

## Christmas Trees Brighten Up Veterans Park



### Christmas tree decorating contest

Voting for the Christmas tree decorating contest in Mendota will end on Sunday, Dec. 22. People can vote online at [https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted\\_button\\_id=J4L5ZETEYRR2A](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=J4L5ZETEYRR2A) or they can bring money to the Mendota City Clerk's office. \$.01 = 1 vote. People can give as many votes for one organization or as many votes for a variety of organizations. There will be a Reimagine Mendota Committee Choice and Community Choice award. Each award is \$25 Chamber Bucks. Proceeds from the contest will be put toward the Pavilion on Main Fundraiser. Trees include: First State Bank, Rotary/Interact, Dirty Dawgs, West Side Family Dentistry, Festive Entertainment, MHS Wrestling, Homestead Reality, Schimmer Chevrolet Mendota, YMCA, Kingspan and Expressions Salon. The trees are located in Veterans Park facing Washington Street. They will be up until Jan. 3. (Reporter photo)

## State Flag Commission selects its top 10 designs for public voting

□ Nearly 5,000 entries submitted; voting slated to begin in January

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Flag Commission selected its Top 10 finalists for the state flag redesign contest with public voting slated to begin in January.

Members of the commission could select up to 10 of their favorite designs – from the nearly 5,000 submissions – prior to their December 9 meeting where they narrowed their choices to 10 overall.

“Having received nearly 5,000 entries, I appreciate the creativity and passion



reflected in all the submissions,” said Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias, whose office convened the Flag Commission meetings.

Starting in January, the

public will have the opportunity to vote online at [www.ilsos.gov/stateflag](http://www.ilsos.gov/stateflag) for one of the new designs, or one of three former flag designs, including the current state flag, the 1918 Centennial Flag and the 1968 Sesqui-centennial Flag.

After the public voting period, the commission will report its findings and recommendations to the Illinois General Assembly by April 1, 2025, whose members will vote on whether to adopt a new flag, return to a previous

iteration of the flag or retain the current flag.

Senate Bill 1818, sponsored by State Senator Doris Turner (48th District—Springfield) and State Representative Kam Buckner (26th District—Chicago), was signed into law by Governor JB Pritzker in 2023, creating the commission to gauge public desire for a new flag.

The flag designs eligible for public voting in January can be viewed <https://www.ilsos.gov/special/IFC/10finalists.pdf>

## City Council OKs annual tax levy

□ Aldermen adopt pair of ordinances

By KIP CHEEK  
Staff writer

MENDOTA - The Mendota City Council approved the annual tax levy and several ordinances at its Dec. 16 regular meeting.

Mayor David Boelk presented the tax levy in the amount of \$2,275,459.92, which was approved by the council.

The mayor also said that the city received a donation request in the amount of \$6,200 from North Central Area Transit (NCAT). NCAT, which is based in Ottawa, provides door-to-door, origin to destination public bus transportation for residents and guests of LaSalle County. Mayor Boelk said the city provides monetary donations to Mendota's public bus transportation for seniors, Mendota Area Senior Services (MASS). After brief discussion, the council said it will revisit the request at a later date.

Since it was the final council meeting before Christmas, Mayor Boelk wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

### ALDERMANIC REPORTS

Alderman Jay Miller presented two ordinances, both of which were approved by the council. The first ordinance establishes



rental housing registration, inspection and certification. The second ordinance establishes property regulations and liens for vacant buildings in the downtown Mendota business district.

Alderman Kyle Kim presented a Kellen proffer for the council's consideration. He said the matter had been discussed in finance committee meetings. After brief discussion by the council, it was decided to reject the Kellen proffer and revert back to the employee wage manual book.

Alderman Jim Fitzpatrick shared with the council a notice of request for qualifications for Safe Routes to School non-infrastructure city-wide comprehensive school travel plan. He said the notice is a part of the grant process the city must complete for its Safe Routes to School grant.

The next regular meeting of the Mendota City Council will be at 5:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 6, 2025.

## 2024 La Salle County tentative multiplier given

SPRINGFIELD – La Salle County has been issued a tentative property assessment equalization factor of 1.0000, according to David Harris, director of the Illinois Department of Revenue (IDOR).

The property assessment equalization factor, often called the “multiplier,” is the method used to achieve uniform property assessments among counties, as required by law. This equalization is particularly important because some of the state's 6,600 local taxing districts overlap into two or more counties (e.g., school districts, junior college districts, fire protection districts). If there was no equalization among counties, substantial inequities among taxpayers with comparable properties would result.

State law requires property in Illinois to be assessed at one-third (1/3) of its market value. Farm property is assessed differently with farm homesites and

dwelling subject to regular assessing and equalization procedures. Farmland and farm buildings are assessed according to standards based on productivity.

The equalization factor is determined annually for each county by comparing the sales price of individual properties sold over the past three years to the assessed value placed on those properties by the county supervisor of assessments/county assessor.

If the three-year average level of assessment is one-third of market value, the equalization factor will be one (1.0000). If the average level of assessment is greater than one-third of market value, the equalization factor will be less than one (1.0000). And if the average level of assessment is less than one-third of market value, the equalization factor will be greater than one (1.0000).

See Multiplier, Page A5



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# LOCAL AND AREA

## Master Naturalists to host Fossil Identification workshop

OGLESBY – University of Illinois Extension will host a fossil identification workshop on Saturday, Jan. 11, from 10 a.m.-noon at Illinois Valley Community College, 815 N. Orlando Smith Road, Room E101.

This hands-on program is designed for fossil enthusiasts of all proficiencies and will provide participants with the knowledge and skills to identify fossils found in the state. IVCC Geology Professor Mike Phillips will lead the workshop, with assistance from Master Naturalist volunteers. Get up close with real fossils and learn what to look for in the field.

This event is open to all ages and skill levels. Space is limited and pre-registration is required at [go.illinois.edu/FossilFun](http://go.illinois.edu/FossilFun)

If you need an accommodation to participate, please contact Emily Hansen at [emhansen@illinois.edu](mailto:emhansen@illinois.edu) or 815-224-0896. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your access needs.

Extension offices are located in Princeton, Ottawa, Henry, and in Oglesby on the IVCC campus. The Mission of University of Illinois Extension is to provide practical education you can trust to help people, businesses and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future.



### It's holiday traveling season

The Chicago, Burlington & Quincy #4978 located at the Union Depot Railroad Museum in Mendota is ready for the winter in full holiday spirit. (Photo courtesy of Bryon Walters)

**What are you asking Santa for Christmas?**

## Maestro & Mi Music Academy offers free holiday concert

PERU – For the 11<sup>th</sup> year, Maestro & Mi Music Academy is bringing holiday spirit to all with a free concert.

Holiday Glee, a family friendly performance, is taking place at 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 19 at The Auditorium Ballroom, located at 109 Wright St. in La Salle.

The concert features 12 professional musicians from the Illinois Valley including Stacy Konczak, Todd Witek, Megan Cullinan, Augie Wilke, Mike Cioni, Phil Valle, John Armstrong, Betillo Arellano, Brandon Czubachowski, Al Shupp, Jim Bottenberg, and Dave Peterson.

## The 2025 From The Heart Cash Calendars are NOW AVAILABLE!!

The proceeds of the sale of the calendars benefit our From The Heart recipients:

**Pegasus Special Riders, Rochelle Christian Food Pantry, HOPE, Focus House, Shining Star Children's Advocacy Center, CASA, Rochelle Area Community Foundation, Community Action Network, Hub City Senior Center & Rochelle Rotary.**



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• **IN PERSON:** You can pick up a 2025 From The Heart Cash Calendar **TODAY** at the following locations:

**In Rochelle at: First State Bank, Stillman Bank, HOPE Chest and Hub City Senior Center**

**In Oregon at: Merlin's**  
**In Dixon at: Shining Star**

• **BY MAIL:** Fill out the form below and send it in to us and we will mail your cash calendar to you!

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(\$20 per calendar plus \$3.50 per calendar postage)

Rotary Calendar, PO BOX 372, Rochelle, IL 61068

*Happy Holidays*



Sitting, left to right: Jennifer Truckenbrod, Rose Bonnell, Celina Garza  
Standing, left to right: Jamie Denault, Aubrey Stienner, Laura McNutt, Audrey Holocker

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# LOCAL AND AREA

## Soar into winter adventure with Flock to the Rock 2025 in Starved Rock Country

UTICA – Get ready to experience the natural wonders and rich heritage of Starved Rock Country as Flock to the Rock takes flight this January. From breathtaking landscapes to family-friendly activities, the region offers countless opportunities to shop, dine and stay all winter long.

Running from January through March 2025, the Flock to the Rock Winter Challenge invites adventurers to explore over 100 unique stops around LaSalle County. Use your phone to check in at each location, complete the challenge, and choose a special reward: a cozy winter cap or an adorable plush bald eagle toy.

Mark your calendar for Eagle Watch Weekend, a highlight of the winter season with thrilling activities for nature enthusiasts and families alike. Witness the majesty of birds of prey up close, learn from engaging educational exhibits, and enjoy interactive programs at multiple venues:

- Starved Rock Lodge
- Live Bird of Prey Programs: Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m., 1 p.m., 3 p.m.

Educational Exhibits in the Great Hall

- Starved Rock State Park Visitor Center Live Bird of Prey Programs: Saturday and Sunday, 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.
- Photos with Sadie, the Starved Rock Eagle Mascot: Noon to 2 p.m. (both days)
- Children's Craft and Story Time: Saturday at Noon
- Illinois Waterway Visitor Center Live Bird of Prey Programs: Saturday and Sunday, 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.
- Children's Owl Pellet Dissection: Sunday at 3:30 p.m.
- Utica Village Hall Live Bird of Prey Programs: Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m., 1 p.m., 3 p.m.
- Children's Bald Eagle Craft Time: Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m.
- Convenient Trolley Service

A trolley service will connect Starved Rock Lodge, Starved Rock State Park Visitor Center, Utica Village Hall, and the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center. Trolley wristbands are available for just \$5 per person per day, making it easy to enjoy every stop along

the way.

- Live Bird of Prey Programs

The awe-inspiring live bird of prey programs are presented by renowned organizations, including the Illinois Raptor Center, Stillman Nature Center, Hoo Haven, and Wildlife Prairie Park.

Eagle Watch Weekend is a collaborative effort, brought to you by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Starved Rock State Park, Army Corps of Engineers Rock Island District, Illinois Waterway Visitor Center, Starved Rock Lodge, LaSalle County Tourism, Heritage Corridor Destinations, and the Village of North Utica.

Join in for an unforgettable winter adventure filled with natural beauty, educational experiences, and family fun. Whether you're a seasoned explorer or a first-time visitor, Flock to the Rock is the perfect way to make the most of the season.

About Heritage Corridor Destinations

Heritage Corridor is a destination of six Illinois counties (Will, Grundy, Livingston, LaSalle, Bureau, and Putnam) southwest of

Chicago including the first hundred miles of Route 66, I&M Canal towns and Starved Rock Country. Experience heritage with a modern twist in dining, culture, vintage shopping and outdoor activities for visitors to explore whether it be a daytrip or weekend visit. Cruise through the first hundred miles of Route 66 where a visitor can enjoy more than a taste of the Mother Road and midcentury Americana style. Stroll through the I&M Canal towns and experience the amenities of this cultural, natural, and economic resource with a combination of industrial grit and up-cycled architecture that leaves a visitor inspired about the past and future. Starved Rock Country, one of the Midwest's original vacation destinations, invites visitors to unplug and experience the charm and beauty of the area waterfalls, canyons and the Illinois River valley. Visiting the Heritage Corridor is time well spent; the essence of midwestern hospitality, outdoor rejuvenation, and vintage flair with a modern twist.

Visit [HCDestinations.com](https://HCDestinations.com) for more information.



### Blackstone pizza lunch

Blackstone School Principal Award winners were honored with a pizza lunch on Nov. 26. Front row, left to right, are Paisley Nagy, Jaxton Becerra, Ryann Leavy, Yolanie Ramirez and Rubi Baltazar. Middle row, Sophia Moore, Adan Carbajal, Noah Perez, Noah Moreno and Jieanna Porter. Back row, William Colin, Blaire Hanse, Odin Clark, Henry Myers, Jeffrey O'Brien and Demi Minton. (Photo contributed)

### Join U of I Extension for virtual lunchtime walk and talk

OGLESBY – Get this on your 2025 calendar. Join Illinois Extension Nutrition and Wellness Extension Educators, Susan Glassman and Lisa Peterson, for a fun, virtual lunchtime walk and talk. Each week, you'll discover simple yet powerful tips to boost your health and well-being, all while getting active from your home or desk. Connect with peers, stay motivated, and explore weekly topics which include:

- Energizing movement and its benefits
- Setting and crushing personal goals
- Fueling your body for all-day energy
- Getting restful sleep and managing stress
- Staying hydrated
- Celebrating every step of your wellness journey!

Step into the new year. Get ready to move, learn, and feel great at lunchtime. Step into the New Year: Virtual Walking Club meets on

Wednesdays, Jan. 15 - Feb. 19, from noon-12:45 p.m. Register at [go.illinois.edu/virtualwalking](https://go.illinois.edu/virtualwalking)

You may also call 815-224-0894 to register. If you need an accommodation to participate, please contact Susan Glassman at [susang@illinois.edu](mailto:susang@illinois.edu) or at 815-224-0894. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your access needs.

Extension offices are located in Princeton, Ottawa, Henry, and in Oglesby on the IVCC campus. The Mission of University of Illinois Extension is to provide practical education you can trust to help people, businesses and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future. University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment. Visit our website at <https://extension.illinois.edu/blmp>.

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# OBITUARIES/LOCAL NEWS

## Dr. Charles E. Lewis

MENDOTA – Dr. Charles “Chuck” Edward Lewis, 92, of Mendota, passed away Nov. 14, 2024, in Mendota.

Celebration of life for both Charles and his wife, Margaret, was held Dec 6, 2024, at the First Presbyterian Church of Mendota. An additional visitation was held Dec. 7 at the Horner-Merritt Funeral Home in Mendota. Burial was at Restland Cemetery in Mendota.

Chuck was born May 20, 1932, in Rushville, the son of Dana Mendel Lewis and Gladys Elizabeth Hersman Lewis. After growing up on the family farm in Hersman, known as Evergreen Heights, Chuck then graduated from University of Illinois with a Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine. In 1954, Chuck married his high school sweetheart, Margaret “Marggo” Elizabeth Snyder. They spent the next 67 years together raising their family and maintaining a local small and large animal veterinary practice.

Chuck is survived by three children, Bruce Lewis, MD, and his wife Rebecca Bower Lewis, MD, Debra Lewis, and Kent Lewis; nine grandchildren and five great grandchildren; three sisters, Jean Delap, Anne Ford, and Mary Garland; one brother Dana (Anita) Lewis; and many nieces and nephews whom he loved dearly.

