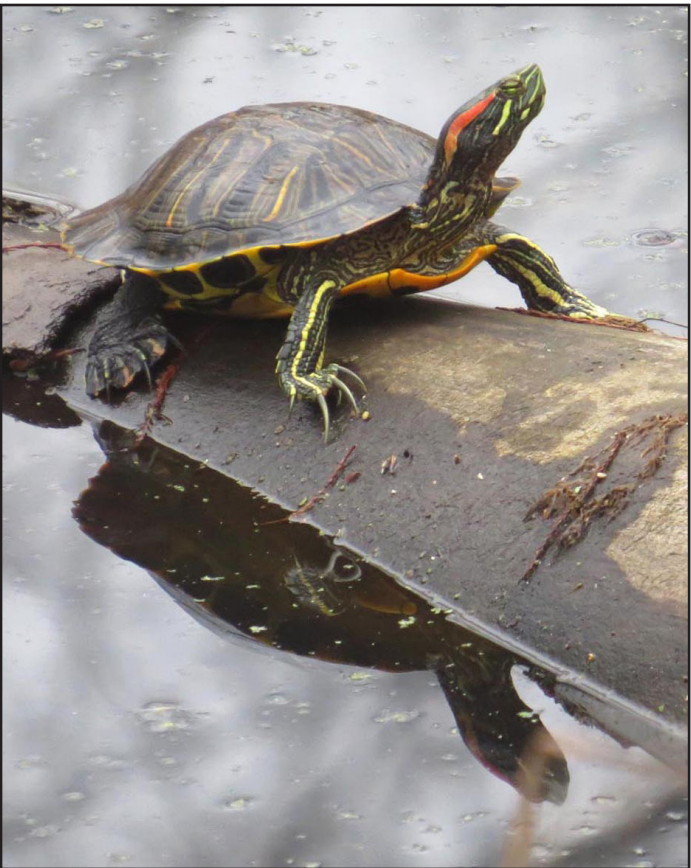
Did Santa Claus leave a Critter behind? The Other Half spotted this reindeer wannabe Critter on Christmas Day in a neighbor's yard. For an armadillo, this Critter was rather fast on its feet.



Young bald eagle? My bird identification skills aren't that great, but this Critter was spotted on a recent Sunday afternoon drive along a rural road in Union County.



A hawk was kind enough to stay put for a photo or two when it was spotted during a “routine” visit to a local park.



It is winter...right? Even so, a turtle was still seen hanging out at the pond at the Lincoln Memorial Picnic Grounds in Jonesboro.