



ROCHELLE News-Leader

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LOCAL NEWS... LOCAL VIEWS WEDNESDAY, FEB. 19, 2025 \$1.25

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Fire departments respond in Chana

Local fire departments were called to a fire in Chana on Friday, Feb. 14. **Page 2**


WEATHER




WEDNESDAY
HIGH LOW
12 -2




THURSDAY
HIGH LOW
20 -1



FRIDAY
HIGH LOW
22 2



SATURDAY
HIGH LOW
29 13



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OBITUARIES

- NORMAN LEE JENKINS SR.
- CHARLES COOPER ROBBINS

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NONE

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No Prep Tacos to open restaurant next month at former site of The Kitchen Table

Co-owner Penaran: ‘I never thought we’d be here’

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

ROCHELLE — Local food truck vendor No Prep Tacos will be opening a brick-and-mortar restaurant in March just outside Rochelle at 7034 S. Klondike Road, the former site of The Kitchen Table.

No Prep Tacos is owned by longtime Rochelle residents and brothers Marco and Jesus Penaran. The business got started in 2023 by selling tacos at car race meets in the region and No Prep Tacos has been regularly serving Mexican food locally for the past year.

“We’re car enthusiasts and we’d go out to Chicago or the suburbs and go racing,” Jesus Penaran said. “We met a lot of people. We would always want a late night snack and nothing was open. We would always say we should bring tacos and sell them out the back of the truck. In 2023 a friend asked us if we wanted to sell tacos at an event at a racetrack in Indiana. We’d never done anything like that before. We’d just cooked for ourselves. There weren’t going to be any concession



(PHOTO BY JEFF HELFRICH)

Local food truck vendor No Prep Tacos will be opening a brick-and-mortar restaurant in March just outside Rochelle at 7034 S. Klondike Road, the former site of The Kitchen Table.

stands. We decided to do it. We sold out within the first three hours and we just saw something we could do. It ended up being so much more than just a side job. It ended up being our full-time job and we ended up here.”

Upon buying their food trailer, the Penarans were looking for a commissary kitchen and found The Kitchen Table, the donation and volunteer-based eatery/community pay-what-you-can café. They came to an agreement with the organization’s founder, Carolyn Brown, to cook there and served one meal a month at the location for The Kitchen Table.

Late last year, Brown and the organization opted to sell the building due to a shortage of resources and volunteers, and overwhelming need. The Kitchen Table will continue as a nonprofit in a reimagined form. The building was purchased by the Penarans for a No Prep Tacos restaurant location. Their aim is to open in mid-to-late March.

“It’s going to be a restaurant where people can come and dine in and enjoy the food instead of waiting in line at the food trailer and having to take it home,” Marco Penaran said.

See NO PREP TACOS page 3

RCH Family Healthcare Clinic welcomes Rochelle native Gonzales as physician assistant

‘I see great quality of care here and that’s important to me. I’m excited...’

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

ROCHELLE — The Family Healthcare Clinic at Rochelle Community Hospital recently welcomed Kristi Gonzales, MSPAS, PA-C, to its list of providers as a physician assistant.

Gonzales, a Rochelle native, brings 10 years of family medicine practice experience. She will focus on patient-centered care with patient-driven decision making, offering care to patients from birth to senior stages of life. Gonzales started at RCH on Jan. 27.

“So far it’s gone well,” Gonzales said. “The staff here is amazing. The team here is great and everyone seems to love their jobs. I’ve met with most of the managers and I have nothing but great things to say. The culture here seems great. Being here in it, it’s been good. I see a lot of good patient care things and we can speak highly of a community hospital.”

After graduating from Rochelle Township High School, Gonzales graduated from the University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign with a bachelor of science in kinesiology and later graduated with a master of science in physician assistant studies from Southern Illinois University. She’s been board certified by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants since 2014.

For the past 10 years, Gonzales has worked as a physician assistant at OSF HealthCare in Mendota. She lives in Rochelle with her husband and children.

“I never thought I would leave Mendota and after 10 years it’s really hard to leave all of your patients,” Gonzales said. Everyone and everything here has been great. I’m back home. I did 10 years



(PHOTO BY JEFF HELFRICH)

The Family Healthcare Clinic at Rochelle Community Hospital recently welcomed Kristi Gonzales, MSPAS, PA-C, to its list of providers as a physician assistant.

of practice and rotations. I worked in multiple specialties including endocrinology, cardiology, general surgery, and women’s health. I’ve done over 1,800 clinical hours. I had lots of good training.”

Before it became OSF HealthCare, the facility Gonzales worked at in Mendota was a community hospital. She has now returned to a community hospital in RCH.

“I loved working there in both iterations,” Gonzales said. “Coming back to a

community hospital again, it really shows the family drive that they’re trying to accomplish here and just community health. That’s a blessing that some people don’t realize. It’s not a big box hospital, but you can still get high-quality care when the patients are the priority. Sometimes that gets lost in bigger health systems. It’s been a blessing to see that.”

See GONZALES page 3

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LOCAL NEWS



Derek Swartz and the Rochelle Township High School Speech Team Performance in the Round (PIR) cast and crew will be competing in the IHSA State Tournament in Peoria the weekend of Feb. 22-23.

