



ROCHELLE News-Leader

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LOCAL NEWS... LOCAL VIEWS WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2024 \$1.25

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No injuries after fire in Steward

No injuries were reported after a Monday afternoon fire at a home in Steward. **Page 3**

WEATHER

WEDNESDAY
HIGH LOW
45 26

THURSDAY
HIGH LOW
54 29

FRIDAY
HIGH LOW
64 35

SATURDAY
HIGH LOW
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INSIDE

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2024 State of the Community address presented by mayor, city manager

‘This is probably one of the proudest years... as city manager’

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

ROCHELLE — On Tuesday, March 19, City of Rochelle Mayor John Bearrows and City Manager Jeff Fiegenschuh presented their 2024 State of the Community address at City Hall and live on Facebook.

The presentation covered city finances and employment, 2023 accomplishments and 2024 goals. In its operations, the city adheres to its strategic plan goals of economic & business development, financial management & stability, community inclusivity & engagement, infrastructure effectiveness & improvement, core service delivery, and quality of life.

“Everything we’re talking about today, what we’ve accomplished as a team and what we hope to accomplish in 2024 ties back to one or all of these items,” Fiegenschuh said.

The city’s current fiscal year budget is \$125.5 million. Fiegenschuh and Bearrows touted the city’s rising equalized assessed value and stable property tax levies.



(PHOTO BY JEFF HELFRICH)

On Tuesday, March 19, City of Rochelle Mayor John Bearrows and City Manager Jeff Fiegenschuh presented their 2024 State of the Community address at City Hall and live on Facebook.

“Our cash balance and financial snapshot are excellent,” Bearrows said. “It’s the best position the city has been in for many years. I think that’s because of a lot of diligence on the part of a lot of folks. Hats off to everyone for making this happen.”

The city currently has 126 employees. It has 44 part-time employees and nine participating in early separation incentive pro-

grams.

The city’s 2023 accomplishments from the presentation included the hiring of police officers and firefighter/paramedics, completing a joint fire training facility with the Ogle-Lee Fire Protection District, its largest sidewalk replacement project to date, work on its new Rochelle Intermodal Transload Center to replace the now-closed Global III intermodal facility, remod-

eling of its new building for city and Rochelle Municipal Utilities staff at 1030 S. 7th St., improvements at Railfan Park, new industry and commercial investment by businesses including Zekelman Industries and Breakthru Beverage, and groundbreakings being held for two new apartment complexes near Willis Avenue on the city’s south side.

See SOTC page 3



Change order for building work approved

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

ROCHELLE — At its meeting Monday, the Rochelle City Council unanimously approved a \$251,984 change order for its renovation work at its 1030 S. 7th St facility. The building was purchased in recent years and was the former site of Johnson Tractor. City and Rochelle Municipal Utilities staff occupy the space and it is being fitted to their needs.

The change order work will include adding a trench drain for equipment bays, more lighting, additional break room space, garage door location adjustments, flooring, and new windows. Renovation work is currently ongoing and space issues and additional needs were found during construction.

“It’s our forever home,” City Manager Jeff Fiegenschuh said.

See CITY page 2



(COURTESY PHOTO)

In the year of Gertie’s 100th birthday, members of RFD recently gathered in front of the former city hall and now-Flagg Township Museum and recreated an original picture with Gertie that firefighters of old took.

RFD to honor 100th birthday of historic 1924 fire truck ‘Gertie’

‘It’s an important symbol and a point of pride for our department’

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

ROCHELLE — This year marks the 100th birthday of the Rochelle Fire Department’s historic 1924 American LaFrance Fire Truck, affectionately known to the community as “Gertie” in parades and at the RFD Museum.

RFD will be honoring Gertie in a number of ways this year, and the festivities will kick off

with the Fireman’s Ball on Saturday, April 13, an evening filled with music, dancing and camaraderie. The event will take place at Flight Deck Bar & Grill from 7 p.m. to midnight and the band Project Nostalgia will perform. There will be a 50/50 raffle, commemorative beer cups and a birthday celebration. The ticket price is \$10.

“She’s an important, symbolic piece,” RFD Firefighter/Paramedic

Ben Johnson said. “I think when people join the fire service, they want to be part of something bigger and leave a place better than you found it. This has been generation after generation of firefighters. This is one of the mainstays that’s been a constant that we can contribute to and pass onto the next generation to have pride in and work on together to represent the last 100 years of what we’ve tried to build. It’s

being able to put your hands on something that many hands have built. That’s pretty powerful.”

Gertie was purchased by the city for a cost of \$10,500 (\$189,443 adjusted for inflation to today) and delivered on Oct. 17, 1924. Under the supervision of Chief George Henze, Gertie was operated chiefly by Drivers Eli Taylor, Herb Kuemmel and Robert Varner. Its first documented demo was to loft

water over the old Central School without touching it during a fire drill. Gertie saw her first fire action on Dec. 1, 1924 at a roof fire at the home of Miss Laura Heath on Ninth Street. She was originally housed at the old city hall (now the Flagg Township Museum) before being moved to new quarters in the Hamaker Building, 316 N. 6th St., (now All Things New & Used).

See GERTIE page 8



(PHOTO COURTESY OF RFD AND ALYSSA GOOD PHOTOGRAPHY)

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LOCAL NEWS

CITY: Council approves resolution amending waste collection rates

From page 1

in the future.”

“This work is not for a building we’re going to have for five years. This is a building that will be there for hopefully longer than any of us will be around that other departments can utilize in the future. I think we owe it to our employees too. If we would have built a new building, it would have cost five times what we’ve spent.”

Garbage

The council unanimously approved a resolution amending its annual waste collection rates with Northern Illinois Disposal. The resolution will increase the monthly charge for residential solid waste, recycling, and yard waste collection from \$12.48 per dwelling unit to \$12.98 per dwelling unit.

Fiegenschuh said the increase was made in kind with one Northern Illinois Disposal raised for the city and the city’s landscape waste charge will not increase. The city plans to buy down rates in the future after increased revenues due to more usage at the landfill.

“I don’t want to nickel and dime our residents,” Fiegenschuh said. “I think it’s important to try to keep our rates as stable as possible. And one way to do that is if we have other revenue sources related to the landfill coming in, maybe we can use it to buy down some of the rate increases on our residents

Airport

The council unanimously approved a resolution for an interfund loan from its landfill fund to its airport fund to pay for the purchase of property located at 13800 E. Gurler Road near the Rochelle Municipal Airport.

The council previously approved the purchase of the property known as Large Car Rebuilders on April 24, 2023 for \$655,000. The airport fund did not have the revenue to make the purchase, so the fund transfer was made. The city will be reimbursed for 95 percent of the purchase by federal entitlement dollars through the FAA and IDOT.

While the property is planned to be incorporated more into the airport in the future, short-term plans for the building include leasing it back to the current owner at a rate of \$5,800 per month for five years.

Land

The council unanimously approved a resolution authorizing the purchase of 7.25 acres of property for \$225,000 from Rick and Doris Kenney for its planned new RMU electrical substation project off Illinois Route 38 west of town. The property will house the new substation and access road. The total purchase also includes funds for a three-acre easement.



(PHOTO BY JEFF HELFRICH)

A swearing-in ceremony was held for Phil Frankenberry of the Rochelle Police Department, who has been appointed deputy police chief. Frankenberry has been with RPD since 1998 and most recently served as the administrative sergeant of the department’s patrol division.

Demolition

The council unanimously approved a resolution authorizing a memorandum of agreement with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office to facilitate the final steps to demolish the vacant building located at 509 and 509.5 Lincoln Ave.

