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Vol. 104 • No. 90

LOCAL NEWS... LOCAL VIEWS

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Students attend Career Expo

RTHS students recently attended the Building Trades Career Expo on Feb. 22. **Page 3**

WEATHER

WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY
HIGH LOW	HIGH LOW
55 34	56 35
FRIDAY	SATURDAY
HIGH LOW	HIGH LOW
50 40	46 33

Today's RNL issue sponsored by Community Unity member:
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Edward Jones
MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING

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OBITUARIES

NONE

INSERTS

• FARM & FLEET

INSIDE

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National retailers looking at former site of Sullivan's Foods

City commissions study to attract potential investment

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

ROCHELLE — At its Feb. 12 meeting, the Rochelle City Council unanimously approved a resolution authorizing a professional services agreement with Teska Associates Inc. for \$20,000 to conduct a study on potential development tools for the Caron Ridge Shopping Center, the former site of Sullivan's that has been vacant for six years.

The city will explore the tools of a tax increment financing (TIF) district and a business development district, which can help with developing areas that have been vacant for years.

The city already has three TIF districts, which the council expressed satisfaction with at its January meeting. TIF districts grow funds after development is seen in an area based on the difference in improved value. That money is then used to incentivize developers. The city has not had experience in the past with a business development district, which



(PHOTO BY JEFF HELFRICH)

At its Feb. 12 meeting, the Rochelle City Council unanimously approved a resolution authorizing a professional services agreement with Teska Associates Inc. for \$20,000 to conduct a study on potential development tools for the Caron Ridge Shopping Center, the former site of Sullivan's that has been vacant for six years.

sees development funds raised by an increase in sales tax, specifically only in the district it's located. A sales tax increase at the site of the Caron Ridge Shopping Center would be in .25-percent increments up to one percent. In order for a business development district and sales tax increase,

the eventual business that fills the space would have to ask for it.

City Manager Jeff Fiegenschuh said the study and move towards a development tool came after the Sullivan's Foods company and building changed hands into new ownership. The entire shopping center, in-

cluding the other businesses in it that are currently active, would be included in the potential TIF or business development district. "Honestly, I think we should have looked at this a lot sooner," Fiegenschuh said.

See SULLIVAN'S pg 8



Phase 2 of treatment plant project begins this spring

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

ROCHELLE — At its meeting Feb. 12, the Rochelle City Council unanimously approved items to allow phase two of upgrades to the Rochelle Municipal Utilities wastewater treatment plant to move forward.

The council previously rejected bids for the project in 2022 due to excessive costs. A redesign was done that resulted in a \$10.67 million bid being approved in February. The project will be financed through an IEPA loan program. The loan currently includes \$3.4 million in principal forgiveness and a 20-year term at 1.36 percent interest. Engineering on the project will cost \$650,500 and the total cost will be \$11,640,600. The city will repay a total amount of \$8,148,420 after forgiveness.

See PLANT page 2

VFW presents \$201,276 check to Queen of Hearts winner

'We just want to support our veterans and... make things better for them'

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

ROCHELLE — On Friday, March 1, the Rochelle VFW Post 3878 presented a \$201,276 check to the winner of its Queen of Hearts contest, Steven Bialas. The contest ran the full 54 weeks and reached a \$335,460 total final jackpot.

The Queen of Hearts drawing involves 54 cards hidden under a covering to be revealed one card per week until the Queen of Hearts is drawn. There are 52 playing deck cards with the two jokers hidden. Players at the local post can purchase tickets in increments of six for \$5 and write a number corresponding to a hidden card on the board and their information on them before placing them in a tumbling drum. One ticket is drawn each Tuesday night and the card with the number on the ticket is revealed.

When the Queen of Hearts is drawn, the winner receives 70 percent of the pot if they are present for the drawing and 60 percent if they are not present. The remaining



(PHOTO BY JEFF HELFRICH)

On Friday, March 1, the Rochelle VFW Post 3878 presented a \$201,276 check to the winner of its Queen of Hearts contest, Steven Bialas. The contest ran the full 54 weeks and reached a \$335,460 total final jackpot.

30-40 percent is split between the post and local non-profit organizations.

Early in 2023, a previous iteration of the Queen of Hearts saw a full 54-week run with the final jackpot standing at \$77,980. That record was

broken in the most recent run. The next Queen of Hearts board will start on March 12 with the jackpot being \$100,165. Tickets are available now at the post.

VFW Trustee and Past Commander Bill

Baumgartner said the most recent Queen of Hearts run yielded a lot of work and fun for the post's leadership, members and staff.

"This time was really a lot of work," Baumgartner said. "It was crazy. Our

second-to-last jackpot went 54 numbers as well and it was only \$77,980. This was almost five times as big. We went through a lot of tickets. We had a lot of good help."

See QUEEN page 2

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LOCAL NEWS

PLANT: RMU's Lanning details next phase of wastewater treatment project

From page 1

The city expects to obtain the loan agreement on March 8, hold a pre-construction meeting on March 27, start construction on May 1 of this year and finalize the project in June 2025.

RMU Superintendent of Water/Water Reclamation Adam Lanning said the project will involve converting half of the plant's treatment process to biological nutrient removal for removing phosphorus.

The first phase of the upgrades wrapped up in 2021 and cost \$7.4 million with \$2.5 million forgiven on that loan. That phase included upgrading headworks equipment, converting aeration to biological phosphorus removal, upgrading the anaerobic lagoon, adding an office administration building and the conversion of the plant's lab.

Regulations on phosphorus are coming in 2030, Lanning said, which is the basis for much of the past and future improvements. Other improvements will involve rehabbing excess flow

lagoons that handle water that exceeds capacity of the plant in rain events and high-flow times. Filters will also be upgraded. The project will also put infrastructure in place to do chemical removal of phosphorus, if needed.

"This second phase should meet the upcoming phosphorus limits by 2030," Lanning said. "It's going to give us several years to perfect the system before that. Currently the EPA is making us do a nutrient assessment reduction plan by the end of this year. It's basically a watershed study on the Rock River from the Wisconsin border almost to the Mississippi River. It's a \$1 million study we've done over the last three years. We're looking at all the nutrient inputs from different communities, municipalities and agriculture. We'll submit that and the EPA will determine what we think could likely end up being an even lower limit of phosphorus. If that does happen, we'll be required to incorporate chemical removal."

Lanning said that after the phase two project, he doesn't anticipate the

wastewater treatment plant will need any more major work "for a while." He doesn't see any other major environmental regulations coming in the next 20-30 years.

The total repayment by the city for both phases of work at the wastewater treatment plant will be around \$13 million.