Chuck was an avid Mendota Trojans fan, a fixture at most every game. He recently received a letterman jacket from the team honoring him for his support. The Lewis family would like to acknowledge and give special thanks to the Mendota Point Guard Club, spearheaded by Erin Strouss, who gave Dad his “Doc” Mendota Trojans jacket. Tears came to his eyes as he told us that jacket was especially dear to his heart because of what it meant for the kids to choose to spend their money that way and because he knew that it meant they wanted to honor him for being such a dedicated and loyal Trojan fan.

He was a faithful University of Illinois alumnus, supporting Nabor House fraternity and enjoyed those college basketball and football games. He also continued to love working outdoors, gardening, and maintaining his home.

In his earlier years, he won awards for tennis, bridge, shuffleboard, and bowling. He and his wife loved to visit friends and family, play bridge and watch the St. Louis Cardinals.

After training some reindeer, he and his beloved wife were in many a parade as Santa and Mrs. Claus.

His daughter taught him to play the piano in his 70s, and then taught him computer in his early 80s so that he could keep in touch with his friends, family, and grandkids. He actively continued learning throughout his entire life, because he and his wife always believed education is the key to a brighter future.

Most importantly, Chuck was a man of faith. He was a wonderful husband, father, grandfather, great grandfather and loved all his family dearly. He was kind, generous, loyal and faithful. He had a sharp wit and good sense of humor.

Visit [www.horner-merritt.com](http://www.horner-merritt.com) for online guestbook.



## Charles Swanson

MENDOTA – Charles Swanson, 85, formerly of Ohio, died Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024, at Allure of Mendota.

Visitation was held on Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024, from 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Garland Funeral Home in Walnut. The funeral followed at 1 p.m. Burial was at Union Cemetery in Ohio.

He was born on Feb. 18, 1939, in Altona, the son of Walter and Edith Swanson. He married Donna Mae Walker on March 26, 1960, in Ohio. She died April 28, 2022.

Survivors include two sons, Jim (Diana) Kinnamon of Dwight and Robert (Linda) Swanson of Mendota; three grandchildren, Brandon Swanson, Angela Rodrick and Erika Treest; six great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

He was preceded in death by his parents; wife; son, Charles Jr.; two brothers and one sister.

Charles had worked at Spartan Tool in Mendota for over 50 years before retiring. He also worked for the Village of Ohio.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to Union Cemetery, Ohio.



## Harold L. Schlesinger

MENDOTA – It is with a deep sense of sorrow that we announce the passing of Harold LeRoy Schlesinger, 87, who left us on Dec. 10, 2024, in Franklin Grove.

Cremation rites have been accorded. A memorial service was held at 11 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 17 at the Immanuel Lutheran Church, Compton. Rev Jeff Schlesinger officiated, and burial of ashes followed at Restland Cemetery. Mendota V.F.W. Post #4079 performed a flag presentation. Wasmer Funeral Home is privileged to assist the family.

Hal was born July 2, 1937, in Mendota, to Homer and Edith (Martin) Schmidt. Edith passed away shortly after his birth, and he was then lovingly raised by Harold and Mary Schlesinger. He graduated Mendota High School in 1955 and attended Wartburg College.

Hal is survived by his sister, Ruth Delhotal of Mendota; a brother, Charles (Sharon) Howarth of Pontiac; and many nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by two sisters, Mary Jean Schmidt and Norma Ecklund, and three brothers, William Schmidt, Robert Schlesinger and Daniel Schmidt.

Hal honorably served in the United States Army. During his travels he resided in California for a time but settled back in his hometown. He was a devoted member of Immanuel Lutheran Church and the American Legion.

Memorials may be directed to Immanuel Lutheran Church of Compton, or Illinois Valley Animal Rescue I.V.A.R. Condolences may be left at [wasmerfuneralhome.com](http://wasmerfuneralhome.com).



## Kevin P. Biers

MENDOTA – Kevin P. Biers, 51, of Mendota, passed away Friday, Dec. 13, 2024.

Visitation will be from 3-8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2024, at the Horner-Merritt Funeral Home, Mendota. The funeral service will take place at 11 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 19, at the First United Methodist Church of Mendota, 100 E. Sixth St., Mendota, with Pastor Mary Bohall officiating. Additional visitation will be from 10 a.m. until the time of the service Thursday morning at the church. Interment will follow in Worsley Cemetery in rural Mendota.

He was born Feb. 3, 1973, in Mendota, the son of William and Yvonne (Sondgeroth) Biers. He married Stacie Chaon daughter of Duane (Pat) Chaon and Cindy (Gene) Stephenitch on April 6, 2002, and spent 22 years deeply in love.

Kevin is survived by his wife, Stacie; two daughters, Kendall Biers and Kate Biers; his parents, William and Yvonne Biers; a brother, Cory (Becky) Biers; and several nieces and nephews.

Kevin is preceded in death by his maternal grandparents, Clint (Helen) Sondgeroth; paternal grandparents, Francis (Mary) Biers; an aunt, Patti Truckenbrod; and an uncle, Jon Hauck.

Kevin was a member of the Ironworker’s Local #444 for several years after deciding to follow in his father’s footsteps. Kevin gained most of his knowledge from his grandfather, Clint, and made a point in life to continue to share that knowledge with younger generations. Kevin spent his time on Earth either in a tree-stand hunting, spending time with his family, or making memories in his shop. He also enjoyed taking rides on his Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Often you would see him with his best friend, his fur baby, Oakley. His kindness and selflessness touched so many people. There were many things he loved but none of them compared to the love he had for his wife and daughters. He never passed up an opportunity to talk about them. Their accomplishments in his time on Earth will leave him forever proud. Kevin was described as the jack of all trades and someone who was always willing to give honest advice. He will be greatly missed by so many.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be directed to the family for a scholarship fund that will later be established for his children. Please visit [www.horner-merritt.com](http://www.horner-merritt.com) to sign the online guest book.



## Three questions about Social Security that can help you plan your retirement

By Mike Weilt

PERU – Social Security benefits are part of the retirement plan of many American workers. If you’re among the many people paying Social Security taxes, you should get an estimate of what your future benefit may be. Our retirement webpage at [www.ssa.gov/retirement](http://www.ssa.gov/retirement) is a great place to start mapping out your retirement plan. These three questions will help to guide your planning:

- What factors may affect your retirement benefits?
  - When is the right time to start receiving your retirement benefits?
  - What documents do you need to provide when you apply for retirement?
- We encourage you to use your personal my Social Security account at [www.ssa.gov/myaccount](http://www.ssa.gov/myaccount) to get an instant estimate of your future retirement benefits. You can also compare the effects of starting your retirement benefits at different ages.

We base your benefit on

how much you earned during your working career. Higher lifetime earnings result in higher benefits. If there were some years you didn’t work or had low earnings, your benefit amount may be lower than if you had worked steadily. If you never worked and did not pay Social Security taxes, and have a spouse who worked, you may be eligible for spouse’s benefits. You must be at least 62 years old, and your spouse must already be receiving retirement or disability benefits. If you are a younger spouse, you may be eligible for benefits if you have a qualifying child in your care. By a qualifying child, we mean a child who is under age 16 or who receives Social Security disability benefits.

You can learn more at [www.ssa.gov/retirement](http://www.ssa.gov/retirement). Please share this information with family and friends to help them prepare for their financial future.

(Weilt is the Social Security District Manager in Peru.)

## DEATH NOTICES

The Mendota Reporter will print DEATH NOTICES (approximately 50 words including name, age, date of death, time/date of services) free of charge. OBITUARIES will be printed at a cost of \$100 to be billed to the arranging funeral home or prepaid with cash, check or credit card. Please submit obituaries or death notices to [editor@mendotareporter.com](mailto:editor@mendotareporter.com).

See the latest obituaries on our website, [mendotareporter.com](http://mendotareporter.com)

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**Where is it... in Mendota?**

**HOW TO ENTER:**  
If you know where this scene is located in Mendota, write the answer briefly and concisely on a slip of paper and drop it off or mail it to The Mendota Reporter Office. All entries must be received no later than noon on Monday. One correct answer will be drawn each week. Prizes must be picked up at the Mendota Reporter Office.

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**Can you identify this photo?**

**LAST WEEK'S ANSWER:**  
Lookout Tower- behind smokeshop/ in front of Setchell's  
Winner: Larry Schlesinger

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# LOCAL AND AREA

## Women Inspired Network announces grant recipients

LaSALLE – Women Inspired Network, a component organization of the Starved Rock Country Community Foundation, hosted its 2024 Celebration of Giving Sunday by awarding \$9,100 in grants to local nonprofits that empower women and benefit children and teens.

Awardees included:

- Regional Office of Education 35’s Care Closet, \$3,000.
- Braveheart Children’s Advocacy Center of Princeton’s resource library, \$3,000.
- Grow Spring Valley’s Sprout program, \$2,500.

And

- Second Story Teen Center of Princeton’s Skill Building Through Crafts Program, \$600.

Educate 35’s Care Closet provides necessities for students in need, so their schooling is not interrupted. This includes hygiene products, clothing, school supplies, food, gas cards, and even pillows.

The closet benefits about 300 low-income and homeless students across LaSalle, Marshall and Putnam counties, said Assistant Regional Superintendent Ryan Myers. It also helps reduce the number of students missing school due to embarrassment about their clothing or hygiene.

Braveheart Children’s Advocacy Center of Bureau, Marshall and Putnam counties strengthens the region’s response to child abuse through prevention, intervention and advocacy.

The grant will allow Braveheart to expand its resource library by 100-150 books. The texts will focus on educational, emotional and developmental topics related to abuse, neglect and trauma.

Grow Spring Valley’s Sprout program encourages residents to conceptualize, plan and advocate for their own community project while receiving mentorship and support from Grow’s membership.

‘Grow’ President Sarah Kinkin said Sprout is focusing on teenagers and young adults aged 14-25 “to inspire and equip young leaders to identify local needs, create solutions, and foster a sense of civic responsibility and pride.”

Sprout’s first project supported a Thanksgiving drive by Hall High School students for the Hall Township Food Pantry served 25 families (154 people) and donated an additional 402 pounds of food to the pantry.

Second Story has been serving youth in Bureau County since 2009 by providing an inclusive and safe environment for companionship, games, studying and more.

Its Skill Building Through Crafts Program provides eight weeks of expert training in a variety of crafts such as scrapbooking, beaded bracelets and necklaces, mug painting, and stained glass.

WIN Grants Chair Debbie Buffington emceed the annual event at Deer Park Golf Club and WIN co-founders Pamela Beckett and Cherie Reynolds were featured speakers. Beckett said WIN has now awarded nearly \$100,000 in grants and scholarships.

Women Inspired Network is a charitable giving circle of local philanthropic women who make annual contributions to empower and enhance the quality of life for women and children.

For information, contact Starved Rock Country Community Foundation Director of Operations Janice Corrigan at (815) 252-2906, janice@srccf.org or visit srccf.org.

## Multiplier

Continued from Page A1

Assessments in La Salle County are at 32.94% of market value, based on sales of properties in 2021, 2022, and 2023. The equalization factor currently being assigned is for taxes, 2024 payable in 2025.

Last year’s equalization factor for the county was 1.0000.

The tentative factor is subject to change (1) if the County Board of Review takes actions which significantly affect the county assessments, or (2) if local officials or others can present data showing that IDOR’s estimates of the average level of assessments in the county should be adjusted. A public hearing on the tentative multiplier will be held between 20 and 30 days after the tentative factor is published in a newspaper of general circulation within the county.

A change in the equalization factor does not mean total property tax bills will increase or decrease. Tax bills are determined by local taxing bodies when they request money each year to provide services to local citizens. If the amount requested by local taxing districts is not greater than the amount received in the previous year, then total property taxes will not increase even if assessments may have increased.

The assessed value of an individual property determines what portion of the tax burden a specific taxpayer will assume. That individual’s portion of tax responsibility is not changed by the multiplier.

## Starved Rock Country Community Foundation forms partnership with Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra

LaSALLE – The Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra is partnering with the Starved Rock Country Community Foundation to support its needs.

The boards of the Illinois Valley Orchestral Association and SRCCF recently approved an agency designated non-endowed fund. To donate, visit <https://srccf.org/fund/illinois-valley-symphony-orchestra>.

IVSO is celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2024-25 with “75 Seasons of Splendor,” featuring music director and conductor Dr. Daniel Sommerville, the organization’s 18th conductor.

“For decades, IVSO musicians have enchanted local concert guests. They’ve made high-quality classical music accessible to everyone,” said SRCCF President Fran Brolley. “We are delighted to partner with an organization that has brought so much beautiful music to our region. The symphony has been a frequent recipient of grant funding from our Arts of Starved Rock Country Fund.”

Since its first season in 1949-50, IVSO has strived to “entertain and inspire the community by performing live orchestral music.” Music from Baroque, Classical, Romantic and Contemporary periods has been performed.

Local and international soloists have appeared with the Symphony and traditions – including the annual Pops Concert and the bi-annual Nutcracker ballet – have developed.

The annual Young Per-



Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra leaders met recently with Starved Rock Country Community Foundation representatives in La Salle. Left to right, are SRCCF President Fran Brolley, and board chair Reed Wilson with IVSO representatives Pamela Butler, Barbara Lukancic, Peggy Etheridge and Laurel Maze. (Photo contributed)

formers Competition and Concert began in 1968 to encourage local youth to audition as soloists and, if selected, perform with the orchestra.

The first performance of Tchaikovsky’s The Nutcracker in 1969 led to a performance of the ballet every other year with local dance academies supplying dancers and choreographers.

The orchestra also performs at area schools.

Diamond anniversary concerts begin at 3 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 10 in LaSalle-Peru Township

High School’s Matthiesen Auditorium with “Magnificence of the Masters” featuring west coast virtuoso clarinetist and Illinois Valley native Cory Tiffin.

Starved Rock Country Community Foundation facilitates philanthropy across La Salle, Bureau, Putnam, Marshall, Lee and Livingston counties by “Connecting people who care with causes that

matter.”

Since 2015, the foundation has created 120 charitable funds supporting fine arts, mental and physical health, education, entrepreneurship, culinary arts, downtown revitalization, disability services, disaster relief, and more.

For information, contact SRCCF President Fran Brolley at (815) 252-2906 or [fran@srccf.org](mailto:fran@srccf.org) or visit [srccf.org](http://srccf.org).

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OPINION



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Graves-Hume Library cites problem – 1994

(The following is from Jessica Nashold's *Backtracks & Sidetracks* column reprinted from Dec. 22, 2004.)  
**By Jessica Nashold**

Kathy Berggren, director of the new Graves-Hume Library, spoke about a growing problem during a December meeting of the board. An increasing number of parents had been leaving their children at the library and were failing to pick them up at closing time. Also, some of the children were bringing in food, which is not allowed. On one occasion a fight broke out between two of the children. Berggren was directed to call police if this happened again. Although a rule was already in place, requiring that children under the age of 6 must be accompanied by an adult, the board considered increasing the age requirement.