RTHS Speech team sees PIR cast, Swartz advance to state

FREEPORT—Derek Swartz and the Rochelle Township High School Speech Team Performance in the Round (PIR) cast and crew will be com-

peting in the IHSA State Tournament in Peoria the weekend of Feb. 22-23. At the Sectional Meet in Freeport Derek earned third place in Humorous

Interpretation and the Performance in the Round Cast also earned third place. The PIR Cast includes Aletheia Venuso, Lydia

VonHaden, Alayna Smardo, Hailey Bungler, Abby Losoya, Sophia Losoya, Kara Hull, Pedro Rosales, Austin Cruz, Alex Soto, Sophia Stein and Mercy

Hunley. Other RTHS team members who were finalists at the Sectional Meet included: Emma Kennay - fourth place - Special Oc-

casion Speaking. Bobbie Henning/Noah LeFevre - fifth place - Dramatic Duet Acting. Speaker of the week was Derek Swartz.



(COURTESY PHOTOS)



Area fire departments respond to detached garage fire near Chana

Late in the morning of Friday, Feb. 14, area fire departments responded to a detached garage fire at 7483 E. Husking Peg Road in a rural area between Rochelle and Chana. The fire reached the second-alarm level and involved a trailer as well. Fire departments were first called at 11:28 a.m. At 11:32 a.m. the fire was elevated to the box alarm level and at 11:38 a.m. the second alarm level was reached to call in more fire personnel. Fire crews fought to extinguish the fire before crews started to be released from the scene at 12:30 p.m. Area fire organizations called to the scene included Oregon, Ashton, Rochelle, Stillman, Lynn-Scott-Rock, Franklin Grove, Mt. Morris, Flag Center, Byron and Polo. The Ogle County Sheriff's Office and the Ogle County Emergency Management Agency responded as well. (Photos by Jeff Helfrich)





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Fritts named secretary for House Republican organization

SPRINGFIELD — On Jan. 17, the House Republican Organization announced the new board for the upcoming 2026 election cycle. State Rep. Brad Fritts (R-Dixon) was named secretary.

"I am humbled and honored to be named Secretary of HRO," Fritts said. "I look forward to working alongside Leader McCombie,

HRO Chair Elik, and the rest of the board as we recruit and support Republican candidates to bring balance back and common-sense governance to Illinois."

Other board members include: Amy Elik – chair (111th District), Travis Weaver – treasurer (93rd District), Fritts – secretary (74th District), Dennis Tipword (105th District),

Mike Coffey (95th District) and Patrick Sheehan (37th District).

"This new board is equipped with the experience and leadership we need to elect Republican House candidates and provide greater balance across the state," McCombie said. "Their collective expertise in campaigning, candidate recruitment, and

party-building will strengthen our ability to promote Republican values and win elections."

The HRO board's mission is to support Republican House candidates statewide and to promote candidates who are committed to fiscal responsibility, government accountability, and economic growth for all Illinoisans.

Kish College enrollment increases for 8th consecutive semester

MALTA — Kishwaukee College is continuing its trend of increasing enrollment, with Spring 2025 students up approximately 15% compared to Spring 2024. Kish's upward enrollment trend began in Fall 2022 and has continued each semester.

"Kish is pleased to report spring enrollment is now exceeding pre-pandemic levels. We believe

the decisions the College has made are positively impacting enrollment, including the elimination of all student fees which started this fiscal year," said Dr. Laurie Borowicz, president of Kishwaukee College.

Enrollment increases are spread evenly across college programs. Specifically, online enrollments continue to go up, with a

significant increase for Spring 2025.

"The college works incredibly hard to provide our community members with the education and support they need to meet their goals. Through thoughtful planning, Kish responds and adapts to the changing needs of our community. The continued enrollment increases are a positive signal we

are providing the best opportunities for our students," said Bob Johnson, Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Kishwaukee College serves approximately 4,000 students annually, offering transfer programs, career-ready degrees and certificates, fast-track programs and more. Learn more at kish.edu.



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LOCAL NEWS

NO PREP TACOS: Rochelle brothers open restaurant at former Kitchen Table location

From page 1

“We’ll have some additional items on the menu on top of what we serve from the food trailer. We’re going to do some work inside before we open.”

Along with selling locally and at race tracks with its food trailer and its planned restaurant, No Prep Tacos also offers catering for private parties and events. The Penarans have seen their business grow quickly after it started out selling under a canopy.

The support from the Rochelle community has been exciting for Marco and Jesus Penaran.

“We’ve received a lot of support from Rochelle,” Jesus Penaran said. “There’s other Mexican restaurants in town, so we didn’t know what to expect. Every time we’ve opened up shop in town, we’ve always gotten good support from the people. And it’s repeat customers, sometimes during the same week.”

Marco Penaran said those who haven’t tried No Prep Tacos before can expect a quick, authentic, consistent bite to eat. The Penarans’ father helps with the seasoning and their mother makes fresh tortillas and has since the beginning of No Prep Tacos. The Penarans never envi-

sioned themselves opening a restaurant. Before No Prep Tacos, Marco Penaran worked in maintenance and went to school for graphics. Jesus Penaran never thought he’d own a property like 7034 S. Klondike Road, which has history as a community cornerstone as The Kitchen Table and also includes The Rowe Pavilion, which was funded by TV’s Mike Rowe of Dirty Jobs fame after a visit to The Kitchen Table.

Marco Penaran said he’s excited to open the restaurant up for customers and to try some new menu items. No Prep Tacos is a family affair for the Penarans.



(PHOTO BY JEFF HELFRICH)

No Prep Tacos is owned by longtime Rochelle residents and brothers Marco and Jesus Penaran.

“It’s cool to do this with my brother,” Jesus Penaran said. “We get to see each other every day. We disagree

on some things, but at the end of the day we have to have a solution that works for both of us. Two heads think more

than one can. Our mom and dad are in our corner too and they give us encouragement and support.”