"I think that's a pretty good number considering I've heard of communities paying upwards of \$30-50 million for new treatment plants," Lanning said. "We're trying to stay ahead of that. Our plant was originally built in the 1990s. The length of the life of a plant depends on when it was built and the quality of its construction. Typically, the life of one nowadays is typically around 30 years. The really expensive portion of replacing a wastewater facility is the concrete. Our concrete is in good shape. Anything that's been jeopardized, we're repairing it. The goal is to keep it there and just replace the mechanicals."

RMU has gotten out ahead of regulations and done the work to meet them before being forced



(PHOTO BY JEFF HELFRICH)

At its meeting Feb. 12, the Rochelle City Council unanimously approved items to allow phase two of upgrades to the Rochelle Municipal Utilities wastewater treatment plant to move forward.

to by the IEPA. Lanning said expenses can add up quickly in those situations.

The wastewater treatment plant upgrades will also allow RMU to be prepared for growth the city hopes for in its residential, industrial and commercial sectors. City

Manager Jeff Fiegenschuh praised Lanning and his department for their work.

"A lot of people don't think about what it takes to keep a society in operation," Fiegenschuh said. "Having a wastewater treatment plant in good shape doesn't just help

with economic development, it's quality of life. Adam has done a fantastic job. We're able to keep our rates lower than a lot of communities. It's because we get these grants and these low-interest forgiveness loans."

QUEEN: Rochelle VFW presents check to contest winner

From page 1

"It just got to the point where it became a madhouse in here at times. All in all, it went pretty smoothly. We had no problems or hiccups. I enjoy seeing people come out and meeting them. It's a lot of work, but it's a lot of fun too."

Baumgartner said that the biggest hurdle for the post with hosting the Queen of Hearts with a large jackpot is when overwhelming crowds can be seen. The VFW's leadership plans to meet to discuss how to best handle crowds and decide on which local nonprofits to donate the

recent proceeds to.

Following the 54-week run that yielded a \$77,980 total jackpot, the Queen of Hearts was drawn on the first card in the next drawing. Baumgartner said he didn't expect to see another 54-week run after that.

"We didn't expect to

see it go the full distance and see the dollar amount get so high," Baumgartner said. "I was getting nervous that the Queen of Hearts wasn't on the board under a number. It was a lot of fun. With us starting at such a high number, I'm worried the next one could go on a long run that reaches

a high number. In this past one, the last three months saw it get bigger and bigger and spiral. It's just unreal how large it got. It's going to help the community and charities a lot."

The VFW started hosting Queen of Hearts contests to help local charities and raise money

for the post including needed improvements to the building. The VFW's leadership will also soon decide on how it will use its portion of the recent jackpot.

Baumgartner said the post is looking at different improvements for the building including renovation of one bathroom facility, replacing floors, a new PA system and a new lift. The post recently completed renovations to one of its bathrooms.

"I'm glad to see things are going to slow down for a few months and come back to what I call normal," Baumgartner said. "Over the weekends people are here buying tickets. It's phenomenal as far as revenue goes for us. That's going to help with a lot of the expenses we have."

Baumgartner thanked the VFW's bartenders for their work on serving crowds and selling tickets, along with its members that volunteered to help with the busier drawings.

"We just want to support our veterans and see what we can do to make things better for them," Baumgartner said. "That's why we keep doing this stuff."

Come Join the Fun...

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LOCAL NEWS

NIU STEM Café explores the past, present and future of weather forecasting

SUGARGROVE—At the next NIU STEM Café, learn about the history and recent progress of weather forecasting with NIU Associate Professor of Earth, Atmosphere and Environment Vittorio (Victor) Gensini, Ph.D.

The STEM Café will take place on Wednesday, March 6 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Fireside Grille, 49 Sugar Lane, Sugar Grove.

More information available at go.niu.edu/stemcafe.

Humans have been attempting to predict the weather for thousands of years. However, our current

instruments and modeling techniques are quite recent. Computers, weather satellites and networks of meteorological observatories have made weather forecasting much more accurate in recent decades.

At this STEM Café, you'll learn about the history and recent progress of weather forecasting, including the impact of new technology. We'll also hear about future potential advances in forecasting atmospheric conditions.

Gensini earned his BA and MA at Northern Illinois University and his Ph.D. at the University of Georgia.

His research covers extreme weather and climate, with specific interest in severe convective storms, synoptic/mesoscale meteorology, applied climatology, GIS techniques, geoscience data visualization, weather forecasting and climate change.

Northern Illinois University STEM Cafés are part of NIU STEAM and are designed to increase public awareness of the critical role that STEM fields play in our everyday lives. They are offered in partnership with the NIU Alumni Association and made possible with support from Bayer Fund.

(COURTESY PHOTO)



Ogle County Democratic Central Committee donates to food pantries

The members of the Ogle County Democratic Central Committee made a difference in their community by recently donating a total of \$800 amongst eight Ogle County food pantries, an idea that originated during the pandemic as a unique way to celebrate the holiday season together since in person gatherings were not possible. The Ogle County Dems have raised over \$3,200 for area food pantries over the last four years. "I am so proud of our members again this year," said Committee Member David "Skip" Donald said. "Helping people is what the Democratic party is all about." For more information about the Ogle County Democrats, visit their website at Oglecountydems.org. or attend their monthly meeting, which is held on the first Tuesday of every month at 6:30 p.m. at the VFW in Oregon. Shown is Donald delivering a donation to Darlene Shafer, treasurer, Polo Lifeline Food Pantry.

GriefShare Support Group starting 13-week seminar March 21

ROCHELLE — Have you been looking for somewhere to go to better understand, share, and be with others who've also experienced loss? GriefShare Support Group is a 13-week, Christ-centered support

group seminar for people who have lost a spouse, child, family member, or friend through death. Study Guides cost \$20 (if finances are an issue, scholarships are available). Contact Yolonda at yolondita@gmail.com or

Chrissy at chrissy_w@comcast.net for more information. Meetings will be held at First General Baptist Church, 500 S. 12th St., Rochelle for 13 weeks beginning on March 21 from 6-8 p.m.



(COURTESY PHOTOS)



RTHS students attend Building Trades Career Expo

On Feb. 22, Mrs. Jacobs and Mrs. Harvey of Rochelle Township High School had the opportunity to take a group of students to the 2024 Building Trades Career Expo at the Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 23 Training Center in Rockford. The students explored construction careers in the skilled trades and learned about world-class apprenticeship programs. Participating in hands-on activities also added to their experience.

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LOCAL NEWS

ROCHELLE POLICE DEPARTMENT

ROCHELLE — On March 1 at 12:37 p.m. Kristina M. Armenta, 37, of Rockford was arrested on an outstanding Ogle County warrant. She paid \$300 and was released with an April 5 Ogle County court date.