**The library is not a babysitting service.**

Mendotan Jack Westerman survived the attack on U.S. ships while aboard the USS Maryland, in Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941. He was president of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association in Atlanta, where he was employed, in 1991. He was asked to arrange a meeting between American veterans and former combatants on the 50th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack. This led to an appearance on NBC's Today Show.

A meeting in Hawaii was arranged at which Westerman met and became a friend of Shimsaku Yamakawa, who has been assigned to the mission that bombed the USS Maryland.

In 1994, plans were underway for a meeting between American veterans and their Japanese adversaries on the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, in September 1995.

**Westerman was asked to serve as liaison for this meeting.**

Three new courses were introduced at MHS. A faculty recommendation was

Backtracks & Sidetracks

required to enroll in a class called Language Enhancement. It was designed to improve the student's grasp of grammar and syntax. A course in Recent U.S. History (RUSH) would try to keep up with rapid changes. Life Skills would focus on approaches useful in coping with modern day problems.

Mendota Agri-Kids 4-H was recognized for its contribution to community service during 4-H Day at the University of Illinois in Champaign. Under the supervision of their leader, Carol Ramer, the Agri-Kids had cleaned up five miles of roadside debris and assisted in a Red Cross blood drive. Members were Mitchell Melau, Michelle Wujek, Jessalyn Ganschow, Justin Ganschow, Michelle Ramer and Melinda Ramer.

The Trojan Tattler let it be known that more reporters would be needed to cover happenings at MHS in the second semester.

A public meeting to address "gang problems" was held Dec. 15, 1994, at the high school. The two-hour presentation by Fred Hefner, of the Joliet Police Department, was attended by 75 school officials, law enforcement personnel, clergymen, parents and children. It was sponsored by the Illinois Valley Crime Prevention Commission, Mendota Police Department and Mendota High School.

Hefner applauded the sponsors for "recognizing a problem before it gets started." He outlined a number of ways to recognize possible gang involvement before it could become serious.

**Graffiti appearing locally was being dealt with.**

At Northbrook School, Principal Ernie Engstrom explained the TAP (Teachers Assistance Period) at the end of the school day was proving valuable. Also at Northbrook, Dave Brewer was demonstrating a non-traditional approach to archeology. Students were able to handle tools used by archeologists on their "digs" and check out some of their "finds."

When the Plan Commission met on Dec. 15, 1994, it recommended the annexation of a tract south of the Tri-County Fairgrounds, to accommodate a 550-unit adult mobile home park. At a Mendota City Council meeting on Dec. 19, the aldermen discussed the matter for 45 minutes, then voted 7-0 against the annexation. One of the developers, John Martin, had "no comment" following the vote. However, he later asked Alderman Jack Kellen if he should make a new proposal. After hearing city attorney Mike Guilfoyle state that acting without knowing more was "not the thing to do," as well as questions from the public –

**Martin implied he would submit a new proposal with more detailed information.**

Dennis M. Jones, who had been owner of Fred Brown & Son for five years, announced he would leave Mendota for a business opportunity in St. Petersburg, Fla., after the first of the year.

Secretary of State George Ryan said increased penalties for "second time offenders" would become effective on Jan. 1, 1995. If drivers were apprehended in a violation after licenses had been suspended or revoked, there would be higher fines and possible jail time.

Trump has fewer obstructions than in 2016

**By Rich Lowry**  
It's not 2016 again.

President-elect Donald Trump is off to a strong start with markedly fewer obstructions than the last time he won.

In football terms, he has a lot of green space ahead of him. In nautical terms, it's plain sailing. In political terms, it might not be a honeymoon, but no one is throwing any furniture, either.

Naturally, there are all sorts of potential pitfalls. Some of Trump's more controversial cabinet picks could, if confirmed, blow up once they are in place. (Does anyone believe that Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s tenure at the Department of Health and Human Services will be smooth and uneventful?) Republicans only have two votes to spare in the House. Events will take a hand, and so will Trump's mercurial nature.

We are in a much different place than eight years ago, though. When Trump won in 2016, the shock to the system was so great that the body politic reacted fiercely and reflexively. Trump was treated as a virus and every antibody attacked him, from activists in the street to the director of the FBI.

This time, the reaction is much more muted. Despite all the fevered warnings of an existential threat to democracy, when former top Kamala Harris advisers did an election post-mortem on the podcast "Pod Save America," they talked about how they could do better next time -- in other words, there will be a next time.

Despite the insistence of his enemies that Trump can't be "normalized," he's been an inescapable fixture of American politics for about a decade now, with at least another four years ahead (he could well continue to dominate the Republican Party even after his second term ends).

Like it or not, Trump is mainstream. He shows up at those most American events -- football games and MMA fights -- and gets applause. He eats McDonald's. He himself is part of the pop culture.

he won the election, or any effort to get so-called faithless electors to keep him from assuming office.

There is no cloud of illegitimacy over his victory. He won more convincingly than in 2016, carrying the popular vote and denying his opponents the opportunity to say he only won via the technicality and anachronism of the Electoral College.

There has been no widely believed conspiracy theory -- spun out of vaporous nonsense and hysteria -- that his victory was the result of collusion with a hostile foreign power.

Relatedly, this time Trump doesn't have a bogus investigation hanging over his head. The Russiagate probe blighted the initial years of his first term. Now, the legal decks are clearing. Whereas Special Counsel Robert Mueller was about to enter the stage after Trump won in 2016, Special Counsel Jack Smith is exiting it. As Trump heads into the White House a second time, he is going to be less legally encumbered than he's been in years.

In 2016, Trump got elected despite a catastrophic unfavorable rating in the polling. This time, he was closer to a break-even favorable/unfavorable rating in some pre-election surveys, and he's ticked upward since. In a recent CBS poll, 59% of people said they approve of his transition. If in 2016 it felt like Trump faced a stiff headwind at the outset, this time he has the wind -- or at least a pleasant breeze -- at his back.

Trump is already looming much larger than the incumbent president who, with the exception of the pardon of his son, has nearly disappeared. When Biden shuffles into retirement, he won't, like Hillary Clinton, be complaining that Trump stole the election from him. If Biden is going to be bitter about anything, it will be about the machinations that denied him a Democratic nomination that he had already won.

None of this means that Trump is guaranteed success in the crucial first two years of his presidency. But the conditions favor him in a way they decidedly didn't eight years ago.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.  
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# LOCAL AND AREA

## IVCC champions graduate in health struggle, president's gesture 'spoke of hope'

OGLESBY – While most guys his age are nailing down job references or securing endorsements for college applications, Jonathan Hammond is asking for access to a drug that could save his life.

The 29-year-old from Peru is circulating an on-line petition in support of his quest for Imlifidase, a drug that would suppress an overreactive immune system so his body could accept a new kidney. Without the drug, the chances of finding an organ his body will not reject are slim, leaving him dependent on dialysis treatment.

Not long ago, Hammond was working full-time, but his health declined this past year and he stopped working. He tires easily so he does not enjoy the activities, like cooking or playing piano, that he used to do. “The simple stuff -- getting up and making a small breakfast -- takes a lot out of me.”

His poor health shattered his plans to graduate with this Illinois Valley Community College class in Spring 2024. But what hurt more than being overcome by illness and withdrawing from the ceremony minutes before it started was that he felt like he broke a promise to IVCC President Dr. Tracy Morris.

“I did not want you to think I didn’t fulfill my end of the bargain,” he would apologize in an email to her later.

Hammond met Morris at her investiture, and after the ceremony she invited him into one of her famous selfies. “Let’s take one now and another on Graduation Day,” she promised.

He remembers the impact her speech and personality had on him that day. “I felt so much hope and inspiration.”



**A chronic illness threatened to derail Jonathan Hammond's graduation hopes, but encouragement and support from IVCC faculty and staff propelled him to his academic goal. Recently, a thoughtful gesture from President Dr. Tracy Morris (pictured, with Hammond) particularly inspired hope and optimism as they celebrated his accomplishment. (Photo contributed)**

After the Graduation Day plan fell through, and when Hammond was feeling better, Morris arranged a mini graduation ceremony for him. They posed for another selfie, she in her regalia and he in his cap and gown. Hammond still chokes up thinking of the gesture. “My mom and my friends got to come. That little interaction spoke of hope.”

Now Morris has reached out to friends, strangers and college employees to help by signing a change.org petition urging the Food and Drug Administration to consider making the Imlifidase supply available for individuals like Hammond who have this as their only option. Hammond said his doctors back the effort so he can become eligible for a transplant and receive an organ that has a chance to survive. Such pleas to bypass the FDA’s lengthy trial process usually come after all other options have been exhausted.

In the few weeks it has been posted, his petition has more than 400 signatures,

some from as far away as Sweden. “I see that people want to help see this go through, not just for me but for thousands in similar situations.”

Hammond said Morris’ championship reflects how the College gave him strength to move forward when his life was overwhelming. At IVCC, Hammond found “a more inclusive and supportive environment than I have felt anywhere before and that gave me the tools to thrive academically even when my health struggles made things impossible.”

The short commute to IVCC’s campus fit into a day with 12-hour dialysis treatments and a job. College got him out of the house “and made me feel normal – like a real boy!” he quotes from Pinocchio.

Being housebound now has put his university studies on hold. “I cannot reach my academic potential at this point, but IVCC has me halfway there.”

E. coli food poisoning contracted when he was in pre-school triggered the

autoimmune disease that caused his kidneys to fail and introduced him to dialysis and organ transplant lists. A photograph taken around that time shows a laughing curly-haired Hammond and his twin sister Taler dancing and tooting plastic music instruments while he is tethered to a dialysis machine.

“It was hard growing up with a chronic illness, but I did not know any different,” he remembers. “I went through my own ‘angry teenager’ period. I missed out on a lot, and I had to grow up fast.” Unlike his healthy sister, he often missed school and spent weeks in a hospital.

To the world, “I would hide my bad days and avoid talking about the bad parts, because I wanted to be someone who happened to have kidney disease, not be defined by it. I wanted to be known for other great things, like being a great piano player or being smart or kind or crafty.” Now he’s trying not to isolate himself from people who could help him and other transplant seekers.

This would be Hammond’s third transplant. His first came when he was 11, just before a cancer diagnosis and chemotherapy. He survived the cancer but lost the kidney. The second transplant in 2015 dialed up his optimism about a new lease on life. “I was attending school, had an internship, and was learning and growing and doing all I could. I had so much energy and freedom!”

That kidney failed after his insurer stopped paying for one immunosuppressive drug that kept rejection at bay, and he went back on dialysis for the fourth time in 25 years. The process now confines him to his room, attached to a machine

**“Some days everything makes me mad and some days, it is what it is. I know I cannot control everything, but I can control doing my treatments that make me feel better.”**  
—Jonathan Hammond

that performs as his kidneys cannot.

He keeps busy with friends, family genealogy, and fashioning Christmas ornaments. When he can, playing music “takes me out of the gloom and doom and expresses what I feel.” But discouragement hovers. “Some days everything makes me mad and some days, it is what it is. I know I cannot control everything, but I can control doing my treatments that make me feel better.”

Still, waiting is a roller coaster ride between hope and despair. He is cheered by comments on his petition. “I feel loved. And the one thing I have never felt in life is alone.”

His illness has reshaped his career goal. Now he wants to focus on helping all patients get the care and medications they need. “That is a wonderful life’s mission for me!”

Hammond’s petition can be found at [change.org/imlifidaseforlife](https://change.org/imlifidaseforlife).



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## DINING & entertainment guide



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## IVCC gives winter break schedule

OGLESBY – Illinois Valley Community College’s winter break begins this week.

Campus services will operate through 4:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 19, and the Main Campus and Ottawa Center will then be closed from Dec. 20 through Jan. 1, 2025. Classes ended with final exams during the week of Dec. 9.

Individuals needing official transcripts can order online during the closure at <https://www.ivcc.edu/admissions/transcript.php>

The campus reopens Thursday, Jan. 2, 2025, and classes begin a week later, on Thursday, Jan. 9. The campus will be closed the morning of Jan. 8 for an all-campus in-service and student support services and offices will open at noon.



Front row L-R: Riley Klein, Rose Leffelman, Lexi Willey, back row L-R, Cooper Whitney, Mary Reglin, Chris Klein, Lisa Quest and Julie Burkardt.

As you can see from our photo, we are missing someone. Our “fearless leader”, Larry Leffelman, passed away this past May after a very short battle with cancer. He handed over the reins to Chris several years before that, and always said, “It’s your decision, you’re the CEO now” whenever she asked his opinion. We miss him coming into the office every day and asking, “What’s going on in here”, or asking one of the girls if she had a new “frock” on. But most of all we miss him telling us how proud he was of how well we do our jobs. He was a tough boss, but we learned how to “do it right the first time” in order to save work, time, money, and trouble. The daughter of one of our old customers said, “Our dads were ‘old school’ and you just can’t find that anymore”. Well, we are still “old school” at Leffelman & Associates, where we are here to help our customers. We don’t look at a customer as a dollar amount and decide if they are worth helping. We look at each of our customers as persons who have insurance needs that we are here to help them fulfill. We thank our customers for their support and pray that everyone stays safe and healthy this season. Hug your family members and tell them you love them while you have them. And have a wonderful Christmas and a new year filled with health and happiness.

*May the Christmas Spirit be with you and your family today and throughout the New Year!*

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# ENTERTAINMENT

## Hollywood

**By Tony Rizzo**  
HOLLYWOOD--When I was 17, I met an 18-year-old girl named Liza at the Hotel St. Moritz on Central Park, and we walked several times from there to Broadway's Great White Way. She told me how she dreamed of doing a Broadway play someday. Imagine my surprise when, two years later, I saw a marquee that read "Flora the Red Menace" starring Liza Minnelli! I didn't realize I'd been walking with Judy Garland and Vincente Minnelli's daughter.

Now everyone can see how this incredible talent became a superstar in the new documentary "Liza: A Truly Terrific Absolutely True Story." The documentary takes us through her 50-year career and features interviews with her sister Lorna Luft (daughter of Sidney Luft, who produced Garland's comeback film "A Star Is Born" in 1954), the late Chita Rivera, Michael Feinstein, Darren Criss and Ben Vereen.

It also includes footage from her 1978 European

tour, when she was riding the crest of her "Cabaret" success and her Oscar win for it. It's set to open in New York and Los Angeles on Jan. 24, 2025.

\*\*\*

"Happy Days" are here again! Seventy-five-year-old Anson Williams, who was formally Potsy on "Happy Days" and directed 31 episodes of the ABC Family series "The Secret Life of the American Teenager," is joining forces with 51-year-old Brian Austin Green (who played David Silver on "Beverly Hills, 90210"). They will star in the horror-thriller film "The Three Killer Pigs," which follows a local farmer who puts a blood oath in place when the killer pigs return. Williams and Green serve as the producers as well.