Back in July, the city closed on the purchase

of the former bank drive-up facility properties for \$165,000. The structures on the land will be demolished and a parking lot will be constructed. The properties are in the Downtown Historic District, which required extra steps that were taken, including a public hearing and developer’s workshop on historic tax credits.

Swearing in

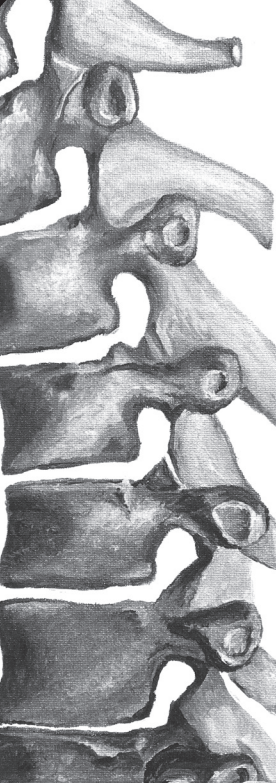
A swearing-in ceremony was held for Phil Fran-

kenberry of the Rochelle Police Department, who has been appointed deputy police chief. Frankenberry has been with RPD since 1998 and most recently served as the administrative sergeant of the department’s patrol division. The deputy chief position had been vacant since Terry Inman’s retirement.

LOTS

A presentation was made at the meeting by representatives from the

Lee-Ogle Transportation System (LOTS), which is studying the feasibility of providing scheduled-route public transit service within Rochelle. Public meetings will be held on the topic at city hall on Wednesday, April 17 from 1-2:30 p.m. and from 5:30-7 p.m. The process will likely end with at least one fixed bus route in Rochelle. The new service would be offered in addition to LOTS’ current services.



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Malta man found guilty of murder stemming from death of pregnant Mt. Morris woman

OREGON — Ogle County State’s Attorney Mike Rock announced in a March 25 press release that on March 22, Matthew T. Plote, 36, of Malta, was found guilty by an Ogle County jury of four counts of first-degree murder, three counts of intentional homicide of an unborn child, one count of residential arson, one count of aggravated domestic battery and one count of concealment of a homicidal death. The jury trial which began on March 18 was presided over by the Honorable Judge Benjamin Roe.

On Nov. 25, 2020, 27-year-old Melissa Lamesch of Mt. Morris, who was nine months pregnant with a son, was found on the kitchen floor in her

single-story home at 206 S. Hannah Avenue in Mt. Morris on Nov. 25, 2020 after the Ogle County 911 center received multiple calls at 4:29 p.m. for smoke coming from the residence. Firefighters found heavy smoke and heat as they entered the structure. Life-saving measures were attempted on Lamesch, but she was pronounced deceased at the scene.

Lamesch’s son was due three days after the fire. She worked as an EMT since June 2016 and was working for Trace Ambulance in Tinley Park. Lamesch graduated from Oregon High School in 2011.

Ogle County State’s Attorney Mike Rock and Assistant State’s Attorneys Heather Kruse and Allison



Matthew T. Plote

Huntley prosecuted the case at trial for the People. The case was investigated by the Ogle County Sheriff’s Office, Mt. Morris Police Department, Illinois State Police, and the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal.

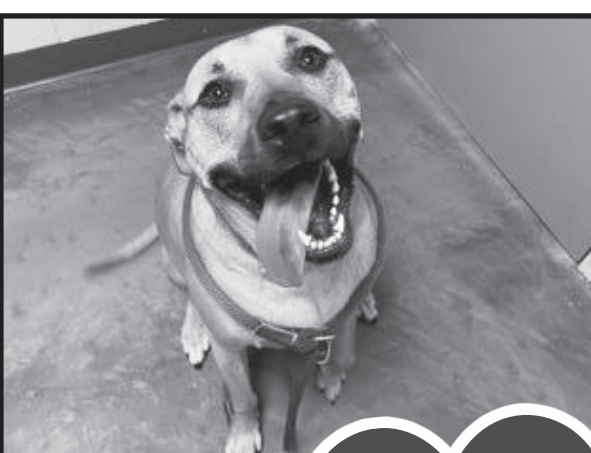
Plote will remain in custody pending a sentencing hearing. He is facing a mandatory life imprisonment sentence. The case is set for a status hearing on April 25 at 3 p.m.

Tails PET OF THE WEEK

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LOCAL NEWS



(PHOTOS BY JEFF HELFRICH)

There were no injuries after a fire at a home in Steward on Monday afternoon, Rochelle Fire Department Lt. Zach Prewett said. Fire crews were called to 207 Miller St. in Steward on Monday at 2:05 p.m. for a report of smoke and fire at a two-story, single-family residence. The first crews on scene reported moderate smoke coming from a second-floor window and saw a small amount of fire in an exterior wall, Prewett said.

No injuries after Monday fire at home on Miller Street in Steward Prewett: Rochelle Fire Department estimates damage amount to be \$30,000

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

ROCHELLE — There were no injuries after a fire at a home in Steward on Monday afternoon, Rochelle Fire Department Lt. Zach Prewett said.

Fire crews were called to 207 Miller St. in Steward on Monday at 2:05 p.m. for a report of smoke and fire at a two-story, single-family residence. The first crews on scene reported moderate smoke coming from a second-floor window and saw a small amount of fire in an exterior wall, Prewett said.

“There was fire on both floors on exterior walls,” Prewett said. “The first crew was able to extinguish most of it before we arrived and ran a hose line in there and extinguished it the rest of the way. All fire was confined to the exterior wall. All occupants were home at the time of the fire and they were able to get outside safely. We were able to get two pet cats out safely as well.”

Responding departments were Rochelle Fire, and the Ogle-Lee Fire Protection District stations of Steward, Creston and Flagg Center.

The residents of the home will be displaced for a time due to the fire and The Red Cross was contacted to help them. Prewett said RFD estimates the amount of damage to be \$30,000. The cause of the fire is under investigation, but was “possibly electrical in nature,” Prewett said.

Fire crews cleared the scene at 4:27 p.m.

OGLE COUNTY SHERIFF’S DEPARTMENT

OREGON — On March 23 at 6:23 p.m. deputies, with the assistance of the Oregon Police Department, conducted a traffic stop at Hill Street and Illinois Route 2. After a brief investigation, Deputies arrested Joseph Mikeworth, 47, of Mendon, Illinois, for driving without a valid license.

Mikeworth was released with a notice to appear. Mikeworth was additionally issued a citation for suspended registration.

On March 23 at 4:02 p.m. deputies conducted a traffic stop at West Mud Creek Road and North Indian Heights Drive. After a brief investigation, deputies arrested Terry Wallace, 74, of Mt. Morris, for driving while under the influence of alcohol. Wallace was transported to the Ogle County Jail where he was processed and released with a return court date.

On March 23 at approximately 10:23 p.m. deputies conducted a traffic stop on West Illinois Route 72 near Adeline Road. After a brief investigation, deputies arrested William W. Clark, 44, of Rochelle, for no driver’s license. Lindsay A. Horton, 39, Dixon, was arrested for an outstanding Ogle County warrant. Joel M. Moore, 36, Nelson, was arrested for an outstanding Whiteside County warrant.

Moore was additionally charged with possession of a controlled substance, possession of methamphetamine less than five grams, and possession of drug paraphernalia. Clark was released with a notice to appear. Moore and Horton were both transported to the Ogle County Jail.

On March 25 at approximately 10:08 a.m. Tristen A. Halverson, 25, of Rockford turned himself into the Ogle County Jail on an outstanding failure to appear Ogle County warrant. Halverson posted bond and was released with no return court date.

All individuals are considered innocent until proven guilty.