On March 1 at 11:47 a.m. Larry G. Harris, 65, of Creston was cited for speeding 50 miles per hour in a 30 miles per hour zone. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 1 at 2:07 p.m. Richard Harris, 58, of Rochelle was cited for disobeying a stop sign. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 1 at 2:29 p.m. Juan M. Castillo-Flores, 23, of Rockford was arrested for no valid driver's license. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 1 at 2:59 p.m. Tyree A. Simmons Jr. was cited for operating an uninsured vehicle and disobeying a stop sign. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 1 at 3:35 p.m. Aaron J. Vondergathen, 21, of Rochelle was cited for speeding 63 miles per hour in a 40 miles per hour zone. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 1 at 4:59 p.m. Jessica A. Kerr, 33, of Rochelle was cited for speeding 53 miles per hour in a 30 miles per hour zone. She signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 1 at 4 p.m. Juan A. Mandujano-Carnash, 27, of Rochelle was cited for no valid registration. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 1 at 5:22 p.m. Zachary A. Marney, 29, of Rocjelle was cited for no valid registration. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 2 at 9:47 a.m. Matea M. Salgado, 23, of Rochelle was cited for no valid registration. She signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 2 at 9:23 a.m. Juan A. Gonzalez, 27, of Kirkland was cited for speeding 60 miles per hour in a 40 miles per hour zone. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 2 at 10:20 a.m. a 17-year-old juvenile of Creston was cited for speeding 61 miles per hour in a 40 miles per hour zone. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 2 at 1:43 p.m. Timothy M. Kittle, 51, of Rochelle was cited for speeding 56 miles per hour in a 35 miles per hour zone. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 2 at 4:32 p.m. Kevin M. Piotrowski, 21, of Genoa was cited for speeding 63 miles per hour in a 40 miles per hour zone. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 2 at 4:56 p.m. Eric L. Smith, 34, of Braidwood was cited for disobeying a stop sign. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.



On March 2 at 4:42 p.m. Melisa Martinez, 31, of Rochelle was cited for disobeying a stop sign. She signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 2 at 9:19 p.m. Zoe Ujcic, 27, of Rochelle was cited for failure to yield. She signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 3 at 7:56 a.m. Sandoval Rafael Arroyo, 18, of Rochelle was cited for speeding 50 miles per hour in a 30 miles per hour zone. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 3 at 2:55 p.m. David Escutia, 25, of Rochelle was cited for speeding 48 miles per hour in a 30 miles per hour zone. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 5 Rochelle court date.

On March 3 at 6:32 p.m. Lisa A. Kopplin, 54, of Rochelle was arrested on outstanding warrants in Woodford and Ogle Counties and transferred. All individuals are considered innocent until proven guilty.

OGLE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

OREGON — On Feb. 27 at approximately 8:45 a.m. deputies arrested Sean Callaway, 28, of Dixon when he turned himself into the Ogle County Jail. He was arrested an outstanding Ogle County warrant for driving while license suspended. There was no bond set on the warrant and Callaway appeared in court on Feb. 27 at 1 p.m. Callaway was released and will return to court on April 28 at 9 a.m.

On Feb. 27 at approximately 3:13 p.m. deputies responded to a domestic problem at 107 E. Meadowland Drive in rural Rochelle. After investigation, deputies placed James Streng, 56, of Rochelle under arrest for domestic battery. Streng was transported to the Ogle County Jail he was held pending a court appearance in front of a judge.

On Feb. 27 at approximately 4:16 p.m. deputies and Rochelle Fire and EMS responded to the area of Mulford Road and Bethel Road in reference to a one-vehicle rollover accident with injuries. Upon arrival, deputies located a black Ford Escape upside down in the east ditch with heavy damage, and the driver, Pamela Schneiderwind-Lopez, 59, of Rochelle, was still in the vehicle. EMS arrived on the scene, extricated Schneiderwind-Lopez from the vehicle, and transported her to Javon Bea Mercy Hospital for non-life-threatening injuries. After investigation, deputies learned that Schneiderwind-Lopez was traveling northbound before having a medical episode, traveling off of the east side of the ditch and striking a culvert before overturning. Creston Fire Department also assisted with the accident.

On Feb. 28 at approximately 3:30 p.m. deputies arrested Corey Stone, 28, of Oregon at the Ogle County Courthouse. He was arrested for contempt of court. Stone posted bond and will return to court on April 29 at 9 a.m.

On Feb. 28 at approximately 3:09 p.m. deputies arrested Anna Allison, 31, of DeKalb at the Ogle County Courthouse. She was arrested for contempt of court.

On Feb. 28 at approximately 7 p.m. deputies responded to the 100 block of East Meadowland Drive in Rochelle regarding a possible violation of bond conditions. As a result of an investigation, deputies placed James G. Streng, 56, of Rochelle, under arrest for violation of bail bond conditions. Streng was transported to the Ogle County Jail where he was held pending an appearance before a judge.

On Feb. 29 at approximately 1:15 p.m. Jeremy Lopez, 29, of Elmwood Park turned himself into the Ogle County Jail. He had a failure to appear warrant. Lopez posted bond and does not need to return to court.

On Feb. 29 at approximately 4:40 p.m., the Ogle County 911 Dispatch Center received a 911 call indicating a 4-year-old child had been mauled by a dog in rural Monroe Center, and CPR was in progress. The child was transported to a Rockford hospital, where they succumbed to the injuries. Monroe Township Fire Protection District, Stillman Fire Protection District, Illinois State Police, and Mercy Health MD-1 assisted Ogle County Sheriff's deputies. The investigation is ongoing.

On March 1 at approximately 9:06 p.m. deputies conducted a traffic stop in the 100 block of North Grant Street in Byron. Upon investigation, Ariel C. Williamsen, 32, of Sterling, was placed under arrest for driving while license suspended, and an active Lee County warrant for failure to appear. Williamsen was also cited for no front registration and operating an uninsured motor vehicle. Williamsen was transported to the Ogle County Jail before being released on a notice to appear and given a future court date.

On March 1 at approximately 8:22 p.m. deputies conducted a traffic stop in the 100 block of South 6th Street in Rochelle. After a brief investigation, Deputies arrested Marco Hernandez-Mandujano, 30, of Rochelle, for driving while license suspended. Hernandez-Mandujano was additionally cited for equipment violations and illegal transportation of alcohol. Hernandez-Mandujano was released on a notice to appear and shall appear in court at a later date.

On March 2 at approximately 9:48 p.m. deputies conducted a traffic stop near the intersection of Illinois Route 251 and Lindenwood Road. After investigation, deputies placed Rosalind Kastner, 48, of Sycamore, under arrest for an active DeKalb County warrant. Kastner was transported to the Ogle County Jail and was held on a no bond warrant.