\*\*\*

Also making a comeback is Arnie Hammer, who has landed his first acting job since a #MeToo scandal derailed his career three years ago. He'll co-star with two-time Emmy Award winner William H. Macy

("Shameless") and Thomas Jane ("Troppo") in the western film "Frontier Crucible," which is based on the novel "Desert Stake-Out." It looks like Hammer no longer has to sell timeshares in the Caymans!

\*\*\*

Ben Affleck distracted himself with work as his marriage to Jennifer Lopez was dissolving. First, he starred in the action/thriller "The Accountant 2" with Oscar winner J. K. Simmons, which wrapped shooting on Aug. 16. Then he starred in the crime thriller "RIP" with Matt Damon, which just wrapped on Dec. 11. Affleck and Damon kept extra busy by producing both films as well.

They even found time to be the producers of the musical "Kiss of the Spider Woman," with -- guess who? -- Lopez. I wonder if Affleck named his film "RIP" (which stands for "rest in peace") because he was thinking of his marriage to Lopez. How J.Lo can you go?

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**By Dana Jackson**  
**Q:** Is it true that former "Bachelorette" Jenn Tran is dating her partner from "Dancing with the Stars"? I hope so; they were so cute together. -- **K.S.**

**A:** While Jenn Tran and dance pro Sasha Farber haven't confirmed that they're a couple, it certainly appears so. If anything, they're great friends who recently attended the premiere of the movie "Wicked" together, as well as a Taylor Swift concert in Vancouver, Canada.

They both deserve some happiness. Tran had her heart broken when her fiancé from "The Bachelorette" ended their engagement right before she was cast on "DWTS," while Farber's marriage to fellow dance pro Emma Slater was dissolved in 2023.

\*\*\*

**Q:** Whatever happened to actor Denis Leary? I loved his firefighter drama series but haven't seen him in anything since. -- **L.W.**

**A:** Denis Leary's best



Tran

known work "Rescue Me," which he co-created with Peter Tolan and starred in as troubled 9/11 first responder Tommy Gavin, ended in 2011. Since this time, he's kept busy with many other projects both in front of and behind the camera -- and also behind the mic voicing Diego the saber-tooth tiger in the animated "Ice Age" movies.

His next series on FX was "Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll," in which he played an aging rock singer who recruits his daughter for his new band. After this, he starred in the short-lived Fox sitcom "The Moodys," which followed a dysfunctional family, before landing a stint as a detective on "Law & Order: Organized Crime." He followed it with a role on the gritty family crime drama "Animal Kingdom."

Leary started his career as a stand-up comedian before landing his breakout role in the comedy film "The Ref" in 1994. He's returning to his comedic roots early next year in a new comedy series on Fox, opposite Catherine Tate ("The Office") and Danny Pudi ("Community"). It sounds like he's perfectly cast as a "loud-mouth Army

colonel" who is sent to a base in the Netherlands "with no real purpose."

"Going Dutch" premieres on Jan. 2, 2025, as part of a comedy block with Joel McHale's sitcom "Animal Control."

\*\*\*

**Q:** Who is the man with the gray hair in the new Charles Schwab commercials who gets angry every time the company is mentioned? He looks so familiar! -- **D.D.**

**A:** Salvator Xuereb plays "Carl the Broker" in a series of commercials that are currently airing for the financial services company Charles Schwab. He's a character actor who has guest-starred in numerous television series, most recently as a smarmy doctor in "9-1-1," a CIA officer in "NCIS: Los Angeles," and Mr. Stewart in "Teen Wolf."

He's also appeared in movies like "Captain America: The Winter Soldier," but his TV credits far exceed his movie credits. Perhaps you recognize him as part of the cast from the series "Pensacola: Wings of Gold," in which he played a demolitions expert nicknamed Buddha.

## Couch Theater

"It Ends with Us" (PG-13) -- This romantic drama from Justin Baldoni ("Will & Harper") is a film adaptation of the 2016 bestselling novel by Colleen Hoover. Blake Lively ("Deadpool & Wolverine") stars as florist Lily Bloom, who recently lays her abusive dad to rest. With their complicated relationship at the forefront of her mind, Lily meets Ryle (Baldoni) and forms a relationship with him, even though Ryle is bad-tempered. As Ryle's anger issues escalate into physical abuse, Lily is forced to either take a stand against him or submit to the same toxic cycle that enveloped her mother. The film, out now, received mixed reviews from critics, while the story's powerful message against domestic violence was drowned out by the on-set drama between Baldoni and Lively. (Netflix)

"We Live in Time" (R) -- Here's another romantic drama that's sure to bring on the tears! Starring two young powerhouses, Andrew Garfield ("Spider-Man: No Way Home") and Florence Pugh ("Dune: Part Two"), the film follows couple Tobias (Garfield) and Almut (Pugh)

throughout 10 years of their relationship. Viewers watch along in a non-linear fashion as Tobias and Almut cross paths for the first time, fall in love, and start a family. So, what's the tear-jerking catch? During their relationship, Almut receives a diagnosis of ovarian cancer, leaving their future hanging in the balance. Most critics gave the film positive reviews, commending Garfield and Pugh's magnetic performances. Out now to rent. (Apple TV+)

"Red One" (PG-13) -- This Christmas movie out now with Dwayne Johnson ("Moana 2") and Chris Evans ("Pain Hustlers") takes viewers on an exciting holiday adventure! As the head of Santa Claus' security detail, Callum Drift (Johnson) finds himself at a loss when his jolly boss gets kidnapped by a black ops team on Christmas Eve. The North Pole team tracks down the person who compromised their position, a hacker named Jack O'Malley (Evans); Jack agrees to help Callum find Santa for double the payment. As clues lead them to a winter witch named Gryla (Kiernan Shipka), they'll need all the Christmas magic and wonder

they can to free Santa from her icy grip. J.K. Simmons ("Saturday Night") makes a hilarious (and buff) Santa. (Amazon Prime Video)

"Juror No. 2" (PG-13) -- Even pushing 95 years old, director Clint Eastwood ("Cry Macho") still seems to have a few tricks up his sleeve! While this thriller didn't impress at the box office, it did move many critics with its intriguingly twisted story. Nicholas Hoult ("The Menu") leads the film as journalist Justin Kemp, who gets called for jury duty on a case involving a woman named Kendall Carter. Kendall was found dead under a bridge after a fight with her boyfriend, who is the main suspect. But when prosecutor Faith Killebrew (Toni Collette) begins to lay out the case, Justin is horror-struck to realize that he might be responsible for Kendall's death, as he recalls hitting something with his car at the same bar on the same night she died. Will he speak the truth or watch an innocent man get convicted instead? Premieres Dec. 20. (Max)

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## • Trivia Test •

1. GEOGRAPHY: What is the northernmost capital city in the world?
  2. U.S. STATES: Which state is the driest?
  3. MOVIES: In the movie "It's a Wonderful Life," what is the name of the angel who saves George Bailey?
  4. LITERATURE: Which American novelist also wrote under the pen name Edgar Box?
  5. SCIENCE: What is the process called in which plants lose water through their leaves?
  6. HISTORY: What was the name of the international group that was supposed to keep the peace after World War I?
  7. TELEVISION: Which TV sitcom featured a holiday episode titled "Abed's Uncontrollable Christmas"?
  8. ASTRONOMY: What is it called when a group of stars forms a pattern?
  9. MUSIC: What is the top-selling holiday song of all time?
  10. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: How many years are in a millennium?
- Answers
1. Reykjavik, Iceland.
  2. Nevada, with an average of 10 inches of rain a year.
  3. Clarence Obody.
  4. Gore Vidal.
  5. Transpiration.
  6. The League of Nations.
  7. "Community."
  8. Constellation.
  9. "White Christmas" by Bing Crosby.
  10. 1,000.
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## King Crossword

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## Strange But True

**By Lucie Winborne**

\* You're more likely to have weirder, scarier and sexier dreams when sleeping on your stomach.

\* The cymothoa exigua, a parasite that severs the blood vessels of a fish's tongue and becomes a new functional tongue, is the only known parasite capable of replacing an entire organ.

\* Are you a java junkie? Scientists found specific genes that are more caffeine-loving than others, so addiction to it might be genetic. In other words, you can go ahead and blame your parents for your coffee obsession.

\* "Family Feud" host Richard Dawson met his second wife, Gretchen Johnson, when she was a contestant on the show in 1981. And yes, he did kiss her.

\* After four years of planning and two months of working nightly from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., a team of hackers at MIT turned their Earth and Planetary Sciences Department building into a giant, multicolored, playable Tetris game.

\* It is considered unlucky to clean your house on the Chinese New Year. You risk sweeping away the good luck of the coming year.

\* "Gigi" author Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette could only write after she had plucked fleas off her dog.

\* If you pour cold water into a person's ear, their eyes will move in the direction of the opposite ear. If you pour warm water into their ear, their eyes will move toward that ear. Used to test for brain damage, this process is called "caloric stimulation."

\* Some areas in Scotland and Japan switched to blue street lights at night and saw a decrease in crime and suicide rates.

\*\*\*

Thought for the Day: "I realized that if I wait until I am no longer afraid to act, write, speak, be, I'll be sending messages on the Ouija board, cryptic complaints from the other side." -- Audre Lorde

### Happy 21st Birthday Michelle!



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Love, Joey



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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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### King Crossword

**Solution time: 25 mins.**

Answers

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**Answers**

1. Reykjavik, Iceland.  
2. Nevada, with an average of 10 inches of rain a year.  
3. Clarence Obody.  
4. Gore Vidal.  
5. Transpiration.  
6. The League of Nations.  
7. "Community."  
8. Constellation.  
9. "White Christmas" by Bing Crosby.  
10. 1,000.

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# SOCIAL NEWS

## Diabetes support group plans Jan. 9 meeting at OSF Saint Paul

MENDOTA — Learn diabetes prevention and management skills from University of Illinois Extension Nutrition and Wellness Educator Susan Glassman, MS Ed, CHES and OSF HealthCare Clinical Dietitian Jennifer Scully, RD/LDN CDCES. Meet with your peers and share practical tips and advice with others who are living with diabetes.

The Diabetes Support Group Meeting is offered at OSF HealthCare, Saint Paul Medical Center, Conference Room C, 1401 E. 12th St., Mendota, on Thursday, Jan. 9 from 9-10 a.m.

Register at [go.illinois.edu/diabetessupport](http://go.illinois.edu/diabetessupport) or call 815-224-0894.

This month's theme is "Back on Track." Topics to be discussed include:

- Focus on goals for diet, exercise, and sleep to avoid feeling overwhelmed
- Find your balance with

getting back on a daily routine after the holidays

If you need an accommodation to participate, please contact Glassman at [susang@illinois.edu](mailto:susang@illinois.edu) or 815-224-0889. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your access needs.

Extension offices are located in Princeton, Ottawa, Henry, and in Oglesby on the IVCC campus. The Mission of University of Illinois Extension is to provide practical education you can trust to help people, businesses and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future. University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

For more information, go online at <https://extension.illinois.edu/blmp>. Serving Bureau, LaSalle, Marshall and Putnam counties.



Signing Christmas cards for veterans, left to right, are DAR members Alice Giberson, Ruth Meinhardt, Leslie Althaus and Lonnie Schaefer. (Photo contributed)

## Local DAR chapter names DAR Good Citizenship winners; signs cards for vets

MENDOTA — The Fort du Rocher Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution met Dec. 7 at the First Presbyterian Church. Regent Donna Jungnickel presided over the meeting. The chapter currently has 39 members.

Amanda Simpson reported the DAR Good Citizenship winner is Jordan Ann Whaley from LaSalle-Peru, Emma Jacobs from Earlville, and Anthony Kelson from Mendota. Whaley's essay has advanced to the district.

The Patriot minutes told about Lily McIlhane Bowan who had born in Ireland c.1705. She came to Pennsylvania with her stepfather and siblings.

She was an expert spinner. She owned slaves which made it possible to have funds and provide patriotic service. After 1779 she purchased 800 acres and moved along the Great Road in the middle fork of Holston. The first missionaries to the settlement had services in a ballroom named for her.

The conservation minute told what is in fall leaves and how they benefit yards.

The deadline for the March newsletter will be Feb. 15, 2025. The chapter needs three or four members to serve on the nominating committee for the 2025-2027 office terms.

After the meeting, members enjoyed

a delicious potluck for Christmas. They also signed Christmas cards for the Illinois Veterans Home residents.

The next meeting will be at 10 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 8, 2025, at the Graves Hume Library, Mendota. Lori Perry will be helping with paper research for supplementals.

The Fort du Rocher web page may be viewed at <http://www.fortdurocher-chaptersdar.com>. Any woman over 18 years of age whose lineage traces back to a Revolutionary War patriot, who wishes to learn more about Daughters of the American Revolution is invited to attend the next meeting or go online to [www.dar.org](http://www.dar.org)

## Barker family to present Christmas event in Kasbeer

KASBEER — "Christmas with the Barker Family" is an hour-long program of stories, dramas, and songs performed on Sunday, Dec. 22, at 6:30 p.m. in the fellowship hall of Kasbeer Community Church, Kasbeer.

The program will be a mixture of secular and sa-

cred seasonal joy, followed by refreshments. Performers include Jeff and Karen Barker, residents of rural Van Orin and retired theatre professors from Northwestern College.

Joseph and Kay Barker from Columbus, Ohio, are founders of Musicologie, a

music education company.

Joseph and Kay have performed nationally as the band Bella Ruse. Jackson Nickolay and Hannah Barker Nickolay are from Holland, Mich., and are founders of Wayfolk Arts, a community of artist-theologians.

The program will include O. Henry's classic Christmas tale "Gift of the Magi," several monologues drawn from characters in the biblical Christmas story, and special musical performances along with audience participation. All are welcome.

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Left to Right: Tyler Full, Jackie Near, Mike Wasmer, Mary Ann Baughan, Jonathan McConville

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# THE BACK PAGE

## POLICE BLOTTER

**DRIVING WHILE LICENSE REVOKED**  
Rachel N. Kaufman, 44, of 1101 Third St., Mendota, was charged with driving while license revoked at 8:20 a.m. Dec. 12 after police officers conducted an investigation into an incident that occurred on Dec. 10 near the intersection of 13th Avenue and Jefferson Street. The subject was released with a LaSalle County court date.

**NO VALID DRIVER'S LICENSE**  
Jason W. Gruner Jr., 29, of 701 Meadowview Drive, Apt. 610, Mendota, was charged with driving with no valid driver's license after a traffic stop at Meriden Street and Wisconsin Avenue at 8:45 p.m. Dec. 13. The subject was released with a LaSalle County court date.