ROCHELLE POLICE DEPARTMENT

ROCHELLE — On March 22 at 12:41 p.m. Alvaro E. Mireles, 60, of Rochelle was arrested on an outstanding Ogle County warrant and transferred.

On March 22 at 11:02 p.m. Abigail Lopez, 21, of Des Plaines was cited for speeding. She signed a promise to comply and was given an April 26 Rochelle court date.

On March 23 at 4:46 a.m. Christian B. Stanberry was arrested for two counts of driving under the influence and cited for improper parking on roadway. He was released on a notice to appear with an April 26 Rochelle court date.

On March 24 at 11:15 a.m. Alexandra I. Cesarone, 36, of Kings was cited for speeding 55 miles per hour in a 35 miles per hour zone. She signed a promise to comply and was given an April 26 Rochelle court date.

On March 25 at 8:15 a.m. Chris A. Gonzalez, 20, of Kingston was cited for speeding 64 miles per hour in a 50 miles per hour zone. He signed a promise to comply and was given an April 26 Rochelle court date.

On March 25 at 9:47 a.m. Jennifer L. Hernandez, 28, of Rochelle was cited for expired registration. She signed a promise to comply and was given an April 26 Rochelle court date.

All individuals are considered innocent until proven guilty.

SOTC: Bearrows and Fiegenschuh discuss future plans for Rochelle

From page 1

“This is probably one of the proudest years for myself as city manager,” Fiegenschuh said.

Goals for 2024 detailed by Bearrows and Fiegenschuh included continuing to hire police officers and firefighters, downtown improvements utilizing grant funds, the reconstruction of the Flagg Road and 20th Street intersection, the reconstruction of South Main Street from Veterans Parkway to Steam Plant Road, the reconstruction of Well 8 and phase two of upgrades to the wastewater treatment plant, and continuing to prepare for the state to reconstruct and widen Illinois Route 251 on the north side of town, which is currently slated for 2027.

To close the presentation, Bearrows thanked city staff.

“I could not be any more proud of each and every one of them,” Bearrows said. “When I came in as mayor five years ago they were very receptive and supportive. What I see now is a team. Everybody works together for the same thing. You can make an amazing amount of progress if you don’t worry about who gets the credit. I’m happy to be your mayor and I look forward to the next 12 months to see what’s ahead for us.”

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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.



Hardin served in Iraq as Blackhawk

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

CRESTON — Jason Hardin of Creston served in the United States Army from 1999-2005 and reached the rank of specialist (E4). He served during combat in Iraq as a Blackhawk helicopter crew chief/door gunner.

Hardin's service began at Fort Jackson in South Carolina in 1999 before being stationed at Fort Eustis in Virginia in 2000. From 2000-2003 he was stationed in Hanau, Germany and from 2003-2005 he was stationed at Fort Campbell in Kentucky.

"I wanted to do something big that I would be proud of," Hardin said. "I knew college wasn't for me at the time and I wanted to get away and travel. It made me grow up really fast. It instilled a strong work ethic and made me a leader."

Hardin started as a Blackhawk helicopter mechanic before moving up to crew chief/door gunner. His re-



Jason Hardin of Creston served in the United States Army from 1999-2005 and reached the rank of specialist (E4). He was stationed at Fort Eustis in Virginia in 2000. From 2000-2003 he was stationed in Hanau, Germany and from 2003-2005 he was stationed at Fort Campbell in Kentucky.

sponsibilities during missions included passengers and payloads. He was the crew member hanging out of the window of the helicopter armed with an M60 machine gun to help provide cover during fights and when inserting or extracting infantry to/from the front lines. He was also responsible for the overall maintenance on the helicopter.

"Serving in that position during combat in Iraq was my most unique experience from my service," Hardin said. "I saw the look on the locals' faces first hand in Iraq when Sadaam Hussein was captured."

Hardin met his wife, Jeni, while stationed in Germany. She worked as an automated logistics specialist, supplying parts for Blackhawk helicopters. The couple grew up an hour away from each other, but it took an Army base in Germany for them to meet. They married in Denmark and their oldest son was born in Germany while they

were stationed there.

Hardin found civilian life to be a challenge after leaving the service. He struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder, but finds strength in his support system, which is led by his wife.

"If I had to do it all over again though, I would," Hardin said. "My service has helped me become the leader I am today and taught me to look after people as if they were my own family. I have the highest respect for all veterans and active duty soldiers. They sacrifice so much to defend this country."

Honoring Our American Hero is a series that will print twice a month in the News-Leader. If you know an American Hero you would like to have featured, contact Jeff Helfrich at jhelfrich@rochellenews-leader.com or call 815-561-2151.

"I wanted to do something big that I would be proud of... It made me grow up really fast. It instilled a strong work ethic and made me a leader... If I had to do it all over again, I would. My service has helped me become the leader I am today..."

Jason Hardin

Thank you,
Veterans,
past, present
and future

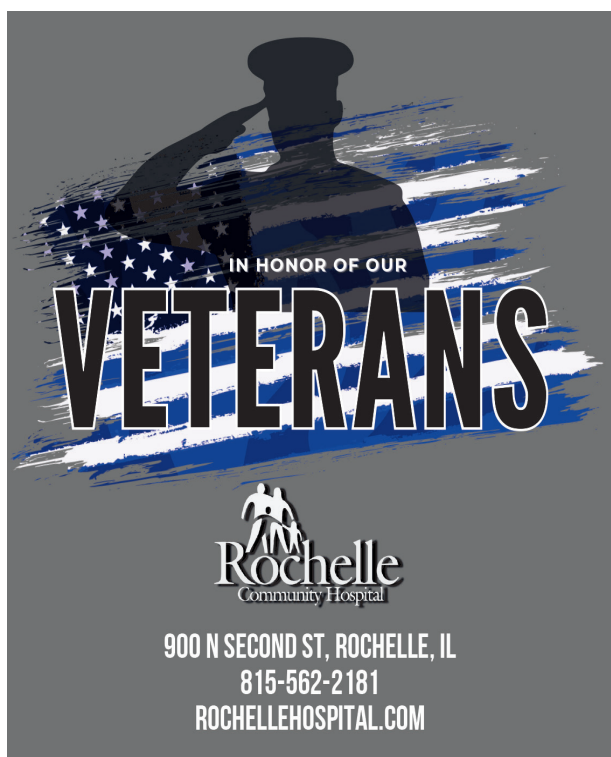


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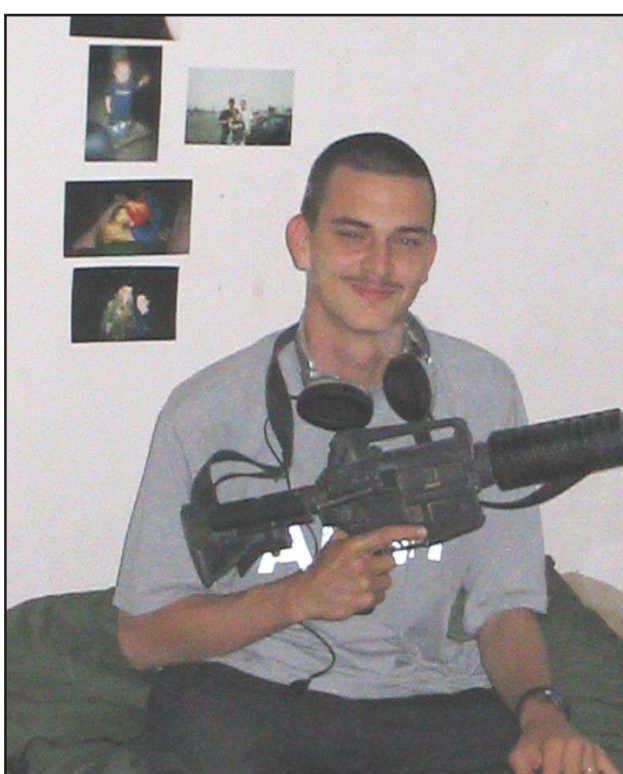
American Hero

Blackhawk helicopter crew chief/door gunner



(COURTESY PHOTOS)

He served during combat in Iraq as a Blackhawk helicopter crew chief/door gunner. Hardin's service began at Fort Jackson in South Carolina in 1999 before being stationed at Fort Campbell in Kentucky.