GONZALES: Rochelle native joins RCH as physician assistant

From page 1

At RCH, Gonzales said she’s looking forward to working in women’s health with Dr. Kendall Vogeler, which she’s enjoyed in the past. She also enjoys acute visits and same-day care, along with preventative care. Gonzales will offer a wide variety of healthcare

needs and the ability to keep patients local at RCH or refer them if that’s what they want.

After practicing for 10 years and getting set in her style of practice, Gonzales is ready to offer care in her hometown.

“I feel good about being back here,” Gonzales said. “I prayed about whether it was the right

move for me. I think it brings a higher level of passion and accountability. I already know everybody and I want the utmost care for people. We’re human and we can only do so much, but it’s been a pressure that’s a privilege.”

During her senior year of high school, Gonzales decided that she wanted to

go into the medical field because of her anatomy class and its teacher at RTHS. She found the physician assistant field of study in college and chose the family medicine specialty so she could be involved with a wide array of patient needs.

The family medicine route has allowed for Gonzales to have a

healthy work-life balance. Being a PA has also put her in a leadership role in medicine, something she desired in school.

Gonzales and her husband are active in the Rochelle community and working at RCH will give her more time for that and her family.

“It feels like a closed loop, being back home,”

Gonzales said. “I’m excited about building on a quality of care that I see has been taking place already in this hospital. I know some people would just drive past Rochelle and go to Rockford for care. I don’t feel that when I’m here. I see great quality of care here and that’s important to me. I’m excited to be home.”

OCHD’s Community Baby Shower is April 11, donations needed

ROCHELLE — The Ogle County Health Department will host a Community Baby Shower on Friday, April 11 at 510 Lincoln Highway in Rochelle from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

There will be free infant and maternity products (diapers, wipes, care products, clothing), raffle baskets, giveaways, refreshments,

and a community health/service fair. All families in the community are welcomed.

The event coordinator is Tarah Ziegler and she can be contacted at 815-562-6976 ext. 2209 or rtziegler@oglecounty.gov.

Donations are needed for the Community Baby Shower, and items

needed include all sizes of diapers, baby wipes, body wash/soap, shampoo/conditioner, diaper cream, feminine hygiene products, toothbrushes/toothpaste, lotions/care products, baby clothing up to toddler sizes, maternity clothing, breast pumps/breastfeeding supplies and baby products/toys/books.

Items that can’t be accepted include infant sleep spaces (cribs, bassinets, etc.), used car seats, visibly soiled/damaged clothing or items, infant formula or foods, and children’s clothing (beyond toddler size).

Donations may be dropped off or shipped to either OCHD office location. Monetary donations

must be provided in the form of a gift card (Visa, Amazon, Walmart, etc.)

Donations will be accepted Jan. 1-March 31, 2025. Community members and local businesses can help with the event by donating items or gift cards, donating products to include in the raffle baskets/giveaways, sponsoring the

event with a monetary donation in the form of a gift card (Visa, Walmart, Amazon), setting up a booth to promote their services/business at the event’s health & information fair, or promoting the event to friends, family, clients, and patients. The event is open to all community members.

Bill payment assistance programs available to Nicor Gas customers

NAPERVILLE — Every family deserves reliable energy at a price they can afford, which is why Nicor Gas is ensuring that income-eligible residential customers have access to essential services and bill payment assistance through its 2025 energy assistance offerings.

This year, customers in need can benefit from the Shield of Caring program, which provides grants of up to \$250 annually, administered by The Salvation Army. Shield of Caring is designed to offer critical support for natural gas bill payments and other basic needs, such as housing and rental assistance, groceries and warm winter coats, food boxes and emergency disaster services.

Nicor Gas established the emergency assistance and homelessness prevention program 2021 with an

initial \$5 million contribution to assist its customers affected by global health and financial crises. In 2022, the company announced an additional \$5 million commitment to expand the Shield of Caring program. Since its inception, over 20,000 Nicor Gas customers have benefited from a Shield of Caring grant, and 35,464 have received essential support, including warm winter coats, food boxes and emergency disaster services.

Residential customers with a household gross income below 400% of the federal poverty level in the last 30 days can apply for assistance at www.shieldofcaring.com. Customers eligible for financial assistance from other programs, such as the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), are encouraged to apply to

these programs first to maximize their benefits.

LIHEAP is a federally funded program that helps low- and fixed-income families meet their energy needs. To qualify for LIHEAP, a household’s combined gross income for the 30 days prior to application must be at or below 200% of the federal poverty level — for a family of four, that is \$62,400 annually, or \$5,200 monthly. For renters, heat must be included in the rent for eligibility consideration. For more information, visit www.LIHEAPillinois.com or call 877-411-9276 (WARM).

In addition to Shield of Caring and LIHEAP, Nicor Gas offers several other resources to help customers manage and pay their natural gas bills and save on energy costs:

Sharing Program: Provides one-time annual grants of up to \$400,

with no repayment requirement, to qualified residential customers who meet income guidelines. Seniors and veterans receive an additional \$150 grant. Administered by The Salvation Army, this program is funded through contributions from Nicor Gas customers and employees.

Low-Income Discount Program: Residential customers receiving LIHEAP or Nicor Gas Sharing Program benefits will automatically be enrolled in the program that provides total bill discounts between 10% and 75%. All other customers can apply for the 5% discount, as well as waivers of deposits and late payment fees, through self-certification online or by calling 888. Nicor4u (888-642-6748).

Energy Aide Program: Offers qualifying households a grant of up to \$250 towards their

past-due balance, with no repayment required. Residential customers must be at or below 350% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines to qualify. Customers with non-heat accounts are eligible for this program as well.

Payment Arrangements: Offers eligible customers extended time to pay past-due balances and bring their account current to avoid service disconnections. Eligibility can be checked at nicorgas.com/myaccount.