**FAILURE TO REPORT ACCIDENT**  
Elizabeth Medina, 35, of 107 Division St., Mendota,

was charged with failure to report an accident to police authority after police officers received a call for service at 201 Fifth Ave. at 11:49 p.m. Dec. 13. The subject was released with a LaSalle County court date.

**DOMESTIC BATTERY**  
Avery J. Barrett, 30, of 502 10th Ave., Mendota, was charged with domestic battery after police officers responded to a call for service at 815 Washington St., Apt. 3, at 10:30 a.m. Dec. 15. The subject was transported to the LaSalle County jail to appear before a judge.

**THEFT UNDER \$500**  
Alejandro M. Gonzalez, 34, of 1108 Sixth St., Mendota, was charged with theft under \$500 at 4:19 p.m. Dec. 15 after police officers conducted an investigation into an earlier matter. The subject was released with a LaSalle County court date.

## Illinois students gain in English, lag in math, graduating more, truant less

By KEVIN BESSLER  
*The Center Square*  
SPRINGFIELD — An overview of the state of students in Illinois schools has been released, and officials are saying the highlight is the proficiency rate for English language arts for middle schoolers.

The Illinois State Board of Education published the 2024 Illinois Report Card earlier this fall. The report showed Illinois students in grades 3-8 charting the highest-ever proficiency rate in English language arts, with officials attributing the gains to the statewide focus on improving literacy. Students in grades 3-8 achieved a proficiency rate of 40.9%, the highest ever since students began taking the Illinois Assessment of Readiness in 2019. "Illinois has seen tremendous, nation-leading recovery in English language arts, thanks to the talented teachers, principals, and superintendents in schools across the state who have worked diligently to implement shifts in their literacy practices," said state Superintendent of Education Tony Sanders.

Illinois' high school graduation rate reached an all-time, 14-year high at 87.7%. Steady gains for Black students over the past six years have driven the increases in the graduation rate. The rate of ninth graders on track to graduate has also risen steadily and exceeds the pre-pandemic rate.

Participation in Career and Technical Education and in advanced coursework continued to rise in 2024, also contributing

to statewide gains in the graduation rate. Illinois students participating in CTE have higher graduation rates than their peers.

The report card shows that English language arts and math recovery in high school continue to lag. Proficiency rates in high school have trended down since 2019, and slightly smaller percentages of high school students met or exceeded grade-level standards last year, compared to the year before.

ISBE attributes the phenomenon of rising graduation rates yet lagging proficiency rates in part to the structure of the states' accountability system, which incentivizes graduation but not growth in high schools.

Chronic absenteeism saw significant improvement for the second year, declining another 7% from 28.3% in 2023 to 26.3% in 2024. Chronic absenteeism skyrocketed nationwide during the pandemic and has yet to reach pre-pandemic levels.

Illinois schools enrolled greater numbers of English learners and more Hispanic, Asian and multiracial students in the 2023-24 school year. Illinois has seen an influx of migrants since August 2022.

As ISBE highlights the successes of the latest data, some are saying there is a long road ahead. According to the Illinois Policy Institute, as students returned to class in August, there were 35% of students grades 3-8 who could read at grade level in 2023, and only 27% met proficiency in math.



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# SPORTS



The Mendota varsity boys' basketball team finished in seventh place in the Hall Colmone Classic held Dec. 7-14 in Spring Valley. Front row, left to right, are assistant coach Pat Reeder, assistant coach Drake O'Donnell, assistant coach Nick Ganz, head coach Steve Wasmer, assistant coach Evan Carroll, assistant coach Ryan Reeder, assistant coach Nate Hachenberger. Middle row, manager Dell Dennis, Johan Cortez, Alex Beetz, Grady Jones, Cam Kelly, Evan McPheeters. Back row, Keegan Beetz, Aden Tillman, Cole Tillman, Drew Becker, Jonas Fitzgerald, Dane Doyle, Braiden Freeman. (Reporter photo)

## Trojan win 2 of 4 in Colmone Classic

### ❑ Mendota outlasts Princeton, 58-56, in seventh-place game

SPRING VALLEY – Mendota won two out of four games and finished in seventh place in the Hall Colmone Classic held Dec. 7-14 at Spring Valley.

After an opening-round win over Putnam County on Dec. 7, the Trojans concluded pool play with a 77-72 overtime loss to Rock Falls on Dec. 11.

The Rockets held a 20-17 lead after the first eight-minute session as Ryken Howard poured in 11 of his team's points. The Trojans heated up in the second period, particularly Aden Tillman, who connected on four shots from three-point land to vault Mendota into a 38-35 halftime lead.

The seesaw affair went back to Rock Falls' favor as it outscored Mendota, 18-11, in third quarter to grab a 53-49 lead with one quarter left to play. The Trojans managed to claw their way back in the final frame behind an eight-point period from Cole Tillman and the game was tied at 65-all after regulation.

In the overtime session, the Rockets scored 11 points compared to seven for Mendota to pull out the victory.

Cole Tillman finished with 25 points for the Trojans, while Aden Tillman ended with seven three-pointers and 22 markers. Dane Doyle chipped in with nine tallies.

\*\*\*

Mendota and conference foe Kewanee hooked up in the third round of the tournament on Dec. 12 and

another tight contest went to the Boilers, 57-52.

The game was tied at 14-14 after the opening stanza and then Kewanee took a 30-26 advantage to the locker room. The Trojans made up the difference in the third quarter and the two teams went to the fourth knotted at 43-all. But in the final period, Mendota netted just nine points and Kewanee connected for 14 to claim the win.

The Trojans had a balanced scoring attack, led by Aden Tillman with 16 points. He dropped in four shots from three-point range. Cole Tillman was next with 13 points, while Drew Becker provided 10 tallies.

\*\*\*

The Trojans (5-3) battled with another Three Rivers Conference opponent, Princeton, in the seventh-place contest and

Mendota rallied for a 58-56 triumph on Dec. 14.

The two teams played to a 17-17 draw after the first quarter before just a nine-point second period saw the Trojans fall behind, 32-26, at the break. Princeton was able to add a point to its lead and owned a 47-40 advantage with just eight minutes to go, but Mendota hit four three-point bombs in the fourth to outscore the Tigers, 18-9, and come away with the win. Princeton's Jordan Reinhardt launched a three-point attempt at the buzzer, but the ball rimmed off.

Cole Tillman, who finished with a team-high 20 points, pumped in a pair of treys in the fourth, as did Aden Tillman.

Cam Kelly hit two shots from beyond the arc and ended with 11 points for the Trojans, while Aden Tillman

had nine points and Braiden Freeman supplied eight markers.

#### Final-day results

11th place – Bureau Valley 65, Putnam County 35; 9th place – Chillicothe IVC 65, St. Bede 55; 5th place – Kewanee 54, Hall 53; 3rd place – Rock Falls 60, Eureka 53; 1st place – Fieldcrest 48, LaSalle-Peru 38

#### All-Tournament Team

Mendota freshman Cole Tillman was one of 10 players named to the all-tournament team. Others achieving the honor were Eddie Lortin of Fieldcrest (MVP), Kuitim Heald of Rock Falls, Jordan Reinhardt of Princeton, Cohen Alstat of Eureka, Mikey Hartman of LaSalle-Peru, Braden Curran of Hall, Jordan Heiter of Fieldcrest, Marion Persich of LaSalle-Peru, Ryken Howard of Rock Falls.

#### ROCK FALLS 77, MENDOTA 72 OT

Mendota (72)				
	FG	FT	Fls	TP
C. Tillman	12	0-2	2	25
Kelly	1	0-0	3	2
A. Tillman	7	1-1	3	22
Freeman	3	1-2	3	7
Doyle	4	0-0	2	9
A. Beetz	0	0-0	3	0
Becker	3	0-0	3	7
Totals	30	2-5	19	72

Rock Falls (77)				
	FG	FT	Fls	TP
Castaneda	1	0-0	3	2
Hernandez	3	1-1	2	8
K. Heald	11	1-2	2	31
Howard	12	3-8	0	29
Menendez	1	0-0	3	2
Mulnix	2	1-1	1	5
Totals	30	6-12	11	77

SCORE BY QUARTERS				
Mendota	17	38	49	65
Rock Falls	20	35	53	65
Three-point goals: Mendota - C. Tillman 1, A. Tillman 7, Becker 1, Doyle 1; Rock Falls - Hernandez 1, K. Heald 8, Howard 2				

#### KEWANEE 57, MENDOTA 52

Mendota (52)				
	FG	FT	Fls	TP
C. Tillman	6	0-4	4	13
Kelly	1	4-4	3	7
A. Tillman	5	2-2	1	16
Freeman	0	0-0	2	0
Doyle	1	0-0	1	2
A. Beetz	1	0-0	3	2
Cortez	1	0-0	1	2
Becker	2	5-6	1	10
Totals	17	11-12	16	52

Kewanee (57)				
	FG	FT	Fls	TP
Welgat	2	1-1	3	7
Lewis	4	3-4	1	14
Reed	1	3-4	2	5
Conley	9	0-0	3	18
G. Hicks	1	3-4	3	6
A. Hicks	2	0-0	2	5
Jones	0	0-0	1	0
Thomas	1	0-0	0	2
Totals	20	10-13	15	57

SCORE BY QUARTERS				
Mendota	14	26	43	52
Kewanee	14	30	43	57
Three-point goals: Mendota - C. Tillman 1, Kelly 1, A. Tillman 4, Becker 1; Kewanee - Welgat 2, Lewis 3, G. Hicks 1, A. Hicks 1				

#### MENDOTA 58, PRINCETON 56

Mendota (58)				
	FG	FT	Fls	TP
C. Tillman	9	0-0	3	20
Kelly	4	1-2	2	11
A. Tillman	3	0-0	3	9
Freeman	2	4-5	2	8
Doyle	1	0-0	1	3
A. Beetz	0	0-0	4	0
Cortez	1	0-0	1	3
K. Beetz	0	2-4	1	2
Becker	1	0-0	0	2
Totals	21	7-11	17	58

Princeton (52)				
	FG	FT	Fls	TP
Fulkerson	2	1-1	3	5
Lanham	1	0-0	2	2
Gartin	7	8-8	4	24
Burton	0	1-2	2	1
Jaggers	1	0-0	0	3
Reinhardt	7	1-5	2	16
Smith	2	0-0	5	5
Totals	20	11-16	18	56

SCORE BY QUARTERS				
Mendota	17	26	40	58
Princeton	17	32	47	56
Three-point goals: Mendota - C. Tillman 2, Kelly 2, A. Tillman 3, Doyle 1, Cortez 1; Princeton - Gartin 2, Jaggers 1, Reinhardt 1, Smith 1				

## Trojans to compete in 61st Plano Classic

### ❑ MHS to face L-P in opening game

PLANO – The Mendota Trojans will once again spend part of their holiday break in Plano by competing in the 61st annual Plano Christmas Classic. The tournament will be held Dec. 23, 26, 27, 28.

The Trojans did not receive one of the top eight seeds in the 16-team event and will open up play on Monday, Dec. 23 against eighth-seeded LaSalle-Peru. Tip-off is set for 3:30 p.m. A first-round win by Mendota would move it to a 7 p.m. contest on Thursday, Dec. 26 against the winner of the Kaneland and Gardner-South Wilmington opening round game. If the Trojans lose their first game, they will play at 12:30 p.m. Dec. 26.

The tournament will continue with eight games on Friday, Dec. 27 and the finals on Saturday, Dec. 28.

Kaneland earned the top seed in the tournament, followed by Northridge Prep, Ottawa, Lincoln-Way Central, Streator, Yorkville Christian and Aurora Marmion.

#### Plano Varsity Christmas Classic

##### Monday, Dec. 23

- 1 - #3 Ottawa vs. Sandwich – 9 a.m.
- 2 - #6 Yorkville Christian vs. Hinckley-Big Rock – 10:30 a.m.
- 3 - #7 Aurora Marmion vs. Morris – 12:30 p.m.
- 4 - #2 Northridge Prep vs. Lisle – 2 p.m.
- 5 - #8 LaSalle-Peru vs. Mendota – 3:30 p.m.
- 6 - #1 Kaneland vs. Gardner-South Wilmington – 5:30 p.m.
- 7 - #5 Streator vs. Plano – 7 p.m.
- 8 - #4 Lincoln-Way Central vs. Newark – 8:30 p.m.

##### Thursday, Dec. 26

- 9 – Loser 3 vs. Loser 4 – 9 a.m.
- 10 – Loser 1 vs. Loser 2 – 10:30 a.m.
- 11 – Loser 5 vs. Loser 6 – 12:30 p.m.
- 12 – Loser 7 vs. Loser 8 – 2 p.m.
- 13 – Winner 1 vs. Winner 2 – 3:30 p.m.
- 14 – Winner 3 vs. Winner 4 – 5:30 p.m.
- 15 – Winner 5 vs. Winner 6 – 7 p.m.
- 16 – Winner 7 vs. Winner 8 – 8:30 p.m.

##### Friday, Dec. 27

- 17 – Loser 11 vs. Loser 12 – 9 a.m.
- 18 – Loser 9 vs. Loser 10 – 10:30 a.m.
- 19 – Winner 9 vs. Winner 10 – 12:30 p.m.
- 20 – Winner 11 vs. Winner 12 – 2 p.m.
- 21 – Loser 13 vs. Loser 14 – 3:30 p.m.
- 22 – Loser 15 vs. Loser 16 – 5:30 p.m.
- 23 – Winner 13 vs. Winner 14 – 7 p.m.
- 24 – Winner 15 vs. Winner 16 – 8:30 p.m.

##### Saturday, Dec. 28

- 25 – Loser 17 vs. Loser 18 – 9 a.m. (15th place)
- 26 – Winner 17 vs. Winner 18 – 10:30 a.m. (13th place)
- 27 – Loser 19 vs. Loser 20 – 12:15 p.m. (11th place)
- 28 – Loser 21 vs. Loser 22 – 1:45 p.m. (7th place)
- 29 – Winner 19 vs. Winner 20 – 3:15 p.m. (9th place, cons.)
- 30 – Winner 21 vs. Winner 22 – 5 p.m. (5th place)
- 31 – Loser 23 vs. Loser 24 – 6:30 p.m. (3rd place)
- 32 – Winner 23 vs. Winner 24 – 8 p.m. (1st place)

## JV Trojans receive 5th seed in Plano Classic

### ❑ Mendota opens with Gardner-SW

PLANO – The Mendota Trojans will participate in the 14th annual Plano Junior Varsity Christmas Classic to be held Dec. 23, 26, 27, 28.

There are 16 teams in the junior varsity tournament with seeds awarded to the top eight teams. Mendota received the fifth seed and will face Gardner-South Wilmington in a first-round game at 1 p.m. Monday, Dec. 23. If the Trojans prevail, they will advance to meet either LaSalle-Peru or Aurora Central Catholic in the

second round at 3:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 26. A first-round loss by Mendota will knock it to the 9 a.m. game on Dec. 26.