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LOCAL VIEWS

Consider this: Will we fall for it?

HOW many of us are worried that the 2020 election was stolen or there was too much scandal around it? Shouldn't we have looked for and found various political and concerned groups trying to fix any problems that were found? Shouldn't we have found in the news that these groups and others were reviewing the voting processes of those areas found to be concerning? Shouldn't we have heard something?

Of course, there were many court cases right after the election that found that there were no widespread irregularities in the election. On the web site (campaignlegal.org/results-lawsuits-regarding-2020-elections) and in the article named, Representative Liz Chaney has made the following quote:

"The president and many around him pushed this idea that the election had been stolen. And that is a dangerous claim. It wasn't true," she said. "There were over 60 court cases where judges, including judges appointed by President Trump and other Republican presidents, looked at the evidence in many cases and said there is not widespread fraud."

Over and over again, various political statements are made by numerous people of election fraud with some saying they have proof. In the Chicago Sun Times article (chicago.suntimes.com/columnists/2023/12/21/24009472/rudy-giuliani-donald-trump-proof-election-fraud-georgia-ruby-freeman-shaye-moss-jacob-sullum), the head-

line says it all as these claims pertain to Rudy Giuliani. The headline reads, "Rudy Giuliani never has proof yet 'never shuts up' about supposed election fraud". What is this proof? Why have we not read about this proof? The only conclusion we can come to if the proof is not presented is that there is no proof at all.

On the web site "The Hill", in the following article, (thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4385239-voter-data-expert-trump-campaign-2020-election-not-stolen/) we receive the best rebuttal to the elections was stolen fantasy loop we constantly hear. The first paragraph of the article says it all. "Ken Block, whom the Trump campaign hired in 2020 to find voter fraud in the election, penned an op-ed Tuesday stating unequivocally that the 2020 presidential election was not stolen and that there was no evidence of voter fraud sufficient to change the outcome of the election".

The rhetoric continues but you and I know that this rhetoric is not true. No matter what you think or hear, this truth cannot be refuted. This rhetoric, however, will continue for many years to come. It is the hope of those spouting this falsehood that we will eventually believe it simply because it is repeated. This type of action seems to have been used in the past and will, most likely, continue. Will we fall for it? I think we know better than that. After all, when the boy cries

wolf repeatedly, we eventually quit listening.

Saying an election was stolen is a serious matter. Without the court rebuttals or those of the man selected to find fraud, we have one last non event to prove this false. Unless, someone is secretly proposing changes to correct what they think is wrong, I have not heard of any occurring. Since this is such a serious matter for all of us, we would be hearing about proposals to change our election processes. Yet the lack of any news is deafening. Ample truth that these statements about fraud are false.

As far as our local elections, if you ever have any concerns about voting or elections, the Ogle County web site contains a lot of information. You can find this information and much more at the following: (www.elections.il.gov/InformationForVoters.aspx?MID=I0cuvBFuZRw%3d). Also, published periodically around election time in our local newspaper and in the voter guide, is the time and place where the public is invited to watch our County Clerk's office test our voting equipment.

It is up to us to decide what is truth and what is not. We must keep our common sense when reading, watching, or listening. How you react, respond, or vote is for you to decide. No one else can or should decide for you. It's up to you, and only you, to determine where you go from here.



Reed Harris

Ron Kern: Ag areas and farmers

SINCE 1980, landowners in Illinois have had a tool available to them that can help preserve farmland for at least 10 years. The Illinois Agricultural Areas Conservation and Protection Act allows one or more landowners to voluntarily place their land into a protected district, often called an "ag area," with the approval of the local county board.

Although it is only one tool in farmland protection, it can offer some assistance in maintaining farmland for farming purposes. Ag areas may also help protect farmers from some aspects of the encroachment of nearby development and possibly assist them in responding to any complaints from residents new to the rural area.

Any single landowner or multiple contiguous landowners with 350 acres or more can submit a proposal for the creation of an ag area to the local county board. The county board is responsible for implementing the procedures outlined in state statute to facilitate exploring the issue locally and voting on the specific ag area request. The approval process includes the following steps:

Upon receiving a new ag area request, the county board issues a public notice for comment by adjacent landowners.

Thirty days after public notice is given, the county board refers the request to the County Ag Area Committee. This committee is appointed by the County Appointing Authority, which includes the county board chair, county Extension staff, and the chair of the county Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). The Ag Area Committee consists of five appointees: four must be active farmers, no more than two can be from one political party, and one must be a county board member.

The Ag Area Committee must hold a public hearing that is followed by a 30-day comment period. The committee must present the county board with a recommendation within 45 days after the comment period ends.

The county board then must approve or deny the ag area request within 45 days of receiving the committee's recommendation.

Within 45 days of their final action, the county board is to notify the Illinois Department of Agriculture of their decision. If the proposal is approved, a description of the ag area is to be filed with the County Clerk's office.

It is important to note that if the proposed land is within 1.5 miles of a municipality's corporate boundary, the municipality may file an objection. If the municipality adheres to all procedural guidelines and timelines, the objection can result in removing the land located within the 1.5-mile zone from the ag area. If removal of this land reduces the area to less than 350 acres, the ag area request is invalidated.

State statute lists several issues that must be considered by the Ag Area Committee and county board when determining whether to approve an ag area request. Those items include: viability of active farming within the proposed area and surrounding areas; presence of viable farmland; the nature and extent of other land uses within the proposed area and adjacent areas; county development patterns and needs; SWCD-approved conservation plans for the land within the area; and any other relevant matters.

Once approved, an ag area remains protected for 10 years. During that time, landowners can request deletions from, additions to, or dissolution of the designated ag area. After the 10-year period expires, extensions of eight years can be granted.

The county board has final approval of any changes to an ag area, following procedures similar to those for ag area establishment.

No land can be included in an ag area without the landowner's agreement. At least 350 acres must be included in the area, and one or more landowners may own the property. The state statute suggests, "the land should be as compact and nearly contiguous as feasible."

Land within an ag area may be bought, sold, inherited, etc., without any restrictions. Ag areas do not change with ownership changes. Once established, the ag area designation stays on the land until the county board dissolves it or it ceases to contain 350 acres.

The benefits of entering property into an ag area may be limited to those specified by state statute, but landowners often cite reasons and benefits that are more personal in nature.

State statute indicates that ag areas help protect landowners from local ordinances that might otherwise interfere with normal farming practices. However, ag areas do not exempt farmers from nuisance suits or from following approved best management practices, especially those prescribed by

law. State statute also indicates that after land is enrolled within an ag area, no benefit assessments for community improvements (such as sewer, lighting, water, etc.) can be imposed on land used primarily for agricultural purposes when the landowner is not benefited. In addition, statute specifies that state agencies must take into account the presence of ag areas when siting state projects; however, this requirement does not prohibit those agencies from acquiring land within the ag area.

While it may be possible to achieve any or all of these benefits without creating an ag area, the ag area designation is an important public declaration that the county and the landowner feel agriculture is important to the community and still a viable industry in that area.