On March 2 at approximately 10:20 a.m. deputies and Polo Fire/EMS Department responded to a two-vehicle crash on Illinois Route 64 at Summer Hill Road in rural Polo. Throughout the course of an investigation, it was learned Marcia Frey, 66, of Mt. Morris was operating a 2008 Pontiac Grand Prix and traveling

directly in front of a 2021 Subaru Ascent when she conducted a U-turn at the intersection of Illinois Route 64 and Summer Hill Road causing a collision with the Subaru. Two occupants of the Subaru were transported by ambulance to Freeport Memorial Hospital for treatment of non-life-threatening injuries. Both vehicles were towed due to disabling damage. Frey received a citation for improper U-turn.

On March 2 at approximately 4 p.m. deputies and the Polo Fire/EMS Department responded to a single-vehicle motorcycle crash on Illinois Route 52 near the intersection of Goose Hollow Road. After conducting an investigation, Lukus Hicks, 27, of Lanark, was issued citations for improper passing and failure to reduce speed to avoid an accident. Hicks was transported by Polo EMS to KSB Hospital in Dixon.

On March 3 at approximately 1:22 a.m. deputies conducted a traffic stop in the 200 block of South 5th Street in Oregon. After investigation, deputies placed Kaylee Johnson, 22, of Oregon, under arrest for driving while under the influence of alcohol. Johnson was additionally issued a citation for improper lane usage. Johnson was transported to the Ogle County Jail where she was released on a notice to appear and given a future court date.

On March 4 at 8:27 a.m. deputies conducted a traffic stop on Illinois Route 2 at Lost Nation Road just inside of Lee County. As a result, Darla M. Russell, 33, of Dixon was arrested for driving while license suspended, and an Ogle County warrant for contempt of court. Russell was released on a notice to appear for the driving while license suspended charge, and transported to the Ogle County Jail on the warrant.

On March 4 at 11:20 a.m. deputies conducted a traffic stop on East Illinois Route 72 at North Marshall Road. As a result, deputies arrested Fabricio A. Primera-Cuicas, 25, of Chicago for no valid driver's license. Primera-Cuicas was additionally issued citations for operation of a motor vehicle with suspended registration, and a turn signal violation. Primeta-Cuicas was transported to the Ogle County Jail where he was released on a notice to appear with a future court date.

On March 4 at approximately 5 p.m. deputies, with the assistance of the Polo Fire Department and Mt. Morris Fire Department, responded to the White Pines State Park, 6712 W. Pines Road, in response to a single-vehicle accident. Upon investigation, it was learned a dark blue Mitsubishi, driven by William E. Bergeson, 22, of Sycamore, was negotiating a curve when they lost control, struck a tree, and overturned. Bergeson, along with an additional male passenger, were transported to the hospital for non-life-threatening injuries. Bergeson was cited for driving under the influence of alcohol, failure to reduce speed/too fast for conditions, and expired registration. Bergeson was released on a notice to appear and provided a future court date.

All individuals are considered innocent until proven guilty.

Report policy

Any arrests listed in this paper are merely charges and the defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty in a court of law. Please note that all police reports received from the Rochelle

Police, the Ogle County Sheriff's Department and the Illinois State Police, will be printed without exception. Requests to omit particular reports will not be considered or honored at any time.

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211 IL Route 38 East, Rochelle, IL 61068
(815) 562-4171

USPS (467-820) ISSN (1075-2811)
Published every Wednesday and Sunday by Rochelle Newspapers Inc. at 211 E. State Route 38, Rochelle, IL 61068. Periodical postage paid at Rochelle, IL 61068. Postmaster send address changes to the Rochelle News-Leader, P.O. Box 46, Rochelle, IL 61068. Subscription rates are \$139.99 per year by mail in Ogle County. Outside county rate is \$149.99 per year. No mail delivery in newspaper-carrier serviced areas. The circulation department is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. If you are a carrier subscriber and your paper does not arrive, contact Kelly White at 561-2112.

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ASHTON NEWS

(COURTESY PHOTOS)



AFC FFA participates in Food Science Career Development Event

On Feb. 28, members of the Ashton-Franklin Center FFA participated in the Food Science Career Development Event hosted at Rochelle Township High School. Activities included aroma identification, triangle tests, an exam and a team problem where the teams created a healthy children’s drink. The AFC team won second place overall. Ella Coffman and Kate Viall tied for first place individual, and after choosing a random tiebreaker question Ella received first place and Kate second place. The AFC middle school team received first place overall. Dani Kaecker won second place individual and Elsie Viall won fifth place individual.



(COURTESY PHOTO)

For his February 2024 local business highlight, State Rep. Bradley Fritts (R-Dixon) chose to highlight Lincolnway Cafe in Franklin Grove. Rep. Fritts spent time touring the business and presented the owners with a certificate of appreciation for their contributions to the community.

Rep. Fritts honors Lincolnway Cafe for February Local Business Highlight

FRANKLIN GROVE — For his February 2024 local business highlight, State Rep. Bradley Fritts (R-Dixon) chose to highlight Lincolnway Cafe in Franklin Grove. Rep. Fritts spent time touring the business and presented the owners with a certificate of appreciation for their contributions to the community.

“This month, I chose to honor Lincolnway Cafe because they are an excellent, family-owned restaurant that gives back to our

community,” Fritts said. “Not only is the customer service and food top-notch, but they also support the local women’s club, Ashton and Franklin Grove sports, as well as many other area events.”

Lincolnway Cafe was opened nearly 18 years ago by owners Muda and Joe. Muda was raised in the restaurant industry and followed in her father’s footsteps, who also owned a family restaurant.

Rep. Fritts concluded,

“It’s not an easy time to own a local family restaurant. I applaud Muda and Joe on their dedication to Lincolnway Cafe and the entire Franklin Grove community.”

Lincolnway Cafe is located at 137 N. Elm St. in Franklin Grove.

To nominate a local business in District 74 for a future highlight, visit Rep-Fritts.com and select Local Business Highlight Submission Form under Resources.

LCFB works to advance legislative priorities at GALC

SPRINGFIELD — More than 400 Illinois Farm Bureau members gathered in Springfield for IFB’s Governmental Affairs Leadership Conference (GALC) on Feb. 20. Local, state, and national political leaders and legislators met with Farm Bureau leaders from across the state, including six members of Lee County Farm Bureau to discuss IFB’s 2024 legislative priorities.

The event culminated in a legislative reception, with nearly 80 elected officials in attendance to meet with IFB members.