Budget Plan: Helps customers with current accounts avoid unpredictable bills by evening out seasonal highs and lows through a monthly budgeted amount. Payments may be adjusted every four months based on actual usage and gas prices. Eligibility can be checked at nicorgas.com/budgetplan.

Energy Efficiency

Program: Provides free home assessments, energy-saving products and incentives to help save money and energy. Eligible income-qualified households may receive additional free services and equipment upgrades. For more information, call 877.866.4239 or visit nicorgas.com/saveathome.

The Nicor Gas Community Connection Center (C3) helps customers navigate all the above options, as well as basic need resources. Customers can contact the C3 team at nicorgas.com/CCC or receive customized recommendations online by answering a few anonymous questions via the Community Assistance Navigator.

For more information about bill payment assistance programs, visit nicorgas.com/energyassistance.

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Congratulations to the Stouffers!

Craig & Betty Stouffer of Kings will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Feb. 22, 2025.

They were married in Creston in 1975.

They have two daughters, Melinda & Valerie Stouffer.

LOCAL NEWS

Obituaries

Norman Lee Jenkins, Sr.

ROCHELLE — Norman Lee Jenkins, Sr. passed away peacefully, Friday, February 14, 2025. “Doc” was born on March 2, 1937, in St. Louis, MO and graduated from Granite City, IL High School in 1955. He attended Illinois State University (ISU) on a baseball scholarship, and his love for the St. Louis Cardinals lives on in his children and grandchildren. He was drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates, but opted to become a first-generation college graduate. Norm met Gloria Kaszynski (deceased) while attending ISU and they were married on August 23, 1958. He earned a B.S. from ISU in 1959, and began his career in education in 1960 working as a teacher and coach in the Worden, IL school system, also serving honorably in the Marine Corps Reserves. Norm completed his masters degree from Purdue University in 1963, and in 1964, he and his young family moved to Ogelsby, IL where he became a counselor and teacher at LaSalle-Peru Township High School. He

returned to Purdue in 1968, four children in tow, to complete his Ph.D. (1970). Doc then embarked on his career with the newly-established Kishwaukee Community College in Malta, IL, and the family relocated to Rochelle, IL. At Kishwaukee, he served as the Dean of Students Services from 1968-1970, Executive Dean from 1970-1978, and President from 1978-2000, when he retired. During his tenure at Kishwaukee he established a strong legacy as a community leader, serving on numerous boards and committees within the college district. Norm married Diane McNeilly (deceased) on October 20, 1997 and they continued to live in Rochelle, remaining active members of the Rochelle community. Over the years, he enjoyed attending the many sports and theatrical events in the lives of his children and grandchildren. Norm, Sr. was preceded in death by his parents, William and Lily Jenkins, and his brothers Bill, Ralph, and Dan. He is survived by his four children: Kathy Phil-



lips (Elliott, deceased) of Stoughton, WI, Norm Jenkins (Dawn) of Rochelle, IL, Lisa Autry (Mark) of St. Louis, MO, and Mike Jenkins (Sheri) of Quincy, IL, as well as many grandchildren and great grandchildren. Visitation is 4:00-7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 19, 2025 at Unger-Horner funeral home in Rochelle, IL. Gravesite services will take place in Worden, IL on May 2, 2025. Given that Norm was a golf enthusiast, if you are so moved, please donate on his behalf to the “GloJay Quest to be Best” youth golf memorial fund, which benefits aspiring community youth golf players of all ages. Guest book at www.UngerHorner.com

Charles Cooper Robbins

LAKE MARY, Fla. — Charles Cooper Robbins, 57, of Lake Mary, FL, died February 6, 2025. He was born and grew up in Oregon, IL, the son of Carolyn and Reiman Robbins and the grandson of Charles and Irma Robbins of Oregon and Hugh and Mary Cooper of Rochelle. He graduated from Oregon High School, attended the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and graduated from Northern Illinois University.

Water sports played an important role in his life. At an early age, he became an accomplished water skier and performed with the Minneiska Water Ski Team, often skiing on Whitewater Lake.

Later in life, he lived for many years in the San Francisco Bay area of California where he sailed and, for a time, lived on

his sailboat. He was also an avid scuba diver. While in California, he became a knowledgeable wine aficionado, and his political leanings transformed from midwest conservative to west coast liberal. During those years, he also carried on international business dealings, often involving trips to China.

On September 30, 2012, he married Yan (Tiffany) Wang. They later moved to Florida.

He is survived by his wife, Tiffany Robbins, of Lake Mary, FL; his sister Lisa Robbins and her husband David and son Ayden, of Greenfield, IN; cousins Elizabeth Cooper of Rochelle;

Thomas A. Cooper of Madison, WI; Don Etnyre of Oregon; Rebecca Bam-borough of Jacksonville, FL; Bill Venor of Buckeye, AZ; Barb Stone of Denver,



CO; Robert Venor of Aurora, CO; uncle and aunt Alan and Kathy Cooper of Rochelle, and aunt Cindi Cooper of Mesa, AZ. He was preceded in death by his parents and grandparents, his stepmother Lea Robbins, his cousin Mary Beth Etnyre, and his uncle Thomas L. Cooper.

After cremation, he will be buried with his parents at Riverview Cemetery in Oregon. A private memorial service will take place at a later time.

ROCHELLE POLICE REPORT

ROCHELLE — On Feb. 13 at 10:26 p.m. Joaquin Bahena-Medina, 40, of Rochelle was cited for use of electronic communications device. He signed a promise to comply and was given a March 7 Rochelle court date.

On Feb. 13 at 4:06 p.m. Cody Logan, 31, of Byron was cited for speeding 52 in a 30 miles per hour zone. He signed a promise to comply and was given a March 7 Rochelle court date.