As stated in the 1980 Agricultural Areas Conservation and Preservation Act, "it is the policy of the state to conserve, protect, and to encourage the development and improvement of its agricultural lands for the production of food and other agricultural products. It is also the policy of this state to conserve and protect agricultural lands as valued natural and ecological resources, which provide needed open spaces for clean air as well as for aesthetic purposes. Agriculture in many parts of the state is under urban pressure from expanding metropolitan areas. This urban pressure takes the form of scattered development in wide belts around urban areas, brings conflicting land uses into juxtaposition, creates high costs for public services, and stimulates land speculation. When this scattered development extends into productive farm areas, ordinances inhibiting farming tend to follow, farm taxes rise, and hopes for speculative gains discourage investments in farm improvements.

Farmers and landowners interested in more information about ag areas should contact their local University of Illinois Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, or Farm Bureau office. Some county building and zoning or development offices may also have information. Interested persons can also contact the Illinois Department of Agriculture in Springfield for further information.

"No race can prosper until it learns there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem." -Booker T. Washington

Ron Kern is the manager of the Ogle County Farm Bureau.

How to contact government officials

U.S. Con. Darin LaHood
1424 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C.
20515
(202) 225-6201

IL Sen. Win Stoller
Stratton Office Bldg
Springfield, IL 62706
(217) 782-1942

IL Rep. Bradley Fritts
Stratton Office Bldg
Springfield, IL 62706
(217) 782-0535

Have a letter you want to submit to us? Send it to (news@rochellenews-leader.com)

KEEPING YOU IN TOUCH WITH YOUR LOCAL LEADERS

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| Tom McDermott | tmcdermott@rochelleil.us |
| Benjamin Valdivieso | bvaldivieso@rochelleil.us |

Rochelle Elementary School Board

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| Javier Zepeda | jzepeda@d231.rochelle.net |
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| Reid Elliot | |
| Jennifer Payton | |

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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 be typed

or legibly handwritten, and no anonymous letters will be published. Any letters from boards or organizations must include at least one name of an individual. Any criticism of public officials should be limited to issues related strictly to their position or actions made in office, as personal attacks will not be published. Letters involving private disputes between the writer and a business will not be published. Political endorsements will be 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.

COMMUNITY



(COURTESY PHOTO)
Arabella Marruffo has been a Girl Scout for seven years with Troop 1168 in Rochelle. Her goal this year was to sell Girl Scout cookies to all 50 states. With the help of videos and photos shared to social media and all the texts and emails sent to family and friends, she achieved her goal.

Rochelle Girl Scout sells cookies to all 50 states

ROCHELLE — Arabella Marruffo has been a Girl Scout for seven years with Troop 1168 in Rochelle. Her goal this year was to sell Girl Scout cookies to all 50 states. With the help of videos and photos shared to social media and all the texts and emails sent to family and friends, she achieved her goal.

Her journey started easily with family in Illinois, Iowa and California and close family friends in Missouri and Washington. The last states to get on board were Rhode Island and New Mexico. It took her almost three weeks with a lot of help from well-connected cousins who took on her goal as their personal missions to help as much as they could.

Arabella earned a special patch for her cadette vest and will be on the Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois podcast in April discussing her achievement and her upcoming trip in June to Our Chalet, Girl Scouts World Center in Switzerland.

Woodlawn Cemetery cleanup deadline is March 31

CRESTON — March 31 is the final deadline for removing grave blankets, wreaths, old flowers etc. from your graves at Woodlawn Cemetery in Creston. After that they will be destroyed.

Do not place any new flowers out until May 1. Please help the cemetery by removing your own grave blankets, etc. This cemetery is not a tax-based cemetery, so help keep our costs down. We need your help to keep this cemetery beautiful.

Clean-up will take place on April 10 beginning at 9 a.m. if anyone would be willing to help. Weather permitting; Bring rakes and gloves.

Note: There are rules on the side of the building as to what is and isn't permitted in this cemetery, please follow them. Thanks for your help!

BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

March 28
Pastor Woodruff

March 30
Grace Olson

April 4
Edward and Sandra Hickey
(anniversary)

Call 815-561-2151 to submit names for birthdays and anniversaries

2024
From The Heart
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Years of Giving

\$20

Mar. 1 - Deanne Ponto, Rochelle, \$25

Mar. 2 - From the Heart, \$25

Mar. 3 - From the Heart, \$50

Mar. 4 - Araceli Flores, Rochelle, \$25

Mar. 5 - Stephanie Gittleson, Rochelle, \$25

Mar. 6 - From the Heart, \$25

Mar. 7 - Jennifer Marshall, LaMoille, \$25

Mar. 8 - Noah Mershon, Rochelle, \$25

Mar. 9 - Stacey Horstmeier, Rochelle, \$25

Mar. 10 - Gail Walker, Rochelle, \$50

Mar. 11 - Christine Gorman, Rochelle, \$25

Mar. 12 - Ethan Etes, Rochelle, \$25

Mar. 13 - Danny Miller, Ashton, \$25

Mar. 14 - Allison Wagner-Huntley, Byron, \$25

Mar. 15 - Tiffany Meyers, Rochelle, \$25

Mar. 16 - From the Heart, \$25

Mar. 17 - From the Heart, \$250

Mar. 18 - Edith Yarbrough, Dixon, \$25

Mar. 19 - Caily Gustafson, Topeka, Kansas, \$25

Mar. 20 - Two Sisters on Main, Amboy, \$25

Mar. 21 - Elvis Baneski, Rochelle, \$25

Mar. 22 - From the Heart, \$25

Mar. 23 - From the Heart, \$25

Mar. 24 - Jan Thompson, Rochelle, \$50

Mar. 25 - From the Heart, \$25

Mar. 26 - Brian Vanderheyden, Sycamore, \$25

Mar. 27 - Rochelle Chamber, \$25



Coffee Break

King Crossword

ACROSS

1 Weighing device

6 Sitar tunes

11 Fearful

12 Using the Internet

14 Eagles' homes

15 Julianne and Demi

16 Away from SSW

17 Auto style

19 Wager

20 Food regimen

22 Cariou of Broadway

23 Visibility hindrance

24 Cancel

26 Journeys

28 Head of st.

30 Animal doc

31 "Lolita" author

35 Summary

39 Plow pullers

40 Felon's flight

42 Sitarist

43 Shankar

44 Prom duds

46 Heavy weight

47 E-business

49 Boring type

51 New citizen, perhaps

DOWN

1 Picturesque

2 Life's work

3 Onassis nickname

4 Cask sediment

5 '50s Ford

6 Peter the Great, e.g.

7 Shortly

8 Day- — paint

9 Car safety feature

10 Allergy season sound

11 Hourglass fillers

13 "Melrose Place" actor

18 "Lion" star

21 Yank at

23 Misanthrope

25 — choy

27 " — outta here!"

29 Library array

31 — plume

32 Wise sayings

33 "Scram!"

34 Preventive shot, in slang

36 40 winks

37 Sidesteps

38 Lipstick shades

41 Repairs

44 Rent

45 Foolproof

48 Hollywood trickery (Abbr.)

50 Ruby or Sandra

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Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | | 4 | | | | | 3 | |
| 5 | | | | 4 | | 9 | | 7 |
| | 6 | | 2 | | 1 | | | |
| | | 2 | | | 4 | 6 | | |
| 3 | 8 | | | | | | 5 | |
| | | | 1 | 7 | | | | 3 |
| | | 6 | | 3 | | 4 | | |
| | 7 | | 5 | | | | | 2 |
| | 3 | | | | 8 | | 1 | |

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦

♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging ♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: Q equals F

W Q R G M R N G H W V G X Z R X V X S J K R
Q J Z J K N G E E J S S J Z S F H R N W R
I W V F W P V G Q X K K J V , N G S W I G
J R R N G P M F K N - X Q Q .