“As an organization, the most powerful thing we can do is connect our members with lawmakers,” IFB President Brian Duncan said. “Our members consistently make an impact on policy by giving legislators a true, boots-on-the-ground expert in agriculture.”

Featured speakers included former Arizona U.S. Sen. Martha McSally, who was the first woman in the U.S. Air Force history to fly a fighter jet in combat and command a fighter squadron, and Kirk Bado, editor of the National Journal Hotline. Breakout sessions featured experts on topics including the active state legislative term, stabilizing the ag workforce,



(PHOTO BY CATRINA RAWSON)

Illinois Farm Bureau President Brian Duncan talks to more than 400 attendees of IFB’s Governmental Affairs Leadership Conference about what it means to build the organization for success. The daylong event in Springfield featured speakers, breakout sessions and a legislative reception.

livestock, soil productivity and more.

GALC is the annual central event around IFB’s longstanding efforts to connect members and legislators. IFB’s Adopt-A-Legislator program, which is more than 20 years old now, fosters long-term personal relationships between urban legislators and farmers across the state. IFB’s annual Leaders to Washington trip connects farmers with national legislators.

This year’s conference, themed “Building for Success,” identified obstacles agriculture may face in the coming years and how to build relationships with governmental leaders. Many breakout sessions

focused on IFB’s legislative priorities for the upcoming year, including a new bipartisan estate tax reform bill, stabilized labor wages, California’s Proposition 12 and more. During the sessions, members had opportunities to share their perspectives with Farm Bureau leadership and staff.

“Every year, our members demonstrate both depth of knowledge on key ag topics and a desire to grow and absorb the latest information on emerging issues,” Duncan said. “That’s what makes GALC successful, and that’s why so many key legislators go out of their way to meet and partner with our members.”

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LOCAL VIEWS

Fiegenschuh: 2024 is moving Rochelle forward

2024 is off to a great start in Rochelle. Our team at the City of Rochelle is looking forward to a productive and eventful year. Mayor Bearrows hosted our annual state of the community address on March 19 at City Hall. 2023 was a successful year for our organization, and we feel it is appropriate to highlight our accomplishments and promote projects set for 2024. We have numerous projects slated for this coming year, honestly there are too many to list in this article. However, I do want to highlight several due to their size, scope and policy significance. First are the downtown

PAID LETTER

Letter to the Editor: Vote for Horner

DEAR editor, After serving Ogle County as county clerk and recorder for over 19 years and as County Board member for five years, I am writing to express support for Chad Horner, Republican candidate for Ogle County coroner. I believe he will be an excellent choice due to his compassion, commitment

PAID LETTER

Letter to the Editor: Cox ready to serve the county

TO the editor and the esteemed residents of Ogle County, As a former Whiteside County sheriff with a decade of leadership and over 30 years in law enforcement, I write to you today not only as a fellow public servant but as an advocate for the principles that underpin our shared commitment to justice, integrity, and community welfare. The role of coroner, a position of critical importance and trust, demands a candidate who embodies

improvements we plan to make that are being funded in part through a State of Illinois downtown improvement grant. The project includes a new downtown restroom facility along with an open area for gathering and events, resurfacing of parking lots, redevelopment of blighted properties, new sidewalks and undergrounding of utilities. A committee of staff and council members has been working on the restroom and open space plan and will be ready to present a recommendation to the full city council in the coming month. Our Community Development department

created an arts committee made up of residents and business owners to help create more public art in our downtown and other public spaces. This group of dedicated individuals has brought a lot of great ideas to our attention, and I am very excited for the community to see their work in action. Our utility departments continue making major investments in infrastructure. The planned improvements include the design work for a new substation on the west end of Rochelle on Illinois Route 38, the construction



Jeff Fiegenschuh

of a new 138Kv line that will tie all RMU substations together to reduce outages, the design and beginning construction of a new iron removal water treatment plant at Caron Road, continued updates to the wastewater treatment plant and cleaning and repainting of the water tower located on Illinois Route 251 at the overpass. Our public works and engineering departments have numerous storm sewer and street improvement projects planned this year including the reconstruction

and signalization of the 20th Street and Flag Road intersection, bridge improvements at 7th Avenue and Kyte Creek, rebuilding numerous alleys throughout the town and the cap and closure of Unit 1 at the Rochelle Landfill. Finally, with pending retirements in 2024, our team is implementing several departmental consolidations. These changes will improve our core service delivery model and save your taxpayer money. We continue filling critical open positions in the fire and police departments as well. I want to thank our entire staff in the city and utilities. Rochelle is served by a group of dedicated people who work to put the community first and deliver services impartially to all our residents and customers. Feel free to call or email me with any questions or suggestions. Let's all work together to continue moving our community in a positive direction. "I am ready to face any challenges that might be foolish enough to face me." -Dwight Schrute "Nothing is impossible. The word itself says I'M POSSIBLE." -Audrey Hepburn Jeffrey A. Fiegenschuh, ICMA-CM, MPA, is the city manager of the City of Rochelle.

Brian VanVickle. These endorsements are a strong indication of his competencies and abilities. I hope you will join me in casting a vote for Chad Horner for Ogle County coroner on March 19. Rebecca Huntley, Chana Former Ogle County clerk and recorder and County Board member Kelly Wilhelm, former Whiteside County sheriff (2008-2018, retired)

How to contact government officials

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Rochelle News-Leader encourages responsible letters to the editor on subjects of interest to our readers. Editing may be necessary for space, clarity or to avoid obscenity or libel, but ideas will not be altered. All letters must bear the handwritten signature of the writer and include address and phone number or e-mail address for verification purposes. Neither the street address nor phone number will be printed. Letters should

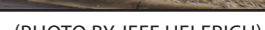
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published, however letters from candidates endorsing themselves will not be printed. Letters may be dropped at the News-Leader office (211 IL Route 38 East), mailed to the News-Leader (P.O. Box 46, Rochelle, IL 61068) or e-mailed (news@rochellenews-leader.com.) The News-Leader reserves the right to edit or reject any letter to the editor for any reason, and letters chosen for publication do not necessarily reflect the views of this newspaper.

SULLIVAN'S: Fiegenschuh discusses current state of former grocery store site

The point of TIF districts are to revitalize

"You can have a district and just never have the sales tax," Fiegenschuh said. "It's part of the quote from our consultants, and we should at least look at it since we're paying for it. If a national retail tenant comes in and says, 'Yeah, we want a sales tax and that extra one percent,' we should at least consider it. It's similar to a TIF, the funding mechanisms are just different. A TIF is funded through additional increment in property taxes and a business development district is funded through a one-percent sales tax if



“The Downtown TIF is the fastest-growing TIF we have,” Fiegenschuh said. “It’s in part because of folks like the Kennays

The city manager said the Caron Bridge Shopping

The process of the study to determine if the Caron Ridge Shopping Center area is TIF-eligible and the creation of a potential TIF will likely take 6-9 months, Eigenschuh said.