On Feb. 14 at 8:24 p.m. Taron Heck, 28, of Rochelle was arrested for driving under the influence and cited for driving the wrong way

on a one-way street, illegal transport/carry of alcohol, and improper lane usage. He signed a promise to comply and was given a March 7 Rochelle court date.

On Feb. 14 at 8:24 p.m. Alexander Wade, 29, of Rochelle was cited for illegal transport/carry of alcohol. He signed a promise to comply and was given a March 7 Rochelle court date.

On Feb. 15 at 2:25 p.m. Tyressea Simmons, 23, of Rochelle was arrested on an Ogle County warrant and transferred.

On Feb. 15 at 4:55 p.m. Michael Long, 49, of Ro-

chelle was arrested on a Rockford Police Department warrant and transferred.

On Feb. 16 at 12:21 p.m. Logan P. Johnson, 18, of Rochelle was cited for disregarding a stop sign. He signed a promise to comply and was given a March 21 Rochelle court date.

On Feb. 17 at 2:12 p.m. Reginald Greer, 55, of Chicago was cited for speeding 72 in a 40 miles per hour zone. He signed a promise to comply and was given a March 21 Rochelle court date.

On Feb. 17 at 7:51 a.m. Nathan M. Laws, 26, of Rochelle was cited for speeding. He signed a promise to comply and was given a March 21 Rochelle court date.

All individuals are considered innocent until proven guilty.

OGLE COUNTY SHERIFF'S REPORT

OREGON — On Feb. 14 at approximately 7:54 p.m. deputies responded to the intersection of East Illinois Route 38 and South East Line Road for a two-vehicle collision. After investigation, deputies placed Jeffrey Holznagel, 61, of Rochelle, under arrest for driving with license expired more than a year. Holznagel was released on a notice to appear and given a future court date.

On Feb. 15 at approximately 9:56 a.m. deputies conducted a traffic stop near the intersection of East Illinois Route 38 and Dement Road. After investigation, deputies placed Kristy Dolister, 34, of Rochelle, under arrest for driving while license suspended. Dolister also had an active Lee County warrant for contempt of court. Dolister was additionally issued a citation for operating a vehicle with suspended registration. Dolister was transported to the Ogle County Jail where she was held in lieu of bond on the warrant and released on a notice to appear with a future court date for the driving while license suspended charge.

On Feb. 16 at approximately 1:58 a.m. deputies were dispatched to the area of 19,000 East Illinois Route 72 for the report of a car in the ditch. After an investigation, it was learned a grey Chrysler 200 was traveling eastbound on East Illinois Route 72 before traveling in the south ditch and losing control. The vehicle then reentered the roadway before sliding to a stop in the north ditch. The driver was identified as Alisa Voss, 52, of Kirkland. Voss was placed under arrest for driving under the influence and transported to the Ogle County Jail, where she was released on a notice to appear. Voss was additionally cited for unlawful possession of cannabis, and traveling too fast for conditions.

On Feb. 16 at approximately 4:54 p.m. deputies

responded to the area of East Illinois Route 64 and South Mulford Road for a two-vehicle crash. After an investigation, it was learned a grey Jeep Cherokee driven by Natuntee Perez, 27, of Loves Park was southbound on South Mulford Road when it failed to stop at the intersection with East Illinois Route 64. The grey Jeep proceeded into the intersection and collided with a black Nissan Titan driven by Jonathon Gebel, 23, of Davis Junction. Jonathan Perez, 26, of Loves Park, was a passenger in the grey Jeep and was uninjured as a result of the crash. Natuntee was transported to a local hospital for minor injuries. Deputies were assisted on scene by Creston Fire Department and Rochelle Fire Department.

On Feb. 17 at approximately 5:05 p.m. deputies responded to the intersection of North Kishwaukee Road and North Meridian Road for a single-vehicle accident. After further investigation the driver of the vehicle, Bradyn A. Jordan, 18, of Lake in the Hills, was placed under arrest for driving under the influence of drugs and possession of a controlled substance. It was determined the vehicle was traveling northbound on North Kishwaukee Road and failed to negotiate the curve prior to the intersection, striking a field entrance and becoming airborne before colliding with a telephone pole. Jordan was transported to the Ogle County Jail where he was booked and released on a notice to appear with a future court date. Jordan was additionally cited for no insurance, failure to reduce speed and improper lane usage. Deputies were assisted by the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office and Byron EMS/Fire personnel.

All individuals are considered innocent until proven guilty.

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

LOCAL NEWS

PARK: Purchases of new truck and mower approved Monday night

From page 1

in 2021.

Mower

The board unanimously approved the purchase of a new zero turn mower from Johnson Tractor for \$11,680. The total purchase of the new mower was \$16,860 with a \$5,000 trade in of an existing mower.

Bonds

The board unanimously approved an ordinance for the issuance of \$528,000 in general obligation park bonds for park district improvements, including \$511,000 in capital improvements, and \$560,000 in taxable general obligation park bonds to pay debt service. The bonds were sold to Stillman BancCorp N.A., who won the bid process out of nine area banks.

Bays

During the meeting, Ohlinger announced the promotion of Shane Bays



(PHOTO BY JEFF HELFRICH)

At its monthly meeting Monday, the Flagg-Rochelle Community Park District Board of Commissioners unanimously approved a \$142,000 bid from A&A Builders for the installation of new playground equipment at Sweeney and Skare Parks.

to superintendent of parks & facilities. Bays has been with the park district for six years.