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King Crossword

Solution time: 21 mins.

Answers

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | 1 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 6 |
| 2 | 6 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 4 |
| 5 | 8 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 9 | 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 2 | 8 | 5 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 9 |
| 4 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 3 |
| 6 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 1 |
| 8 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 9 | 7 |
| 7 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 9 | 8 |

Answers

After the paleontologist finished digging up that valuable fossil, he gave it the brush-off.

CryptoQuip

answer

LOCAL NEWS

GERTIE: Rochelle Fire Department celebrates 100 years of historic fire truck

From page 1

On May 23, 1926, Gertie was first on-scene at the Morris Kennedy Elevator fire, where high winds spread spot fires to roofs over five blocks away. Departments of Rockford, DeKalb and Amboy were due to respond as well, but ran into issues such as burning out bearings and blowing tires on their fire trucks. That fire saw \$30,000 in total damage, about \$530,000 in today's money.

On June 30, Gertie was called to DeKalb for the American Steel Wire Plant fire, which caused \$100,000 in damage (\$1.7 million adjusted to today). It was that day that Gertie is said to have made a "record run" of making it to DeKalb in 28 minutes, despite being slowed by heavy Lincoln Highway traffic.

Gertie served as the primary city fire truck from 1924 until the delivery of a new Seagrave engine in 1945. A second American LaFrance engine was purchased in 1947. Gertie's final documented fire was Feb. 17, 1973, when two simultaneous fires were seen in the 300 block of Lincoln Highway and the 400 block of Cherry Avenue. Gertie is believed to have helped "save" downtown Rochelle at least four times.

"To me, it's striking when we take her in parades," Johnson said. "She's driving in the downtown area that she's driven for 100 years. The buildings have had busi-

nesses come and go, and they still stand as well. She has saved downtown Rochelle at least four times. It would have burned to the ground if it had not been for her and the fire crews."

Gertie has become a symbol for RFD and its history and a point of pride for current firefighters like Johnson and retired members of the department like Chiefs Brian Johnson and Tom McDermott. Firefighters have worked over the years to keep, store, restore and maintain Gertie.

"It was there when I started," Brian Johnson said. "And it's still there. That's important to all of us. She offers the city something. And that's pride. We thought about putting hose on her, and realized that would be stupid. Because that's where the kids sit in parades. And it's just another memorial thing for the firefighters. The old guys can think about it. We've hauled many retired guys in parades. And some for their funerals. It's just very emotional to me."

Gertie is maintained by Wayne Page, a local farmer, who McDermott and Ben Johnson said is the only reason Gertie is still able to be driven in parades. Page has experience with machines like Gertie and can often be found working late on her the night before parades to make sure there won't be any issues.

McDermott also works as a historian for the Flag Township

Museum. The greatest mystery the fire truck comes with is the origin of its name.

"We don't know where the Gertie name came from," McDermott said. "It just popped up in an old newspaper article once: 'Old Gertie'. I went through every paper leading up to that and never found anything. It's a mystery. We have no idea. I don't know if it was a hit song of the day or named after somebody's old girlfriend. But it's always been Gertie."

Ben Johnson called RFD and city's ability to keep Gertie over the years "remarkable", especially due to the fact that she made it through a world war when items like old fire trucks were being scrapped to help in the war effort. With vocal support from RFD, the city made the choices over the years to ensure Gertie could continue to live on as a symbol for the history of firefighting locally.

"People wonder when it isn't in a parade," McDermott said. "It's just like the fire department, in a way. Nobody cares until it's not there. They know it's there and the fire department's there. They know it's going to be there when they need it. It's for those parades. It's for those homecoming weeks. People don't want to ride on one of the new trucks. They want to ride on Gertie. And it's there. It's always been there. That's her job now. For parades and for taking firefighters that pass away to their funerals."



(COURTESY PHOTO)

Gertie served as the primary city fire truck from 1924 until the delivery of a new Seagrave engine in 1945. A second American LaFrance engine was purchased in 1947. Gertie's final documented fire was Feb. 17, 1973, when two simultaneous fires were seen in the 300 block of Lincoln Highway and the 400 block of Cherry Avenue.

McCombie launches Women in Ag group

SAVANNA — House Minority Leader Tony McCombie held a successful first "Women in Agriculture" advisory group, bringing together over a dozen women from across her 89th legislative district to discuss legislative updates relevant to the industry, and connect with similar minded women.

Bringing together women working in agriculture has been a priority for Leader McCombie. This first meeting was an introduction for members within the group, and an opportunity for them to hear from Leader McCombie on issues relevant in the legislature to farming, agricultural education, and funding.

"This meeting was a great introduction to a coalition that I have wanted to start for some

time—to bring women together, celebrate their impact to agriculture and be a resource for each other," said McCombie. "I see this group as an opportunity for women to work together to gain a better understanding of legislation and programs that promotes Illinois' largest economic driver."

Illinois Department of Agriculture Director Jerry Costello was also present for the first meeting to provide an overview of the Department and make his department accessible for questions or concerns on issues brought forward in discussion.

"The future of agriculture is changing with technology and other innovations. At the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA), we welcome the opportunity

to bring more women into the industry through recruitment initiatives, mentoring relationships and partnerships with schools through FFA and 4-H. Continued bipartisan efforts to expand opportunities for women in agriculture are critical and have our full support," said Director Jerry Costello II, IDOA director.

McCombie's group will continue to meet quarterly throughout the year and will feature additional guest speakers to bring added resources and insight to Women in Agriculture. With questions about the advisory group or for information on how to join as a participant, residents are encouraged to contact Leader McCombie's District Office by email atmccombie@ilhousegov.org.

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SPORTS



WRESTLERS HONORED

The RTHS wrestling team held its awards banquet this past Thursday evening.

See page 2 for more details

RTHS Boys Track

Hub vaulter wins state title

Nuyen finishes first at 2024 Illinois Top Times Indoor State Championships

BY RUSSELL HODGES
SPORTS EDITOR

BLOOMINGTON — Rochelle sophomore Andrew Nuyen has been practicing his pole vaulting for an average of four to five hours a week since his freshman season with the Hub track and field team concluded this past year. In addition to practicing with the RISE Pole Vault club in Joliet, Nuyen has been practicing at home, where he has a \$1,000 pole vault pit in his yard.

Nuyen’s dedication has led to significant improvements in his clearances from last season, where his indoor personal record was 7 feet 6 ½ inches and his outdoor personal record was 8 feet 11 ¾ inches. The talented sophomore has taken his skills to new heights, setting multiple RTHS fresh-soph school records in just the first few meets of the 2024 indoor campaign.

Nuyen concluded his stellar indoor season at the 2024 Illinois Top Times Indoor State Championships at the Shirk Center in Bloomington, where he set a new fresh-soph

school record and finished first in Class 2A with a clearance of 14 feet 11 ¼ inches. Nuyen is the first male student-athlete from RTHS to win an indoor state championship since Joe Torres in 2011. Nuyen is just inches away from the varsity school record of 15 feet set by John Place in 1983.

“It was scary at first, but I calmed myself down and I tried to have fun,” Nuyen said. “There was good competition, but I was able to calm down and relax. It was cool to make history and it’s something that I still can’t wrap my head around. My coaches at my other training facility in Joliet have helped me a lot. I wanted to vault more in the offseason and that’s helped me.”