The tournament will continue with eight games on Friday, Dec. 27 and then eight more on Saturday, Dec. 28 to conclude the action.

Kaneland landed the number one seed in the event, followed by Aurora Marmion, Ottawa and L-P. The sixth through eight seeds are Northridge Prep, Morris and Hinckley-Big Rock.

## Lady Trojans get solid win over Streator, 50-26

Mendota experienced some offensive woes and fell to Princeton, 51-21, in a Three Rivers Conference varsity girls' basketball game on Dec. 12 at Princeton.

The Lady Trojans (0-3 in league) trailed 18-7 after the first quarter and then were able to score just one basket in the second period and went into the locker room down by a 30-9 count.

“Our offensive movement was just not good enough tonight,” said Mendota coach John Hansen. “It led to way too many forced bad shots and passes.”

Ava Eddy, Kennedy Knaff and Emily Diaz led Mendota in scoring with five points apiece. Knaff and Crystal Garcia each hauled down five rebounds to pace the club.

\*\*\*

Mendota notched its second win of the season with a 50-26 triumph over Streator on Dec. 14 at Streator.

The two teams played a tight first half, with Mendota owning narrow two-point leads after the first quarter and at halftime (16-14). The second half was a different story as the Lady Trojans scored 21 points in the third period and 13 in the fourth to

turn the close game into a rout.

“Our defense was awesome and we had a huge third quarter offensively,” said Hansen.

Eddy had a solid game for Mendota with 16 points, 11 steals and five rebounds. Cassie Gonzalez connected for 10 points and hauled down six rebounds, while Knaff had six points, eight steals and seven boards. Ella Coss chipped in with eight points.

#### PRINCETON 51, MENDOTA 21

Mendota (21)				
	FG	FT	Reb	TP
Eddy	1	2-3	1	5
Garcia	0	2-4	5	2
Knaff	2	1-2	5	5
Coss	0	0-2	2	0
Denault	0	0-0	2	0
Gonzalez	1	0-2	3	2
Freeman	1	0-0	0	2
Doyle	0	0-0	4	0
Baxa	0	0-0	2	0
Sondgeroth	0	0-2	1	0
Diaz	2	0-0	3	5
Totals	7	5-15	28	21

Princeton (51)				
	FG	FT	Fls	TP
Jesse	2	0-0	4	5
Morris	0	0-0	1	0
Hecht	1	1-2	0	3
Koning	1	0-0	1	2
Brandt	1	5-6	0	7
Mattingly	1	0-0	2	3
Reviglio	2	2-4	0	6
Driscoll	5	7-11	2	17
Davis	2	2-2	0	6
Bridgick	1	0-0	1	2
Totals	17	17-25	10	51

SCORE BY QUARTERS				
Mendota	7	9	14	21
Princeton	18	30	47	51
Three-point goals: Mendota - Eddy 1, Diaz 1; Princeton - Jesse 1, Mattingly 1				

## MHS wrestlers roll over Somonauk; Serrano, Stevenson take 6th at Plano

The Mendota wrestlers had their season debut on their home mat and they split a triangular meet with Winnebago and Somonauk on Dec. 10 at the MHS gym.

The Trojans took out Somonauk, 48-12. Recording pins for Mendota were Trayvon Rucker, Rhett Watson, Payton Gagliardo and Oliver Turner. Winning via forfeit were Gavin Stevenson, David Reyes, Aaron Torres and Germain Serrano.

Mendota dropped a fierce battle with Winnebago, 42-36. Pin wins for the Trojans went to Stevenson, Cole Kleckner, Gavin Evans Corbin Furr and Angil Serrano. Reyes picked up a forfeit win for Mendota.

#### Dec. 10

##### Mendota 48, Somonauk 12

106 – double forfeit; 113 – double forfeit; 120 – Gavin Stevenson (M) won forfeit; 126 – double forfeit; 132 – Trayvon Rucker (M) pinned Haggerty (S), 1:34; 138 – Stencel (S) pinned Adrian Arteaga (M), 1:00; 144 – double forfeit; 150 – Daniels (S) pinned Cole Kleckner (M), 2:29; 157 – Rhett Watson (M) pinned Campbell (S), 0:29; 165 – David Reyes (M) won forfeit; 175 – Payton Gagliardo (M) pinned Tripp (S), 0:47; 190 – Aaron Torres (M) won forfeit; 215 – Oliver Turner (M) pinned Orr (S), 4:50; 285 – Germain Serrano (M) won forfeit

##### Winnebago 42, Mendota 26

106 – Ca. Whitehead (W) won forfeit; 113 – Hopkins (W) won forfeit; 120 – Stevenson (M) pinned

Bausman (W), 5:48; 126 – Percy (W) won forfeit; 132 – Ch. Whitehead (W) pinned Rucker (M), 3:11; 138 – double forfeit; 144 – Gustafson (W) won forfeit; 150 – Kleckner (M) pinned Liam (W), 3:10; 157 – Gavin Evans (M) pinned Bous (W), 2:33; 165 – Reyes (M) won forfeit; 175 – Corbin Furr (M) pinned Wishop (W), 0:23; 190 – Woodman (W) pinned Torres (M), 0:18; 215 – Franzen (W) pinned Turner (M), 1:20; 285 – Angil Serrano (M) pinned Cowman (W), 0:51

\*\*\*

Mendota competed in the Plano Classic on Dec. 13-14.

Stevenson finished in sixth place in the 120-pound weight class and Angil Serrano took sixth place in the 285-pound division.

## JV boys beaten by Kewanee

SPRING VALLEY – Mendota's junior varsity boys' basketball team wrapped up play in the Hall Colmone Classic with a 39-31 setback to Kewanee on Dec. 13.

Points were hard to come by for both teams in the first half. Mendota held a 6-3 lead at the conclusion of one quarter and was up 14-12 at intermission.

Kewanee heated up in the third quarter and tallied 13 points compared to seven for the Trojans to take a 25-21 lead, and then it scored 14 in the fourth to pull away.

Cesar Casas dropped in 14 points to pace the Trojans, while Drew Becker added seven markers.

## Freshman cagers edged by Marquette

OTTAWA – Mendota opened up the freshman boys' basketball season with a narrow, 31-29 setback to Marquette on Dec. 9 at Ottawa.

The Trojans doubled up the score on Marquette after the first period, 12-6, but they went cold in the second quarter and scored only two points compared to five for the home team to make it a

14-11 game at intermission. Mendota carried a slim 22-20 advantage to the final frame, where outscored the Trojans, 10-5, to post the victory.

Abel Nanez dropped in 10 points to pace Mendota, while Ross Sondgeroth provided eight points and Tomas Corrigan added seven tallies for the Trojans.



# SPORTS

## IHSA Board adjusts classification cycle

BLOOMINGTON – The Illinois High School Association (IHSA) Board of Directors met for its regularly scheduled meeting at the IHSA office in Bloomington on Dec. 9, where the Board issued the following statement related to forthcoming action related to IHSA State Series classifications:

**Statement from the IHSA Board of Directors**  
“The IHSA Board of Directors has heard the concerns from the public, and more importantly, from our member schools in the days since the completion of the IHSA’s fall state tournaments.

As a Board, we recognize certain trends and data within IHSA sports and activities that lead us to believe that some changes are necessary. It is fundamental to understand that the IHSA’s rules



are made up of two subsets:  
1. IHSA Board Policy.  
2. IHSA By-laws.

IHSA Board Policy can be adjusted by the IHSA Board of Directors, while IHSA By-Laws require the vote of the IHSA member schools.

The Board took action at its meeting on Dec. 9 to begin using a one-year classification cycle in 2025-26, ending the use of the current two-year cycle. The IHSA will use enrollments collected by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) in September of 2024 to determine each school’s classification

enrollment for the 2025-26 school year.

Throughout 2025, the Board plans to delve deeper into all aspects that impact IHSA classifications. It is our hope that we can achieve consensus to both adjust Board Policy prior to the 2025-26 school year, and bring forth a by-law proposal or proposals to the membership during the 2025-26 legislative process.

Throughout the fall, administrators from numerous member high schools across the state have engaged with the Board. We appreciate

all communication, respect each point of view that has been offered, and will consider all ideas that have been provided.

The passion evoked by constituents in their communications to the Board are tangible proof that high school sports and activities remain a fabric of our high school communities, and that the work of the IHSA is as important today as it was in 1900.

We remain committed to working with the IHSA member high schools to provide the best experience we can for all who compete in IHSA sports and activities.”

### ACTION ITEMS

The Board approved a recommendation to move to a one-year State Series classification cycle beginning in 2025-26.

## When do you change teams?

**Not the Last Chance**  
*By Brandon LaChance*

Life is never easy, right?

There is always something going on, an emergency, an inconvenience, a setback.

Or even the opposite side of things with celebrations, anniversaries, birthdays, work and/or school accomplishments, giving birth, a fun vacation day.

Although those are mostly fun, they also take time and dedication which means you probably went through the emergencies, the inconveniences, and the setbacks to get there.

If life is already hard enough, why do we make it even tougher on ourselves?

Why did we become Chicago Bears fans?

For the older crowd, I’ll say 46 and up, you got to see the lone Bears’ Super Bowl victory in 1986 along with the supreme talent of Walter Payton, William Perry, Mike Singletary, Steve “Mongo” McMichael, and Richard Dent. Plus, one of the best defenses the league has ever seen and a pain in the butt, loudmouth, renegade QB in Jim McMahon.

Since I was born in October 1985, three months before the greatest moment in Bears’ history, I only know of this team from record books, books written by sports writers, sports documentaries, and stories from... the older crowd.

In 2006, the Bears made it to the ship and I remember where I was, jumping up for joy when Devin Hester broke away for a touchdown on the opening kickoff, and how many Steak-n-Shake (I was working) burgers and shakes I ate after the Bears lost to the Peyton Manning and the Indianapolis Colts.

Pure heartbreak.

And honestly, that’s all it has been as a Bears’ fan.

We thought a good quarterback had arrived after Jay Cutler was brought in on the trade with the Denver Broncos.

He would play great at times, awful at others, and then made a funny face or said something stupid to make everyone hate him. He was a class act, kidding, but his reign behind center from 2009-16 is still the best QB production the Bears have ever seen. Better than NFL Hall of Fame member Sid Luckman, Jim Harbaugh, the Super Bowl champ McMahon, and all of the lackluster QBs we’ve seen through the years including Mitchell Trubisky, Erik Kramer, Justin Fields, Rex Grossman (QB in the 2006 SB), Jim Miller, Kyle Orton (traded away for Cutler), Cade McNown, Josh McCown, Nick Foles, Chris Chandler, Andy Dalton, Chad Hutchinson, Mike Glennon, Caleb Hanie, and oh man, this list could be very, very long.

It’s not even just the QB role.

Besides Payton, who rushed for 16,726 yards for the Bears from 1975-1987, there hasn’t been too much to be excited about since the 1986 Super Bowl.

Matt Forte had a good run and is probably the best running back my generation has seen in a Bears jersey, but that’s it. That’s the list of good running backs after Walter Payton...Forte.

Gale Sayers doesn’t count because he left Chicago in 1971. David Montgomery would have been right there with Forte as he rushed for 3,609 from 2019-22, but then left for the Detroit Lions, where it is quite possible, they win a Super Bowl. ...As long as they don’t see the Buffalo Bills in the last game of the season.

I’m not even going to get into to long list of ball carriers who were draft busts or pure failures for the Bears.

Let’s make it clear, I’m not saying players who have played for the Bears are all bad. They’re better than you and I who are writing, reading, and watching about the NFL, but are multiple, multiple layers from ever being good enough to be on the field with these guys.

I’m not saying it is a jynx.

Ownership and management could definitely be the answer as the McCaskey family has always been about money and not so much about the football product.

Coaching could definitely be the answer as Matt Eberflus became the first ever Chicago Bears coach to be fired midway through the season after the Thanksgiving time management debacle against the Lions.

Since Mike Ditka went 106-92 from 1982-92 where he won Super Bowl XX and was named the Associated Press Coach of the Year in 1985 and 1988, there has been two coaches who has posted a winning record, Lovie Smith and Matt Nagy.

The Bears ran Smith out in 2012 and Matt Nagy had one good season, AP Coach of the Year in 2018, because opponents hadn’t figured out his game plan yet. Once they did, he was run out also.

We don’t all have to be fans of winning teams.

But it would be nice to be able to watch football knowing a great game or a stellar victory is going to overshadow the grind of the rest of the week.

And before you ask, no, absolutely not. I will never be a Green Bay Packers’ fan.