“During this time, he has demonstrated exceptional attention to detail, outstanding work quality and an unwavering ded-

ication to our parks and community,” Ohlinger said. “His contributions as a maintenance worker have been instrumental in maintaining the high standards of our facilities and his leadership skills make him well suited for

this next step in his career. We’re confident that Shane’s expertise and his commitment will serve the district and our community well in this new role.”

Bays provided an update on recent maintenance work including

landscaping work at Lake Sule, new sand at the volleyball courts at Cooper Park, replacing platforms at the playground at Flanagan Park, covering of graffiti along the bike path, and painting inside at Spring Lake Marina.

Illinois Extension to host Poverty Simulation in Oregon

OREGON — Understanding poverty requires more than empathy — it requires experience. On Friday, Feb. 28, from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Illinois Extension will host a Poverty Simulation at the Rock River Center in Oregon. This free event, which includes lunch, offers participants a powerful opportunity to step into the

shoes of individuals facing the daily challenges of living on a limited budget.

During the interactive simulation, participants will navigate real-life scenarios that families in poverty encounter, such as securing housing, feeding their families, and accessing essential services — all while managing financial constraints. The

experience highlights the tough decisions and obstacles low-income individuals face, fostering a deeper understanding of poverty’s impact on families and communities. Whether you’re working with clients from diverse backgrounds or simply seeking to broaden your perspective, this life-changing experience

offers a unique opportunity to delve into the daily struggles of those living in poverty.

“Poverty is not a game, and addressing its challenges requires more than awareness — it demands firsthand understanding,” said Karla Belzer, Illinois Extension county director for Carroll, Lee, and Whiteside counties. “This

simulation is a valuable tool for professionals, community members, and anyone interested in gaining a new perspective on the struggles of those in need.”

The event is open to the public, and registration is required by Feb. 21. To sign up, visit go.illinois.edu/CLWpoverty or contact 815-632-3611. If

you will need an accommodation to participate, please call 815-632-3611. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your access needs. Join us for this eye-opening experience and gain a greater awareness of the challenges faced by low-income families in our communities.

Sinnissippi Centers: Youth mental health crisis continues to grow

DIXON — Concerns about youth struggling with depression and anxiety became more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. While greater awareness of mental health emerged during the pandemic, the fact remains that the rate of mental health needs for children and teens has been steadily rising since the early 21st century.

Between 2012 and 2018, there was a 34.6% increase in the occurrence of mental health diagnoses among children ages 4-17, according to the National Institutes of Health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that between 13% and 29% of American children ages 3-17 currently have a diagnosable mental health condition. Emergency room visits for pediatric mental health increased 55% between 2012 and 2016, while hospitalizations for mood disorders among juveniles increased 80% between 1997 and 2010.

“Even as funding for mental health increased during COVID-19, so did the demand for services. Funding and resources have historically lagged behind the demand for decades,” says Gloria Martin, Sinnissippi Centers’ director of Child and Adolescent Services. “Mental Health America ranks Illinois 29th in the country in mental health workforce availability, and the Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that only 23.3% of Illinois residents’ mental health needs can be met with the existing workforce.”

According to a report issued by a statewide task force, Illinois was identified as “in crisis” well before the COVID-19 pandemic. A heartbreaking trend is that suicide is now the second leading cause of death among teenagers ages 15-19.

“Many factors contribute to this urgent need,” Martin said. “Foremost is the negative impact of social media, which

does not get enough attention. Online bullying and unrealistic standards create immense pressure on adolescents. Academic pressures and fear of school shootings add to chronic stress levels. Social and environmental stressors, such as poverty, abuse, and climate change, also impact mental health. Biological factors, such as puberty and brain development, affect emotional control and judgment. Sadly, the pandemic worsened overall mental health issues for youth due to social isolation and the loss of caregivers affecting youth far into the future.”

Rural areas experience even greater barriers to obtaining mental health treatment for youth.

“Accessibility, affordability, availability, and acceptability are more pronounced challenges in rural areas,” Martin said. “To reduce these barriers, Sinnissippi Centers began partnering with area schools in 2015 to place SCI staff on-site

to provide mental health services.”

With parental consent and in collaboration with school staff, youth are enrolled as Sinnissippi Centers clients. Depending on individual needs, students may receive assessments, therapy, and medication monitoring, if needed, onsite in their school setting. Parents are actively engaged through phone, video, in-person, and after-school contacts.

“This model has evolved over the past 10 years in close collaboration with our schools to provide greater accessibility and reduce time out of school,” Martin said.

Beginning in 2015 with

onsite services in three schools, the Sinnissippi Centers school-based mental health program has grown substantially. As of December 2024, 635 youth were receiving mental health services onsite in their schools by Sinnissippi staff at 42 schools across five counties. In addition to providing onsite school-based services, staff also offer services after school, in person or virtually, during breaks, and over the summer.

Studies referenced by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) show that youth with emotional or behavioral problems often experi-

ence treatment delays of four years. For example, a youth identified in second grade with behavioral or mental health concerns may not be linked to off-site services until sixth grade. This delay can profoundly affect social, emotional, and academic performance. Youth provided with school-based services at a younger age are more likely to see the severity of issues reduced or resolved, promoting greater academic and social success in school.

“Sinnissippi is proud to help hundreds of youth each year become more successful students and happier individuals,” Martin said.

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LOCAL VIEWS

Asphalt – A material we should all know

ROCHELLE has been greatly influenced by historical events, especially the development of transportation systems through the years. As residents of the “Hub” City, we are surrounded by transportation pathways which run through and around Rochelle. Roadways, railroads, and air routes to our municipal airport and the Rockford Regional Airport are all integral parts of the environment we experience day in and day out. It is helpful for us to spend time thinking and learning about these systems to grasp the “big picture” of the world we live in. After all, we all use and rely on them!