Nuyen was one of two athletes to clear 14 feet 11 ¼ inches at the indoor state meet. The other was Sycamore’s Braedon Shaner, who Nuyen edged out for the state title based on the tiebreaker criteria. Nuyen and Shaner went head-to-head at Sycamore’s Gary Egler Invitational earlier this season, where Shaner won with a height of 14



Sophomore Andrew Nuyen finished first in Class 2A’s pole vault competition during the 2024 Illinois Top Times Indoor State Championships at the Shirk Center in Bloomington over the weekend. Nuyen becomes the first boys track and field athlete from RTHS to win an indoor state title since Joe Torres in 2011.

feet 7 ¼ inches and Nuyen took second at 14 feet. With the indoor season now over, Nuyen said his goals for the outdoor season include clearing

16 feet, which would be a new RTHS school record by a full foot.

“I saw my friends doing the pole vault when I was a freshman and I thought

it would be fun,” Nuyen said. “Maturity has helped me a lot, but most of my improvements have come from my coaches. It’s fun to feel the exhilaration of

being up in the air... I’ve been practicing for about four-and-a-half hours a week, plus the time I spend at the gym. I’ve exceeded my expectations.”

RTHS Girls Soccer

Lady Hubs avoid shutout in loss to Sterling

Lara scores Rochelle’s lone goal as Golden Warriors prevail 4-1 on Thursday

BY RUSSELL HODGES
SPORTS EDITOR

ROCHELLE — A short-handed Rochelle Lady Hub varsity soccer team did its best to hang tough against the Sterling Golden Warriors during Thursday’s nonconference home matchup.

Playing without several key injured starters including senior Kara Martinez, the Lady Hubs fell short of notching their first win of the season on Thursday. Junior midfielder Makayla Lara scored Rochelle’s first and only goal in a 4-1 loss to the Golden Warriors. Rochelle (0-4, 0-0 Interstate 8) will return home for a match against Streator-Woodland on Tuesday evening.

“We’ve been more competitive over our last couple of games and I thought this was the best game we’ve played so far,” head coach Brad Male said. “The score doesn’t reflect it, but we’re starting to progress on the back line and we worked better as a team. We’re continuing to find more continuity in our back line and we’ll continue to progress once we have our full team back.”

The Lady Hubs nearly had the first goal of the match, as a battle for possession deep inside the Sterling penalty area resulted in a deflected shot

and a save by the Golden Warriors during the 18th minute. After Rochelle was unable to capitalize on the scoring chance, Sterling bounced right back and converted a goal in the 19th minute, when the Golden Warriors lofted a shot from well outside the penalty area that soared over the head of Lady Hub goalkeeper Danica Ward.

Sterling took a 2-0 lead shortly after, taking advantage of a breakaway down the middle of the Rochelle defense and scoring in the 22nd minute. The Lady Hubs snapped their scoreless streak during the 29th minute, when Lara blasted a left-footed shot that fired through the upper half of the Golden Warrior net. Lara’s goal was only the second of the season for the Lady Hubs, who scored one goal in their season opener against the Harlem Huskies on March 14.

“We’re hoping that we can get some players around Makayla who she can pass the ball to and put some trust in,” Male said. “We think that will open her up a little more. She’s the main player we’re looking for right now, but we need to have more players around her who she can rely on.”

Rochelle threatened to even the score early in the second half, possess-



Senior Danica Ward clears the ball away during the Rochelle Lady Hub varsity soccer match against Sterling on Thursday evening. The Lady Hubs fell to the Golden Warriors 4-1 to move to 0-4 on the season.

ing the ball inside Golden Warrior territory for several minutes, but the Lady Hubs were unable to finish

any runs near the Sterling goal. Rochelle eventually ran out of steam, as the Golden Warriors con-

nected on back-to-back goals in the 52nd and 56th minutes, one on a deflected shot and another on a

breakaway down the far sideline, to earn a three-goal advantage and seal their victory.

SPORTS

RTHS Wrestling

(COURTESY PHOTOS)



Wrestlers take home RTHS and Interstate 8 Conference awards at team banquet

The Rochelle Township High School wrestling team held its awards banquet on Thursday evening, with several student-athletes earning RTHS and Interstate 8 Conference honors. Two student-athletes including Dempsey Atkinson and Cammyla Macias earned Academic All-Conference honors. Six student-athletes including Brock Metzger, Tommy Tourdot, Kaiden Morris, Frank Nasca, Xavier Villalobos and Keagan Albers took home Academic All-Conference Honorable Mentions. Seven student-athletes including Tommy Tourdot, Xavier Villalobos, Brenden Voight, Grant Gensler, Roman Villalobos, Brock Metzger and Kaiden Morris earned All-Conference honors from the Interstate 8. Two student-athletes including Deegan Schabacker and Josh Lassiter received All-Conference Honorable Mentions. Xavier Villalobos won the Takedown King and Pin King Awards, while Kaiden Morris won the Most Valuable Wrestler Award and Roman Villalobos took home the Kevin Olivier Most Improved Wrestler Award.

RTHS Baseball

Hubs defeat Sterling for first win of season

Rochelle moves to 1-1 overall after 12-5 road victory on Thursday afternoon

BY RUSSELL HODGES
SPORTS EDITOR

STERLING—The Rochelle Hub varsity baseball team scored its first win of the season on Thursday evening, recording 11 hits and tallying four runs in the third inning to secure a 12-5 victory over Sterling in non-conference action. Senior Brock Metzger reached base

five times in the win, while sophomore Brode Metzger singled three times for the Hubs (1-1, 0-0 Interstate 8).

Rochelle held a 4-0 lead after plating four runs in the top of the third inning, where junior Carson Lewis belted a three-run double and senior Chandler Cunningham reached on an error to bring home Brock Metzger. The Hubs added

three runs in the top of the fourth inning, surging ahead 7-0 after an RBI single from Brode Metzger and a fielder's choice grounder from Brock Metzger, who scored on a wild pitch four at-bats later to give the Hubs a seven-run advantage.

Sterling answered with three runs in the bottom of the fourth inning, cutting the Rochelle lead to 7-3 after a

two-run single from Miles Nawrocki, who scored on a passed ball soon after. The Hubs fired back with three runs in the top of the sixth inning, where freshman Brody Bruns sent an RBI double into the outfield and junior Elijah Harley plated another run on a sacrifice. Cunningham reached on a dropped third strike in the next at-bat, allowing Bruns

to score.

An RBI double from Mason Smithee and a sacrifice fly from Braden Birdsley led to two runs for the Golden Warriors in the bottom of the sixth inning, making the score 10-5 before Rochelle responded with two runs in the top of the seventh inning. Bruns slapped an RBI single with two outs, bringing Brode Metzger home before

eventually scoring on a steal of home.

Senior Dylan Whaley started on the mound for the Hubs, throwing three and one-third innings while striking out two batters and allowing three earned runs. Bruns entered in relief and earned the win, firing three and two-thirds innings with three strikeouts and two earned runs allowed.

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ASHTON NEWS



(COURTESY PHOTOS)

AFC's Gonnerman signs to play volleyball and basketball at Highland Community College
Congratulations to Ashton-Franklin Center senior student-athlete Brianna Gonnerman, who has signed to continue her academics as well as her volleyball and basketball careers at Highland Community College next year. A signing ceremony was recently held at Ashton-Franklin Center in honor of Gonnerman.



(COURTESY PHOTOS)

On March 15, Ashton-Franklin Center Elementary School held a ribbon cutting for its new book vending machine in its cafeteria. Students and staff were invited to participate in the event.

AFCES holds ribbon cutting for new book vending machine

'It's just really trying to promote reading with the kids in a fun and innovative way'

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

FRANKLIN GROVE — On March 15, Ashton-Franklin Center Elementary School held a ribbon cutting for its new book vending machine in its cafeteria. Students and staff were invited to participate in the event.