“And we’ve been up front with the broker about that, so they know the timeframe,” Fiegenschuh said. “I don’t want to speak for them, but I think if we can come to an agreement on incentives, I don’t want to say when they’re going to announce, but sooner rather than later. Because that building is sitting vacant. And if the developer has a tenant that wants to come in, they’re going to want to come in as soon as we can get an agreement in place with them on those TIF dollars. To create the TIF, it will probably be 6-9 months. I’m excited. I hope that we’re able to, at a minimum, put that shopping center into a TIF. And I think it’ll help revitalize the area.”

A snowman wearing a top hat, sunglasses, and a scarf, standing in the snow. The background is a bright, sunny sky with rays of light.

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A snowman wearing a top hat, sunglasses, and a scarf, standing in the snow.

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SPORTS



STATE QUALIFIERS

The Rochelle Wrestling Club qualified four kids for state tournaments this year.

See page 6 for more details

RTHS Wrestling

Hubs turn in successful season

RTHS finishes 24-7 with Interstate 8 and IHSA 2A Regional titles this winter

BY RUSSELL HODGES
SPORTS EDITOR

ROCHELLE — After a historic season where the Rochelle Hub varsity wrestlers won a school-record 28 dual matches and advanced five individuals to the IHSA State Championship meet in Champaign, the program returned this winter with an equally as impressive campaign.

Rochelle finished with a 24-7 overall record and a flawless 5-0 record in the Interstate 8 Conference during the 2023-24 season. The Hubs successfully defended their conference title while ending the season with seven All-Conference wrestlers including five First-Team honorees and two Honorable Mentions.

Rochelle won an IHSA 2A Regional title and advanced to the IHSA Dual State Championships, both of which haven't happened since the 2017-18 season.

"Expectations were very high coming into the season, especially after last season," Vruno said. "We set high goals for ourselves, but that's the standard we are trying to create and the kids met every single one of those standards this season. From the bottom of the lineup to the top, our

kids did an excellent job of being more offensive and scoring more points during matches. We did this by improving skills in the neutral position and perfecting our techniques on top."

Rochelle advanced four individuals to the IHSA State Championship in Champaign, where juniors Kaiden Morris (43-4) and Xavier Villalobos (44-4) each earned medalist honors. Junior Grant Gensler (37-9) and senior Brock Metzger (37-8) also represented the Hubs at the State Farm Center. Metzger will be one of three seniors who will depart from the varsity lineup. The Hubs will lose senior Frank Decena as well as four-year varsity starter Tommy Tourdot (28-7).

"I think we should look to win another conference championship next year," Vruno said. "On the individual side, we should look to at least match the number of state qualifiers that we had this season. I leave the individual side goals for interpretation because we always tell our kids that their job is to get down to Champaign. If they can do that, then anything can happen."

Villalobos, a three-time state qualifier and two-time state medalist, and



(PHOTO BY RUSSELL HODGES)

Junior Kaiden Morris is one of three state qualifiers eligible to return for the Rochelle Hub varsity wrestling team next year. Morris took second in the IHSA 2A Individual State Championship meet this year.

Morris, a two-time state qualifier, are among the many talented sophomore and junior athletes eligible to return next season. Gensler concluded his junior season as a two-time state qualifier, while sophomores Roman Villalobos (32-17), Brenden Voight (32-10), Freddie Hernandez (31-15), Keagan Albers (23-20) and Deegan Schabacker

(18-20) all advanced to the sectional tournament this year.

"We're hoping that our sectional qualifiers can reach the next level," Vruno said. "These are kids who are looking to be on the mat during the spring in order to get to the next level. We're also hoping that some of our JV wrestlers can find their way into the varsity lineup

next year."

Freshmen Josh Lasister (15-20) and Angel Hernandez (9-22) are two underclassmen who concluded the season as varsity starters. In addition to junior Matthew Lynn (6-23), Rochelle has multiple underclassmen on the JV team who could emerge as varsity starters next year. Those athletes include sophomores Colten Man-

ning, Tony Milburn and Frank Nasca.

Additionally, Rochelle's leading female wrestlers are eligible to come back next season. Those girls include state medalist, conference champion and two-time state qualifying junior Dempsey Atkinson (21-7) as well as sophomore and conference champion Cammyla Macias.

RTHS Track & Field

Rochelle athletes returning to action for 2024 season

Hub and Lady Hub teams to begin indoor slate with meets in Sycamore, Byron

BY RUSSELL HODGES
SPORTS EDITOR

ROCHELLE — The Rochelle Hub and Lady Hub track and field teams are less than one week away from beginning the indoor portion of the 2024 season. The Hubs are returning several varsity athletes under head coach Dale Bergeson, while the Lady Hubs have key seniors back in action and are looking to form a new identity under first-year head coach Colfay Pointer.

The Lady Hubs will be first to lace up their track shoes, with Rochelle scheduled to open the indoor season at the Sycamore Invitational on Tuesday, March 5. The Lady Hubs will then travel for the Byron Indoor Preview on March 9 before concluding the indoor season at the Sterling Warrior Invitational on March 16. Rochelle welcomes back a familiar face in Pointer, an RTHS alum who was a state-qualifying runner and collegiate athlete at the University of Dubuque.

"This year we have a big group and a really young team," Pointer said. "Our team has a great attitude and we have some great upperclassmen excited to take charge and help lead them. Our team philosophy is 1 percent this year

because we are striving to get 1 percent better every day. I expect the athletes to show up and put in the work and my goal is to see each athlete grow throughout the season. Our team is strong in numbers and we have students who are excited to learn and improve their performances. We have a lot of young athletes, so getting them more experience will be a huge growth point for our team as the season progresses."

The Hubs begin the indoor season at the Byron Indoor Preview on Saturday, March 9. Rochelle will then head to the Gary Egler Invitational at Sycamore on March 13 before competing in the Sterling Warrior Invitational on March 16.

"We will have a big group this year, as there weren't many students who graduated last year," Bergeson said. "The group is experienced and ready to compete and get better. The expectation this year is to get 1 percent better everyday. This year we will be better in every event in track and field. Looking at the numbers and who is back, this team will be a much-improved team over the really good team we had last year. We are strong in the high jump, pole vault, shot put, 1600 meters and



(PHOTO BY RUSSELL HODGES)

Sophomore Declan McGee returns in the distance running events for the Rochelle Hub track and field team this season. The Rochelle Hub and Lady Hub teams will begin the indoor season this week.

3200 meters. We need to see times drop in our 400 and 800 runners and I believe as we go through the season, these events will improve."