In the previous transportation article, we discussed how the development of good roads has enabled the movement of people and cargo over the land quickly and efficiently. In this article we’ll discuss how a material known as “asphalt” has contributed to our remarkable road system, as well as some of its drawbacks.

Today asphalt is recognized as a crucial construction material for road building as well as parking

lot construction, but it has a history that spans thousands of years. Its earliest usage dates to ancient civilizations, where it was found in areas like Babylon (modern day Iraq), around 3000 BC. The Babylonians utilized natural bitumen mixed with rocks, sand, and plant materials, to waterproof structures and create roads. This marked the inception of asphalt’s use in construction. At that time Bitumen was found in naturally occurring deposits in the earth, but today bitumen is refined from crude oil.

The ancient Egyptians also recognized the value of bitumen in the mummification process and for waterproofing boats. The material’s resilience and adhesive properties made it a favored choice for various applications across cultures. During the Roman Empire, bitumen asphalt was utilized in road construction, building the famous Appian Roadway as an example of its durability. This period highlighted the practical benefits of asphalt, contributing to long-lasting infrastructure.

The 19th century brought significant advancements in

asphalt technology, particularly during the Industrial Revolution. In the United States, the first recorded instance of asphalt paving was in 1870, when the city of Newark, New Jersey, paved its streets using a mixture of natural asphalt. This paved the way (no pun intended!) for its widespread adoption in urban areas, facilitating better transportation networks. Of course, as roadways became better with pavement, opportunity and demand rose for automobiles.

By the early 20th century, asphalt made from human-made materials became more prevalent. The discovery of petroleum and its refinement in the late 19th century allowed humans to produce refined bitumen, leading to a more uniform and reliable material. When hot mix asphalt (HMA) was invented in the 1930s it revolutionized road construction. Hot mix asphalt, which combines asphalt cement with aggregates and is transported to the road construction site immediately while it’s still “hot”, provides improved durability and performance. The Federal-Aid High-

way Act of 1956 further propelled asphalt’s use, establishing an extensive interstate highway system in the United States that relied heavily on asphalt for its roads.

Today, asphalt is used primarily for road construction, paving, and roofing applications. Approximately 94% of the asphalt produced is used for various types of paving, including highways, streets, and airfields. Since it can be used in different climates and for diverse purposes, it is even more useful compared to concrete which has more temperature limitations. And advancements in technology have led to the development of recycled asphalt pavement (RAP), which minimizes waste and reduces the ecological footprint of paving projects. This process allows old asphalt to be scraped up and ground into a reusable material, conserving resources and reducing energy consumption in production.

There are so many useful characteristics of asphalt. It provides a smooth surface that helps vehicle performance and safety while also reducing road noise and

improving riding comfort. Because asphalt has some flexibility it is less prone to cracking compared to rigid materials like concrete, thus requiring less maintenance and offering a longer lifespan (when properly installed). And if that wasn’t enough, its dark color helps with snow and ice melting! This provides safer winter driving conditions and reduces the need for salt and gravel to be spread on the roads.

However, asphalt isn’t without its drawbacks. Because asphalt’s most important ingredient comes from petroleum, producing it has environmental impacts, particularly regarding emissions and resource extraction. Furthermore, while many asphalt roads can be recycled, not all can be. Challenges such as thermal cracking and softening can arise under extreme weather conditions and when temperatures fluctuate drastically (which has happened several times already this winter). This compromises the material’s durability. Additionally, the presence of harmful chemicals in some asphalt formulations raises health

concerns for workers and nearby communities.

So, asphalt has evolved from ancient uses in construction to become a central player in our modern world’s infrastructure. Its development reflects advancements in technology and materials science, making it a vital component of road construction today. While it boasts significant benefits, particularly in durability and adaptability, it also presents challenges that require ongoing attention to ensure sustainable and healthy use in the future. As urbanization continues globally, the role of asphalt will likely remain indispensable.

Watch here for more information about transportation systems and the components which pertain to all of us.

Kurt Wolter has studied and taught technology - including production, transportation, energy, and communication - for over 30 years. He enjoys trying to better understand technology and its past, present, and future while also attempting technical journalism. He can be reached at technology100@gmail.com.

Walters: The top 10 countries to retire in

I can’t believe the reception my last article about where to retire has received! So many people told me they hadn’t considered moving abroad for retirement and were surprised to learn how much cheaper it can be to live overseas.

Don’t worry — I’m not retiring anytime soon. But just like saving for retirement, deciding where to retire takes time, research, and careful planning.

Right after I wrote that article, I came across a video about the top 10 countries to retire in. I did some further research and was pleasantly surprised to find that several of the countries my friends are moving to made the list. I thought you’d like to know which ones so you can start your own research and determine if retiring abroad is right for you.

According to International Living, the top 10 countries to retire in are:

Thailand – With a cost

of living around \$2,000 per month, Thailand offers a tropical climate, affordable healthcare, an exotic culture, and incredible food. However, it is quite far from the U.S., which may be a drawback for some.

Italy – Living in Italy costs about \$2,000–\$2,500 per month. The country is rich in culture and history, offers world-class cuisine, and boasts one of the best healthcare systems. It’s also easily accessible from the U.S. and has a mild Mediterranean climate in many regions.

Greece – This beautiful country offers great weather year-round, affordable accommodations, and a large expat community. It has a solid public healthcare system, which can be even better with private insurance. However, if you live in a tourist destination, you’ll have to contend with many visitors.

Malaysia – A cultural crossroads with a low cost of living, pristine beaches,

and easy access to other parts of Asia. Its affordability is a major draw, including inexpensive home healthcare.