## Northbrook boys’ basketball

(6th Grade)

**Dec. 9 vs. Serena**

“A” game

Northbrook 50, Serena 10  
NB scoring: Elijah Godina 13 points, Grayson Goodlow 13 points, Julian Arteaga 9 points, Cruz Arteaga 8 points, “B” game

Northbrook 28, Serena 13  
NB scoring: Antonio Arteaga 9 points, Cam Milus 7 points, Aiden Allen 6 points

**Dec. 10 @ Spring Valley JFK**

“A” game

Spring Valley 15, Northbrook 14

Scoring: Elijah Godina 7

points, Julian Arteaga 5 points

“B” game

Spring Valley 28, Northbrook 17

Scoring: Antonio Arteaga 7 points, Xavier Hiatt 4 points

**Dec. 12 vs. Peru Parkside**

“A” game

Northbrook 38, Peru 24

Scoring: Cruz Arteaga 13 points, Grayson Goodlow 13 points, Julian Arteaga 8 points

“B” game

Northbrook 24, Peru 22

Scoring: Antonio Arteaga 11 points, Braydon Thiele 9 points

## BOWLING

**Wednesday Night Men’s League**

Standings as of Dec. 4 – 1. Man On! 34-22;

2. O’Donnell Excavating 31-25; 3. Black Brothers 30.5-25.5; 4. First State Bank 30-26; 5. Maybe Next Week 24.5-31.5; 6. Novak Farms 18-38

High team game (scratch) – Man On! 1079, First State Bank 1041, O’Donnell Excavating 1017

High team game (hdcp) – O’Donnell Excavating 1253, First State Bank 1248, Man On! 1239

High team series (scratch) – Man On! 3075, O’Donnell Excavating 2783, First State Bank 2751

High team series (hdcp) – Man On! 3555, Novak Farms 3497, O’Donnell Excavating 3491

High individual game (scratch) – Drake O’Donnell 269, Tim Dessing 266, Luke Ross 257

High individual game (hdcp) – Tim Dessing 295, Scott Novak 288, Tyler Schmitt 286

High individual series (scratch) – Mike Smith 692, Drake O’Donnell 670, Todd Smith 667

High individual series (hdcp) – Mike Smith 788, Tyler Schmitt 756, Mark Wioxm 755

**Monday Night Mixed League**

Standings as of Dec. 9 – 1. Split Happens 52-18;

2. Leagal Beagles 46-24; 3. CM Farm 41-29; 4. Ramer Inc. 26-44; 5. The

Struggle is Real 23-47; 6. Bad Kats 22-48

High team game (scratch) – Split Happens 726, Ramer Inc. 717, Leagal Beagles 655

High team game (hdcp) – Ramer Inc. 979, CM Farm 948, Split Happens 942

High team series (scratch) – Split Happens 2009, Ramer Inc. 1990, Leagal Beagles 1901

High team series (hdcp) – Ramer Inc. 2776, Leagal Beagles 2735, CM Farm 2716

Men’s high game (scratch) – Matt Ramer 254, Mike Smith 225, Brendan Ramer 212

Men’s high game (hdcp) – Brendan Ramer 283, Ed Roulston 271, Matt Ramer 271

Men’s high series (scratch) – Matt Ramer 651, Mike Smith 622, Brendan Ramer 566

Men’s high series (hdcp) – Brendan Ramer 779, Mike Smith 736, Ron Westphal 727

Women’s high game (scratch) – Jessica Robinson 224, Gail Sessler 214, Emily Thomas 201

Women’s high game (hdcp) – Jessica Robinson 278, Gail Sessler 264, Emily Thomas 243

Women’s high series (scratch) – Jessica Robinson 571, Gail Sessler 568, Emily Thomas 539

Women’s high series (hdcp) – Jessica Robinson 733, Gail Sessler 718, Kim Smith 710

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## RealEvents

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## LaMoille H.S boys’ hoops

**Dec. 10 vs. Hinckley-Big Rock**  
Hinckley-Big Rock 64, LaMoille 33

Stats: Brayden Klein 10 points; Tyler Billhorn 8 points, 8 rebounds; Connor Deering 12 rebounds

**Dec. 11 @ Henry**  
Henry-Senachwine 52, LaMoille 37

Stats: Klein 16 points; Deering 9 points, 8 rebounds; Billhorn 12 rebounds

**Dec. 13 vs. Leland**  
Leland 65, LaMoille 50

Stats: Klein 28 points, 4 assists; Billhorn 15 points, 7 rebounds; Ed fry 6 rebounds

**Dec. 14 @ Amboy**  
Amboy 62, LaMoille 29

Stats: Cody Winn 10 points; Billhorn 8 points, 7 rebounds; Deering 6 rebounds



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# THE FARMER'S REPORT



Paul Kieser, of the founding family of Midwest Food Bank, secures a load of hay to transport to North Carolina to help farmers devastated by Hurricane Helene. (Photo courtesy of Midwest Food Bank)

## Illinois donation sends hay to farmers in need

By PHYLLIS COULTER  
FarmWeek

With the help of a generous central Illinois farmer who wishes to remain anonymous, the Midwest Food Bank, known for serving local food pantries and disaster relief, is delivering feed for livestock in hurricane-ravaged areas for the first time.

"We had a very generous donation of alfalfa hay in round bales," at a time when there is great need for feed in areas impacted by hurricanes Helene and Milton, said Eric Hodel, CEO of Midwest Food Bank (MFB) in Bloomington-Normal. "We are bridging the gap by providing trucking."

Upon learning of the donation, MFB sought out who needed the hay most and how to get it there. The North Carolina Farm Bureau connected MFB with the North Carolina Cattleman's Association, which got things rolling, Hodel said.

Each trip from central Illinois to the WNC Regional Livestock Center near Asheville, North Carolina, is about 700 miles each way. It will take about 30 loads.

As of Nov. 14, five loads were delivered with four more set to leave by Nov. 18.

Hodel, who also farms, is asking truck drivers and farmers with trucks, trailers or hay-moving equipment and those who can donate gas money to help by volunteering for the mammoth effort to transport about 600 round bales of hay.

"We want it all to be delivered by Christmas," he said. Hodel is aiming for mid-December when farmers will need the hay for their beef and dairy cattle.

One of those helping is Ron Farney of Bloomington, a longtime volunteer driver for MFB, who just got back from his first trip.

"They are really appreciative," he said. One person told him, "You are saving farmers from bankruptcy."

Farney picked up a load of 17 bales of hay from Eureka on Nov. 10. He and his wife, Ellen, headed out at 4:30 a.m. Nov. 11 and returned home Nov. 12 at 9:30 p.m., mission accomplished.

"We saw some of the devastation and washouts," Farney said.

When they got to within 40 miles of their destination on Interstate 40, the road was closed due to storm damage and the Farneys had to backtrack, but they made it. Farney said they met a woman picking up a generator, hay and fencing who sincerely thanked them.

"We are nimble at execution," Hodel said. "It's typical of Midwest people."

Melanie Tennell, MFB's marketing director, noted, "we've never done this before, but we're figuring it out. This is an example of disaster relief taking an unexpected and impactful shape."

It's appropriate since the organization was started by a Bloomington farmer (David Kieser in 2003) to go full circle to help other farmers, Tennell said.

The hay is only part of MFB's hurricane relief as traditional giving also continues. Three more loads of family food boxes just left the Morton facility. By the end of the year, Hodel estimates Midwest Food Bank will deliver more than 40 loads of food and supplies for people and 30 loads of hay for livestock.

"We are glad to help out when we can," Farney said. "I'd like to do it again."

Hodel urges others to "join the caravan" to get the hay delivered before winter.

To help, call Midwest Food Bank at 309-663-5350.

(This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit FarmWeekNow.com.)

## Whispering Pines Reindeer Ranch & Tree Farm in Shabbona delivers holiday glee

By CELESTE HUTTES  
Illinois Farm  
Bureau Partners

Every morning, Randy and Beth Espe watch reindeer frolic outside their kitchen window as they sip their morning coffee—a delightful daily ritual they have fondly dubbed the "rodeo."

Santa himself would envy their view.

"When they go out into the pasture, they get giddy because it's cool, and that's their playtime," Randy says of the reindeer. "They run, they jump, they kick, they spin. It's pretty amazing to see."

And so, the day begins at Whispering Pines Reindeer Ranch & Tree Farm in Shabbona, where the Espe family's labor of love grew into a beloved holiday tradition for countless families.

### Reining in holiday cheer

What might seem an unlikely retirement gig comes as a slight surprise to those who know Randy well.

"People would bring me abandoned and orphaned animals when I was young," Randy says. "We raised a lot of raccoons, a pet fox, a little bit of everything. I always dreamed about raising white-tailed deer at some point. But reindeer turned out to be a better choice because they are domesticated. You can snap a halter on them and walk them around on a lead rope — and you can just sit and love on them."

His dream of deer became a reality after Beth retired from Northern Illinois University and Randy wrapped up a 40-year career in the seed business. As they started a second act in life, the couple set aside 18 acres to grow the small Christmas tree operation they began years earlier on the family farm.

As Randy researched ways to promote Christmas trees, he discovered Hardy's Reindeer Ranch in Rantoul. He visited owner Mark Hardy for some tips and promptly fell in love with reindeer.

"In hindsight, I wish I had listened better to Mark," Randy says. "He told me to take all the money I was going to spend on Christmas trees and buy another reindeer or two. Reindeer have turned into our major focus, and they are actually less work than the Christmas trees."

Before buying any reindeer of their own, the Espes joined the Reindeer Owners and Breeders Association (ROBA) and the Reindeer Farmers Association (RFA) to learn how to responsibly breed and care for reindeer. By 2018, they felt ready to welcome their first four reindeer from Alaska. Today, their herd numbers more than a dozen.

### Arctic adaptability



Whispering Pines Reindeer Ranch & Tree Farm owner Randy Espe brings holiday glee to seasonal events with his reindeer. (Photo by Nathan Lambrecht/©Journal Communications)

A close but more laid-back cousin to the caribou, reindeer represent a distinct subspecies and longtime friends to humans.

"The Laplanders domesticated reindeer thousands of years ago," says Randy, referring to the Sami people of the northern regions of Scandinavia. "Reindeer are to the Laplanders what the buffalo was to the American Indian."

Far from their native lands in the Arctic and mountainous regions of eastern Europe, Siberia and Scandinavia, reindeer living in Illinois require special care. According to Randy, ticks and heat present the biggest challenges.

Reindeer delight in frigid winter weather. During warmer months, the reindeer typically stay in the barn throughout the day, emerging at dawn and dusk to graze in cooler temperatures.

Those amazing antlers — grown by both males and females — also present a serious safety hazard for reindeer. Sprawling like a tree canopy, the antlers can easily become wedged in a fence or gate.

"Reindeer antlers go in all different directions," Randy says. "It's one of the bigger challenges of working with them. We've done everything we can to make our fencing safer and try to eliminate places they can get caught."

Randy notes the steep learning curve involved with raising a nonnative animal and the importance of joining organizations like RFA and ROBA to learn from others' experiences.

**"Reindeer are such playful and magnificent animals. When they run and jump in the pasture, it looks like they're learning to fly. We are blessed to get to see that every day."**

—Randy Espe

"A lot of products you might typically use for farm animals are not labeled for reindeer," Randy says. "We medicate them like sheep, feed them like a cow because they're ruminant, and treat their hair and skin like a horse because they're sensitive."

### Magical moments

The Espes have also learned reindeer have a magic all their own. With their friendly natures and impressive appearance, the Espes' reindeer often outshine Santa at the many holiday events they attend.

"The reindeer always create a lot of excitement," Randy says. "Kids just get giddy, and their eyes light up. It's heartwarming to see how much happiness they bring."

Every Thanksgiving weekend, the Espes open their ranch to the public for a holiday experience, complete with Santa, reindeer and countless Christmas trees. Eight varieties of evergreen trees grow at Whispering Pines Reindeer Ranch & Tree Farm, and 2024 marks the first year you can cut your own.

You will also find the Espe family and their reindeer at holiday festivals, Christmas parades and tree-lighting ceremonies across northern and central Illinois throughout

the holiday season. To further delight young visitors, Randy and Beth's three daughters dress up as elves.

Beth recalls a young boy named Fritz who was only mildly excited to see Santa and his reindeer. He told Beth he was really there to see the elf, Ginger Bells, because he follows her on TikTok and thought she was "awesome."

"Ginger Bells is my daughter, Allie, and she's very into her role," Beth says. "Seeing those smiles and hearing those laughs and giggles — it's the best thing ever."

From watching their reindeer prance in the pasture to seeing faces light up at the sight of them, the Espes are living their dream.

"Reindeer are such playful and magnificent animals. When they run and jump in the pasture, it looks like they're learning to fly," Randy says. "We are blessed to get to see that every day. Reindeer have become part of who we are. And the way they make people feel is magical."

(This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit ILFBpartners.com.)

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# THE FARMER'S REPORT

## 2025 Illinois Land Values & Lease Trends Report to be offered free

JACKSONVILLE – The 2025 edition of the Illinois Land Values and Lease Trends Report will be available as a free pdf download when it becomes available in March 2025. The publication is produced annually by the Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers.

This is according to Luke Worrell, AFM, ALC, Worrell Land Services, Jacksonville, overall chair of the project for the group. “It’s a matter of simple economics,” Worrell explains. “The Report has been averaging 124 pages and weighs in at a little over one pound. To print and mail copies will be costing the Society around \$20 or more per issue; there are postage increases coming in 2025. That’s getting too rich for a lot of folks, so we decided to offer the entire book as a downloadable pdf file from our web site. At no charge.”

Worrell explains that there will be a limited number of printed copies that will be available to advertisers and members who like to hand-deliver the Report to special clients each year. “We will also have a complimentary copy to give to everyone attending our annual Land Values Conference. That will be held March 27 in Bloomington.” Individuals will also be able to order print copies. “We’ll know the price on those once the book is printed, and will depend on how many someone may want,” Worrell states.

“By going electronic we can offer some special features for readers and advertisers which were not available in printed copies,” he explains. “Readers will be able to go to the page that shows the regional maps of the state, ‘click’ on a region of interest, and be taken immediately to the first page of that region in the Report. Plus, they will be able to ‘click’ on most ads and be taken directly to that advertiser’s web site.”

He adds that anyone who wants can pre-order a free copy of the Report now by signing on at the Society’s website [www.ispfmra.org](http://www.ispfmra.org). They will automatically be given link information when the book becomes available in March. They will then have 30 minutes to download the Report.

Copies of the printed report will also be available for ordering online with payment by credit card. “That will come in March when the final book is produced and we know what costs are involved,” Worrell explained.

The annual Report covers Illinois farmland sales and trends from the previous year divided into ten geographic regions of the state. There is information on anticipated land sales and lease trends and includes historic summaries by regions. There are also forecasts for lease rates by farmland Productivity Index.



## Illinois researchers develop near-infrared spectroscopy models to analyze corn kernels and biomass

In the agricultural and food industry, determining the chemical composition of raw materials is important for production efficiency, application, and price. Traditional laboratory testing is time-consuming, complicated, and expensive. New research from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign demonstrates that near-infrared (NIR) spectroscopy and machine learning can provide quick, accurate, and cost-effective product analysis.

In two studies, the researchers explore the use of NIR spectroscopy for analyzing characteristics of corn kernels and sorghum biomass.

“NIR spectroscopy has many advantages over traditional methods. It is fast, accurate, and inexpensive. Unlike lab analysis, it does not require the use of chemicals, so it’s more environmentally sustainable. It does not destroy the samples, and you can analyze multiple features at the same time. Once the system is set up, anyone can run it with minimal training,” said Mohammed Kamruzzaman, assistant professor in the Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering (ABE), part of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences and The Grainger College of Engineering at U. of I. He is a co-author on both papers.

In the first study, the researchers created a global model for corn kernel analysis. Moisture and protein content impact nutritional value, processing efficiency, and price of corn, so the information is crucial for the grain processing industry.

NIR and other spectroscopic techniques are indirect methods. They measure how a material absorbs or emits light at different wavelengths, then construct a unique spectrum that is translated into product characteristics with machine learning models. Many food and agricultural processing facilities already have NIR equipment, but models need to be trained for specific purposes.

“Corn grown in different locations varies because of soil, environment, management, and other factors. If you train the model with corn from one location, it will not be accurate elsewhere,” Kamruzzaman said.

To address this issue and develop a model that applies in many different locations, the researchers collected corn samples from seven countries – Argentina, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Serbia, Tunisia, and the USA.

“To analyze moisture and protein in the corn kernels, we combined gradient-boosting machines with partial least squares regression. This is a novel approach that yields accurate, reliable results,” said Runyu Zheng, a doctoral student in ABE and lead author on the first study.

While the model is not 100% global, it provides considerable variability in the data and will work in many locations. If needed, it can be updated with additional samples from new locations, Kamruzzaman noted.

In the second study, the researchers focused on sorghum biomass, which can serve as a renewable, cost-effective, and high-yield feedstock for biofuel.