Seniors Kylie Smith, Kennedy Adamski and Kyra Bivins are three upper-

classmen to watch for as the Lady Hubs return to action. The Hubs are returning several upperclassmen including seniors Landon Mickley, Luis Hernandez, Bruno Fernandez and Nathan Sergeant. Juniors Jack Til-

ton, Virgil O'Dell, Jackson Smith and Colton Czekala, along with sophomores Declan McGee, Andrew Nuyen, Wyatt Worthington and freshman Devin Macek, are more names to watch.

The outdoor season be-

gins on April 2, when the Hubs and Lady Hubs will face Morris and LaSalle-Peru in an Interstate 8 Conference triangular meet.

The annual Hub Relays will be held on April 13 at RTHS.

SPORTS

RMS Girls Basketball

(PHOTOS BY ROBIN RETHWILL)



Rochelle Middle School eighth-graders take third at North Central Junior Conference tournament

The Rochelle Middle School eighth-grade girls basketball team took third in the North Central Junior Conference Championship tournament. The Royals fell 38-8 against Sycamore before edging Kaneland Harter 21-20 in the third-place consolation game. Above from left to right are assistant coach Noah Mershon, Tinley Tabor, Audrina Rodriquez, Anaya Ortiz, Zoe Norberto, Kaliyah Cathina, Gianna Olguin, coach John Gonzales (back row), Jaelyn Gonzales, Evelyn Garcia, Clara Millard, Carol Carpenter, Gwendolyn O'Dell and Madison Ludwig (front row).



Rochelle Middle School seventh-graders finish fourth at North Central Junior Conference tournament

The Rochelle Middle School seventh-grade girls basketball team finished fourth in the North Central Junior Conference Championship tournament. Rochelle picked up a 22-9 win against DeKalb before falling 28-25 against Kaneland Harter in the third-place consolation game. Above from left to right are Delani McGee, Ariana Hueramo, Tess Kissack, Isadora Hueramo, Elise Hardcastle, Makayla Waters (front row), coach Chad Stewart, Chloe Escatel, Ella Behrens, Jehan Jaradat, Alivia Law and assistant coach Morgan Baker (back row).

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ON THE FARM

Farm income to drop from 2022 record

BY TAMMIE SLOUP
FARMWEEK

FARM income is forecast to shrink in 2023 after climbing to record highs in 2022.

USDA's Economic Research Service released its Farm Sector Income Forecast Nov. 30, which estimated net farm income to fall by \$31.8 billion (17.4%) to \$151.1 billion in 2023.

Net farm income — a broad measure of profits — reached \$182 billion in 2022, increasing 30% from 2021.

In September, USDA estimated net farm income at \$141.3 billion. (Net farm income reflects income after expenses from production in the current year and is calculated by subtracting farm expenses from gross farm income).

The net farm income reflects overall lower crop and livestock cash receipts, increased input costs, higher interest rates and declining government payments.

"When grouped by commodity specialization, all farm businesses' specializations except cattle/calves, wheat and specialty crops are forecast to see lower average net cash income in 2023," the report stated. "Farms specializing in dairy are expected to see the largest decline relative to 2022."

Although this year's net farm income is expected to drop below last year's record high, it's still one of the best years on record for the farm sector, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said.

"In fact, net cash farm income for 2023 is 15%

above average for the last two decades, and farm income over the 2021-2023 period represents the highest level of farm income in the last 50 years," Vilsack said in a statement.

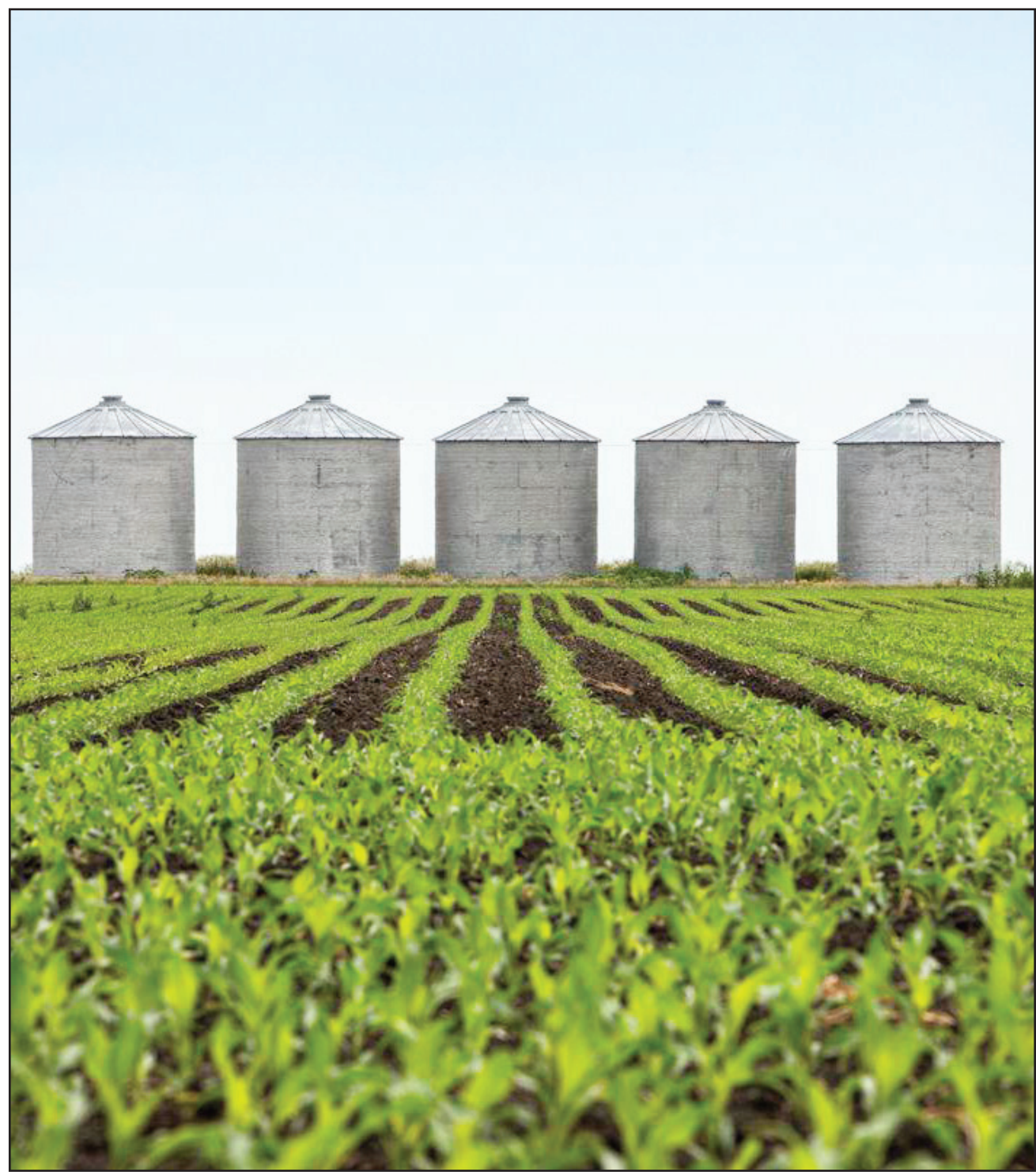
U.S. agriculture exports have also seen the three highest years on record in 2021-2023, which is reflected in overall cash receipts, while 2024 is projected to be the fourth highest year on record despite potential declines, he added.