The new vending machine was funded by the school's parent-teacher club. Books for the machine will be purchased with funds from book fairs. The book vending machine takes "Inchy Coins" rather than real money. Students can earn Inchy Coins by following the AFCES's four school-wide expectations: Respectful, responsible, safe and kind. Books can be purchased with one coin and students get to take the books home.

After AFCES Principal Jenah Burkitt explained the concept to kids and staff on March 15, one student from each class randomly selected by their teachers were then able to come up to the machine and purchase a book for their classroom libraries.

Burkitt said that fundraising for the machine has taken place for the past three years and she thanked the PTC for their help in getting it.

"I saw on social media that one of my old schools had gotten one a couple of years ago," Burkitt said. "I thought it was really cool, so I approached the PTC and they loved the idea. We do a Scholastic Book Fair twice a year. The money we earn from that will pay for the books. So, it kind of pays for itself. It's just really trying to promote reading with the kids in a fun and innovative way."

Burkitt said the school wants to encourage both getting better at reading and students finding a love for it in a world where screens are more prevalent.

"We want to remind kids that they can get a lot from just picking up a book and reading it," Burkitt said. "If it takes a vending machine to make that happen, then why not?"

AFCES sixth graders Tessa, Mya, Hannah and Silas said the new book vending machine made them excited and more likely to follow the AFCES school-wide expectations.

"I was amazed at how excited the kids were by it," Burkitt said. "I was a little nervous because a lot of them asked if it would be filled with pop or candy. But when they found out it was books and they were excited, I was pleasantly surprised. We have a good group of kids who still love to read. I knew it was something they were going to really enjoy."

Lee County Sheriff's Deputies arrest Rock Falls man for obstructing justice

STERLING — On March 23 at approximately 10:16 p.m., deputies from the Lee County Sheriff's Office conducted a traffic stop on Illinois Route 2 near Mound Hill Road, outside of Sterling.

Through the deputies' investigation during the traffic stop, Winston R. Wilbanks, 36 of Rock Falls was arrested and charged with the following after giving a false name to the deputy: Obstructing justice (class four felony), driving while license revoked (subsequent offense, class four felony), resisting/obstructing arrest (class A misdemeanor), three traffic citations. Wilbanks is currently on mandatory supervised release/parole from Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). IDOC was contacted and advised of Wilbanks' arrest and charges. IDOC did not issue a parole hold. In accordance with provisions of Illinois SAFE-T Act, Wilbanks was given a court date and released from custody. All charges are merely an allegation, and the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty. Citizens are reminded to call the Lee County Sheriff's Office at (815) 284-6631 or Crime stoppers at 1-888-CAUGHT-U. Callers can remain anonymous and receive rewards of up to \$1,000 if their information leads to an arrest.

AFCES Sports Roundup

AFC softball beats Earlville
The Ashton-Franklin Center softball team edged Earlville 10-9 on Monday, March 11. Claire Freeman went 2-for-5 with two RBIs while Natalee VanNatta went 3-for-4 with one RBI and Leah O'Brien went 3-for-4 with two RBIs.

AFC baseball blows out Earlville
The Ashton-Franklin Center baseball team dominated Earlville 16-1 in four innings. Justin Henert went 2-for-3 with five RBIs in the win, while Caleb Thomas threw all four innings with 10 strikeouts and only one run allowed on one hit. Mitchell McPherson went 2-for-2 with three runs and two RBIs for the Raiders, who saw Aaron Lester finish 2-for-2 with three runs.

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INDEPENDENT ADMINISTRATION PUBLICATION NOTICE TO: Creditors and Claimants
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1. Notice is given of the death of Maria Krpan, who died on October 27, 2023 a resident of DeKalb, Illinois.
2. The Representative for the estate and his/her address is: Martin T. Krpan, 1501 Daniel Ct., Sycamore, IL 60178
3. The attorney for the estate and his/her address is: Kelly J. Robar, Esq., PO Box 415, Sycamore, IL 60178
4. Claims against the estate may be filed on or before September 13, 2024. **Claims against the estate may be filed with the Clerk of the Circuit Court, 133 W. State St., Sycamore, IL 60178, or with the Representative, or both. Any claim not filed within that period is barred. Copies of a claim filed with the Clerk must be mailed or delivered to the Representative and to the attorney within 10 days after it has been filed.***
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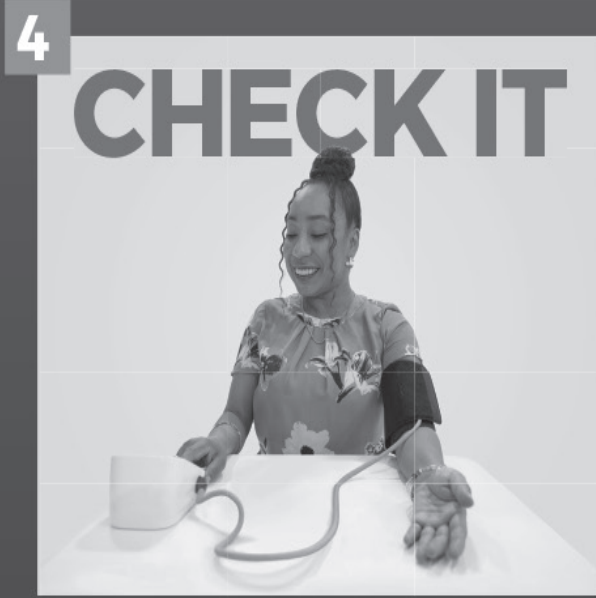
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**Johnny
Chadwick**
Year: Freshman
Sport: Baseball

Q: How many years have you been playing this sport?

A: 10 years.

Q: What do you enjoy most about this sport?

A: It's a challenging game in which you will fail a lot, which makes you want to work harder.

Q: What is your favorite school subject and why?

A: Math because it comes naturally to me and it could get me into engineering.

Q: Who is your favorite athlete and why?

A: Aaron Judge because he's a great baseball player and he's always humble.

Q: Who is your biggest role model and why?

A: My dad, my grandpa and my two uncles. They have taught me so much about how to be a better player and person.

Q: What is your dream job and why?

A: Any job that will let me support a family and spend time with people I care about. Something in engineering.

Q: Where would your dream vacation be and why?

A: Europe because there are so many things to see over there that you wouldn't find in the U.S.

Q: What is your favorite thing about being a student-athlete at RTHS?

A: The challenges that each day brings.



**Trenton
Cunningham**
Year: Freshman
Sport: Baseball

Q: How many years have you been playing this sport?

A: 10 years.

Q: What do you enjoy most about this sport?

A: That I get to play with the people I know.

Q: What is your favorite school subject and why?

A: Biology because my friends are in that class with me.

Q: Who is your favorite athlete and why?

A: Anthony Rizzo because we play the same position.

Q: Who is your biggest role model and why?

A: Preston Borris because I want to be like him.

Q: What is your dream job and why?

A: To play at the MLB level because I like the game.

Q: Where would your dream vacation be and why?

A: Australia because of the land.

Q: What is your favorite thing about being a student-athlete at RTHS?

A: I enjoy having something to do and something to push me to be better.

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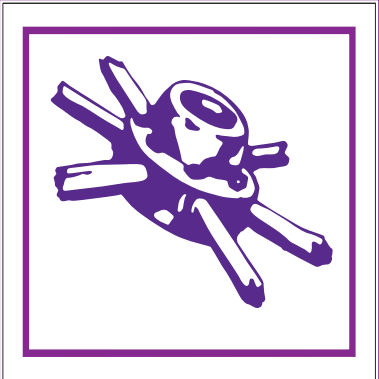
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