Biomass conversion into biofuels depends on chemical composition, so a rapid and efficient method of sorghum biomass characterization could assist biofuel, breeding, and other relevant industries, the researchers explained.

Using sorghum from the University of Illinois Energy Farm, they were able to accurately and reliably predict moisture, ash, lignin, and other features.

“We first scanned the samples and obtained NIR spectra as an output. This is like a fingerprint that is unique to different chemical compositions and structural properties. Then we used chemometrics – a mathematical-statistical approach – to develop the prediction models and applications,” said Md Wadud Ahmed, a doctoral student in ABE and lead author on the second paper.

While NIR spectroscopy is not as accurate as lab analysis, it is more than sufficient for practical purposes and can provide fast, efficient screening methods for industrial use, Kamruzzaman said.

“A major advantage of this technology is that you don’t need to remove and destroy products. You can simply take samples for measurement, scan them, and then return them to the production stream. In some cases, you can even scan the samples directly in the production line. NIR spectroscopy provides a lot of flexibility for industrial usage,” he concluded.

The first paper, “Optimizing feature selection with gradient boosting machines in PLS regression for predicting moisture and protein in multi-country corn kernels via NIR spectroscopy,” is published in Food Chemistry [DOI: 10.1016/j.foodchem.2024.140062].

The second paper, “Rapid and high-throughput determination of sorghum (Sorghum bicolor) biomass composition using near infrared spectroscopy and chemometrics,” is published in Biomass and Bioenergy [DOI:10.1016/j.biombioe.2024.107276]. This work was funded by the DOE Center for Advanced Bioenergy and Bioproducts Innovation (U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Science, Biological and Environmental Research Program under Award Number DE-SC0018420).

## Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) - Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding for Climate-Smart Agriculture in Illinois

CHAMPAIGN – The USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Illinois State Conservationist Tammy Willis announced a statewide funding opportunity for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) funded by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The submission deadline for CSP-IRA applications to be considered in fiscal year (FY) 2025 is Jan. 10, 2025.

IRA funding provided an additional \$3.25 billion nationwide over five years for climate smart agriculture through CSP. Through the additional CSP-IRA funding, Illinois received \$29.8 million in FY 2025 to provide direct climate mitigation benefits to Illinois producers. The CSP-IRA funds will advance conservation on producer’s farm or forest land through practices and enhancements such as cover crop, conservation tillage, wildlife habitat planting, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, tree planting and more.

**How to Apply**

NRCS accepts producer applications for its conservation programs on a continuous basis, however producers interested in CSP financial assistance through IRA should apply by Illinois’ application deadline of Jan. 10, 2025, to be considered for funding in the current cycle.

Producers interested in CSP-IRA should submit a signed application (NRCS-CPA-1200 form) to the local NRCS field office. A blank NRCS-CPA-1200 application form may be obtained from the NRCS staff. Otherwise, an application may be submitted through the Farmers.gov website using your farmers.gov account. Producers wishing to use Farmers.gov, can sign in or create an account by clicking on “Sign up” in the upper right of the website.

CSP-IRA applications submitted by Jan. 10, 2025, will be evaluated by local NRCS staff. The NRCS staff will work with an applicant to assess the land and resource concerns, answer ranking questions, and determine program eligibility. If an application is ranked high enough to be funded, the NRCS staff will work with the applicant to develop a contract.

For information on CSP-IRA contact the local NRCS field office or visit <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/illinois>.



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## Be broken for Jesus

There's a story about a little boy who was very poor and needed shoes. He was standing in front of a shoe store, barefoot and shivering with cold. A woman approached him and asked him why he was standing there, looking through the window. He told her, "Well, ma'am, I was asking God to give me a pair of shoes."

The woman took the boy into the store, washed his dirty, bare feet, and put new socks and shoes on them. The boy was so touched by her compassion that he asked her, "Ma'am, are you God's wife?" He assumed if she showed him that kind of love, she must be related to God.

This story is one of the best examples of what it

means to walk in love. And our goal as believers in Christ is to show God's love so people see Him shining through us.

Matthew 26:26 (NIV) says, "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'" It's interesting to see here that Jesus blessed the bread, broke it, and then gave it to the disciples.

We usually refer to this scripture when we have communion to remind us of the sacrifice He made for us. And just as Jesus gave His life and was broken for us, we must be broken so we can live for Him.

We don't like to think about God breaking us,

but it's really a wonderful thing. Because when we're born again, the seed of God's nature—all that He is—is planted in our spirits.

First Peter 1:23 says, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (NIV). And 1 John 3:9 tells us that as believers, "...God's seed [His principle of life, the essence of His righteous character] remains [permanently]" in us (AMP).

This means we have what it takes to be like Jesus and love others the way He loves us. We already have His love in us, but we all need God to do a work in our souls for us to be able to walk in love. We have to grow spiritually for our soul—mind, will, and emotions—to be molded into the image of Christ.

We need to pray for Him to show us how to walk in love...for God to do whatever He needs to do in our lives so His love can flow through us to others. When we do, He will help us to overcome the things that stand in the way: pride, unforgiveness, selfishness, insecurity, fear, or any other ungodly attitude or behavior.

Isaiah 64:8 says, "O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our Potter, and we all are the work of



Your hand" (AMP). I know what it's like to be broken and molded by God. I used to have so many problems; I was hard to get along with and harsh. There were a lot of things I didn't understand because I had been mistreated and sexually abused by my father growing up. I thought it was good to be hard and not let anyone push me around, because I thought everyone else had a problem, not me.

I remember praying so diligently for God to change my husband, Dave, because if he would just be the way I wanted him to be, then I would be happy. But one day God spoke to my heart so strongly and said, "Dave is not the problem." My response was, "Well, who is? It's just me and him. What do You mean Dave is not the problem?"

It was devastating to realize I was really the problem, but it was also the beginning of a beautiful work God wanted to do in me.

Even though I was

a mess, I really loved God and wanted to live for Him, but I had to give Him control so He could mold me into His image. I began to pray things like, "God, do whatever You need to do in my life to change me. I'm the clay and You are the Potter. Romans 8:29 says you foreordained me to be molded into the image of Jesus, and I want to be everything You created me to be."

The journey hasn't been easy, but I can honestly say that the hardest times in my life have become blessings, because God has used them to bring me close to Him so I can grow spiritually. That's His plan for all of His children.

I want to encourage you to spend time with God and search out the promises He has for you in His Word. Trust His wisdom and do what He shows you to do. As you put your faith in God to break you, mold you, and make you what He's created you to be, the Potter will make you

an amazing work of His hand!

\*\*\*

For more on this topic, order Joyce's three-part teaching resource What Is Love? You can also contact us to receive our free magazine, Enjoying Everyday Life, by calling (800) 727-9673 or visiting [www.joycemeyer.org](http://www.joycemeyer.org)

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries, Inc. She has authored more than 150 books, including BATTLEFIELD OF THE MIND and THE ANSWER TO ANXIETY (FaithWords). She hosts the Enjoying Everyday Life radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit [www.joycemeyer.org](http://www.joycemeyer.org)

Please note: The views and opinions expressed throughout this publication and/or website are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Joyce Meyer Ministries.

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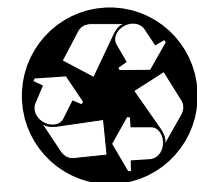
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122324)

## Recycle



## 601 VEHICLES FOR SALE

## 203 HELP WANTED

The City of Mendota seeks to hire a full-time Building Code Officer/Property Safety Director. The person will be responsible for approving building permit applications and performing inspections to ensure compliance with all building codes and ordinances for new and existing residential and commercial buildings. The director will conduct health and safety inspections for commercial and rental properties. The director will also manage contractor, business, landlord, and vacant building registrations, including applications, renewals, and reporting. The director may assist with staff management for various city and grant projects. Candidate must have Building Inspection Certification and Home Inspection License. However, City is willing to provide training for these certifications. Candidate must possess experience in construction and have computer skills. Candidate must be able to make independent judgments based on accepted policy and interact effectively and courteously with the public, especially when conveying general legal guidelines. Salary based on experience. Benefits include health, vision, dental, life, and IMRF Pension. Full job description and application available at Mendota City Clerk's Office (800 Washington St.) or available at [mendota.il.us/jobs](http://mendota.il.us/jobs)

## 307 MISCELLANEOUS FOR SALE

**AMBULANCE BID**  
The City of Mendota is accepting sealed bids for the sale of (1) used 2001 Ford E450 MedTech Ambulance. This vehicle has a 7.3 diesel motor and an automatic transmission. Mileage on this vehicle is 87,312 miles, 6806.8 hours. Vehicle can be seen by contacting the Mendota Fire Department at 815-539-3434. Bids to be in by Friday, Dec. 20, 2024, at 4 p.m. at Mendota City Hall, 800 Washington St., Mendota, IL 61342. The City of Mendota reserves the right to accept or reject any and all bids.

[mendotareporter.com](http://mendotareporter.com)

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**Six out of 10 Americans rely on a local newspaper for advertising information about local businesses.\***

\* Source: America's Newspapers



## 12 Days of Giving Shop Local & WIN!

November 18th is the kick off day for the Mendota Chamber's 2024 12 days of Giving Christmas Shop Local Promotion.

For every \$10 spent in a participating business, you will receive one sticker. In order to qualify for the 12 Days of Giving prizes, you must turn in a full card and each card must have stickers from at least FIVE OF THE PARTICIPATING BUSINESSES.

Double Stickers will be handed out during the Mendota Christmas event on Saturday, Dec. 7th. Be sure to stop by the Mendota Chamber information booth downtown during the event for a special Mendota Chamber Shop Local Sticker.

Bring in your full cards to the Mendota Chamber Office at 800 Washington St. before Dec. 13th. You may also drop off your full card in the city's drop box on Illinois Avenue.

The 12 Days of Giving drawings will begin on Dec. 9th and be held every day, except Sundays, through Dec. 23rd. There will be 1 winner each day. The daily prizes will include merchandise and gift cards from our participating businesses.

On Dec. 23rd, the Chamber will draw for the grand prize. All daily winners will be added back into the Dec. 23rd drawing. The Grand Prize will include merchandise and gift cards from our participating businesses.

4M Graphix  
Anderson Mosshart  
Antojitos Gonzalz  
ARS Auto Repair Specialists  
August Hill Winery & Illinois Sparkling Co.  
Beck's 1-39  
Beck's BP Rt. 251  
Bowers Corner TAP  
Carquest  
Cindy's on 34  
CVS/pharmacy  
De La O's  
Dirty Dawgs  
El Rey

El Torito  
El Zarape  
Expressions  
Floralcrest Inc.  
Jaquesis 2.0  
La Esquintia  
Lakeside Liquors  
LaSalle News Tribune  
Liams Market Place  
Little Jo's  
Lube Cube Plus  
Lulamaya  
Maxie Salon  
McDonalds  
Mendota Area Y  
Mendota Elks Lodge

Mendota Golf Club  
Mendota Moose Family Center  
Mendota Shell  
Mendota Sport Shop  
Meyers Furniture  
Moore Tires  
Nightengales  
OSF St Paul Gift Shop  
Parkway Restaurant  
Pizza's by Marchelloni  
Purpose Nutrition  
Quest  
Ramos Cleaning  
Red Ranch Photo  
Red's Landscaping  
Rosati's Pizza Pub

Serenity Creek Massage  
Smooth Smoke and Vapor  
Sports-N-Stuff  
Studio 5100  
Subway  
Sullivan Ace Hardware  
Sullivan's Foods  
Tacos Guzman  
The Chalet Sports Bar  
The Mendota Reporter  
Triple Service Plumbing, Heating, & Cooling  
Uncle Joes Gaming  
VFW  
Ziggie's Family Restaurant

# Christmas Services Schedule

Looking for a Church home this Christmas?  
Come home to

## Zion United Methodist Church

808 Jefferson St., Downtown Mendota  
815-538-2186

Community Longest Night Service  
A Worship Service of Hope, Strength & Community  
Friday, December 20th - 7pm

Sunday Family Friendly Service & Sunday School - 9 am

Christmas Eve  
Candlelight Communion Service - 3 pm

[www.zionchurchumc.com](http://www.zionchurchumc.com)

Please join us for

## Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

5 PM

All are welcome

Pastor Laurie Walker

Facebook: FPCMendota

### First Presbyterian Church

1003 5th Street, Mendota

815-538-5603

[mendotafirstpres@gmail.com](mailto:mendotafirstpres@gmail.com)

Worship with us this Christmas Season!

### Christmas Eve Services:

4:30pm  
Family Friendly Worship and  
7pm  
Worship

Both services will include Holy Communion and candle lighting.

St. John's Lutheran Church  
607 10th Ave Mendota  
815-539-5626  
Pastor Elise Rothfusz

## Holy Cross Catholic Church

1010 Jefferson St. • Mendota

And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly hosts with the angels, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests."

A Light will shine on us this day, the Lord is born for us.

### 2024 Christmas and Holy Day Mass Schedule

Tuesday, December 24	Wednesday, December 25
4:00 pm Holy Cross	8:30 am St. Theresa
4:00 pm St. Theresa	9:00 am Sts. Peter & Paul
6:00 pm Sts. Peter & Paul	10:00 am Holy Cross
6:00 pm Holy Cross - Spanish	
10:00 pm Holy Cross	

Tuesday, December 31  
4:00 pm Holy Cross  
5:00 pm St. Theresa

Wednesday, January 1  
8:00 am St. Theresa  
9:00 am Sts. Peter & Paul  
9:30 am Holy Cross  
11:00 am Holy Cross - Spanish

Fr. Greg Nelson, Pastor  
Fr. Jeff Windy, Parochial Vicar  
Phone (815) 538-6151

## In Celebration of Our Saviors' Birth & New Year

### Christmas Eve

December 24  
7:00 p.m. at Immanuel  
9:00 p.m. at First, Lee  
Candlelight Service with Holy Communion

### Christmas Day

December 25  
10:00 a.m. at Immanuel  
Worship with Holy Communion (no worship at First, Lee)

**Immanuel Lutheran Church**  
398 Church Road  
Compton, Illinois  
815-539-6567

Pastor Jeff Schlesinger

[www.ilccompton.org](http://www.ilccompton.org)

*Gloiy Night*

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."  
Luke 2:11 KJV

**Saturday, Dec. 14**  
9am - Noon  
Bake Sale  
at 1st State Bank Main Lobby

**Friday, Dec. 20**  
7pm  
Blue Christmas  
at Zion

**Tuesday, Dec. 24**  
9:30pm  
Christmas Eve Worship Service

**Wednesday, Dec. 25**  
9:30am  
Christmas Day Worship Service

Each Sunday, Sunday School 9 am  
Worship Service 9:30 am

**Mendota First United Methodist Church**  
100 E 6th Ave, Mendota, IL  
815-538-5587

# Christmas Services