"Even so, the data shows a majority of farm households rely on off-farm jobs to make ends meet, indicating that the income is not evenly distributed across the farm spectrum," Vilsack said. "USDA will continue our efforts to bolster a complementary system that makes it possible for small- and mid-sized farms to benefit from more, new and better markets and climate smart agriculture opportunities so they can thrive."

Total production expenses are forecast to increase by \$14.9 billion (3.5%) in 2023 to \$443.4 billion. Interest expenses and livestock/poultry purchases are expected to see the largest increases in 2023 while spending on fertilizer/lime/soil conditioners, fuels/oils, and feed is expected to decline relative to 2022.

"A bright spot for farmers is that some production costs, including feed, fertilizer and pesticides, have declined," Vilsack said.

The forecast also reported direct government farm payments are forecast at \$12.1 billion in 2023, a \$3.5 billion (22.3%) decrease from 2022.



Farm sector equity is expected to increase by 6.9% (\$229.4 billion) in 2023 to \$3.57 trillion in nominal terms. Farm sector assets are forecast to increase 6.6% (\$254 billion) in 2023 to \$4.09 trillion following expected increases in the value of farm real estate assets. Farm sector debt

is forecast to increase 5% (\$24.6 billion) in 2023 to \$520.7 billion.

American Farm Bureau Federation Economist Daniel Munch noted in a recent Market Intel that farm income numbers for 2022 were not finalized until August 2023 and have been adjusted upward over

\$20 billion in the eight months since the year ended. During this time, USDA is digesting new information and data as it becomes available, shifting calculations from estimates to actual values.

"This means there is still much variability in final 2023 net farm income,"

he wrote.

Read the full forecast online, bit.ly/4a0f4Wy.

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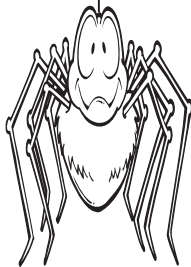
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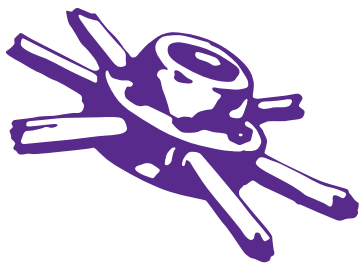


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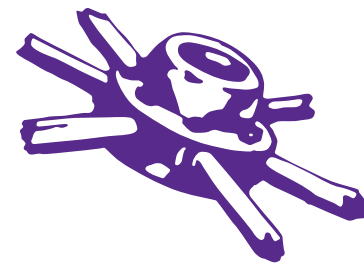
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HUB SPOTLIGHT



(COURTESY PHOTO)

Wells Millard, Benjamin Morris, Teddy Millard and Nehemiah Andronic (left to right) all recorded top-3 finishes during the IKWF North Sectional at RTHS on Saturday.

Junior Hubs scrap at IKWF Rochelle Sectional

BY RUSSELL HODGES
SPORTS EDITOR

ROCHELLE — Rochelle Township High School hosted the IKWF North Sectional on Saturday, when 13 members of the Rochelle Wrestling Club competed in hopes of advancing to the IKWF State Championship series later this month. The Junior Hubs qualified four individuals including Benjamin Morris, Teddy Millard, Nehemiah Andronic and Wells Millard for state tournaments.

The IKWF Novice & Senior State Championships will be held from March 8-9 at the BMO Harris Bank Center in Rockford. The IKWF Bantam & Intermediate State Championships will be held from March 16-17 at the Decatur Civic Center in Decatur later this month.

Morris won the sectional title in the Novice 154 Division with a 3-0 record. Morris received a first-round bye before securing three straight falls over Red Raiders Wrestling's Joseph Brannigan as well as Riot Room Wrestling's Michael Campbell and Harvard's Colton Moreno.

Teddy Millard won the sectional title in the Novice 74 Division with a 2-0 record. Millard took first and second-round byes into the semifinals, where he earned a fall over Red Raiders Wrestling's Rocco Cervone before scoring a 5-2 decision over

Crystal Lake's Anthony Zalud in the finals.

Nehemiah Andronic took second in the Bantam 70 Division with a 2-1 record, notching a 14-0 major decision over Red Raiders Wrestling's Gannon Root and a 9-4 decision over Dundee's Cayden Druger. Wells Millard took second in the Bantam 55 Division with a 2-1 record, securing a fall over Crystal Lake's Logan Pesek and a 4-2 decision over Crystal Lake's Brody Connolly.

Elias Andronic finished fourth in the Bantam 58 Division with a 2-2 record, earning a fall over Crystal Lake's Joshua Scott and a 6-4 decision over Harlem Huskies wrestler Camdyn Hataway. Andrew Eyster finished fourth in the Senior 154 Division with a 2-2 record, notching falls against Crystal Lake's Dylan Jimenez and Stockton Renegades wrestler Chance VenHuizen.

Dominic Escatel competed in the Intermediate 84 Division, finishing with a 3-2 record that included falls over Sycamore's Bryce Ellingson, Hononegah's Jaxon Dwyer and a 9-5 decision over Dundee's Walter Kenny. Other Rochelle Wrestling Club athletes who competed on Saturday include Cheyenne McBride (Girls Bantam 62), Eoghan Good (Boys Bantam 49), Colt Hensley (Boys Intermediate 122), Joshua Hernandez (Boys Novice 100), AJ Milan (Boys Senior 103) and Zander Griner (Boys Senior 164).

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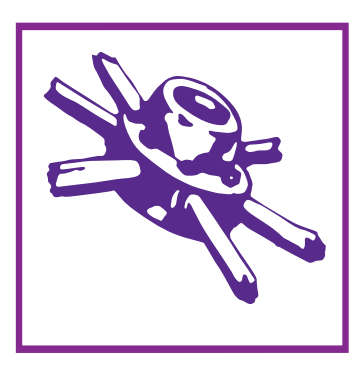
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