Spain – A warm and welcoming country with rich culture, a low cost of living, numerous golf courses, and a large expat community. Whether you prefer the beach, a bustling city, a historic castle, or a forest retreat, Spain offers a first-world infrastructure at a much lower cost than the U.S.

France – Dream of living in a charming French town, picking up fresh baguettes each morning, and enjoying wine at night? Outside of the major cities, France offers a relatively low cost of living, an excellent lifestyle, and a strong healthcare system.

Mexico – Perfect for those who don’t want to move too far. Mexico offers great weather, affordable living, a rich culture, and outstanding food.

Costa Rica – Many expats are drawn to Costa

Rica for its low cost of living, excellent healthcare, beautiful beaches, lush rainforests, and fine dining.

Portugal – A dream destination with old European charm, affordable living, great weather, and strong expat communities near golf courses and pristine beaches. Portugal is also ranked as having one of the best healthcare systems for retirees.

Panama – Panama offers first-world conveniences at Central American prices. The capital city has all the modern infrastructure you’d expect, while the country also boasts stunning beaches. Retirees can benefit from Panama’s Pensionado Program, which provides significant discounts on living expenses.

I wasn’t surprised by this list because all these countries offer what I previously discussed: a low cost of living, good healthcare, accessible transportation, favorable

weather, and large expat communities.

However, personally, I would not choose some of these countries due to security concerns. I would also rule out any country that is too far or difficult and expensive to travel to—I still want to see my kids! Additionally, I wouldn’t feel comfortable in a place where I’m unfamiliar with the culture, and I have to love the food. I tend to get tired of the same cuisine after a few days.

We have a friend who retired to Panama, and she absolutely loves it. We’ve visited her twice and fell in love with the country. Her health has improved significantly thanks to the warm climate, fresh fruits and vegetables, and an active lifestyle.

Another friend is in the process of moving to Thailand. She recently returned from a trip where she scouted places to live, researched healthcare options, and spent time ex-

periencing the culture. She has now received her visa and decided that Thailand is her future home.

Yet another friend has made multiple trips to Portugal to find her ideal retirement spot.

If you’re considering retiring abroad, I suggest starting with a visit. Explore different cities and see what you like. Then, research visa requirements, healthcare options, and cost of living. Finally, find a reputable relocation expert to help with the visa process, housing, health insurance, banking, and other essentials.

As for me? Well, it’s tax season, so I have a lot of work to do. But a girl can dream!

Silene Walters is a CPA, the owner of Walters Accounting Inc in Stillman Valley. When she is not preparing taxes she travels with her husband George and shares her experiences on <https://www.facebook.com/dreamoftraveling>

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

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

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

COMMUNITY

Dorothy's Diamonds travel to the Smokey Mountains

ROCHELLE — Dorothy's Diamonds last trip taken was a tour to Pigeon Forge and the Smokey Mountains.

The scenery was beautiful and in full color. The drive up to the twin chimneys in The Smokey Mountain National Park was breath taking.

The group saw five shows including the Paula Dean Lumber Jack show. The group visited the Applewood Farmhouse in Sevierville and free time in the beautiful Gatlinburg nestled within the mountains.

The Hub City Senior Center benefited monetarily from this trip.

If you want to see beautiful country travel with Dorothy's Diamonds to a Myrtle Beach Show Trip in April and enjoy four shows, Barefoot Landing,



Dorothy's Diamonds last trip taken was a tour to Pigeon Forge and the Smokey Mountains.

Myrtle Beach Boardwalk and Promenade, and L.W. living History Farm. In August we will

tour Mackinac Island and in October we will travel to the beautiful upper New Hampshire and the White

Mountains. For more info on these fun times call Dorothy 815-384-5325.



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- Jan. 29 - Lindsey Stopa, Rockford, \$25
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- Feb. 7 - Kailey Pifer, Rochelle, \$25
- Feb. 8 - Sharon Watkins, Sycamore, \$25
- Feb. 9 - Roger Meyer, Mt. Morris, \$50
- Feb. 10 - Elsie Johnson, Rochelle, \$25
- Feb. 11 - Xoe LeMay, Dixon, \$25
- Feb. 12 - Tom Myrick, Rochelle, \$25
- Feb. 13 - Juan Luna, Rochelle, \$25
- Feb. 14 - Bill Cash, Roscoe, \$25
- Feb. 15 - Alyssa Perez, Rochelle, \$25
- Feb. 16 - Eva Chu, Rochelle, \$50
- Feb. 17 - Rocio Belmonte, Rochelle, \$25
- Feb. 18 - Bridget Schott, Dixon, \$25
- Feb. 19 - Mark Wanner, Rochelle, \$25

RMU water receives perfect IEPA inspection score

ROCHELLE — Rochelle Municipal Utilities (RMU) is proud to announce that its recent inspection by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) resulted in no deficiencies, highlighting the utility's ongoing commitment to operational excellence and environmental stewardship.

The comprehensive inspection, conducted by IEPA officials, reviewed RMU's compliance with state and federal water quality regulations, operational procedures, and environmental safety standards. The assessment confirmed that RMU's water treatment and distribution systems meet or exceed

all required guidelines, ensuring safe and reliable service to the community. "We are thrilled to receive a perfect score on our IEPA inspection," City Manager Jeff Fiegenschuh said. "This result is a testament to the dedication and hard work of our entire team, who consistently prioritize the health and

safety of our residents by maintaining the highest standards of water quality and system reliability." RMU remains committed to providing high-quality utility services while investing in infrastructure improvements and sustainable practices to meet the evolving needs of the community.

BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

Feb. 20 Christian Losoya	Feb. 22 Jessica South Lucy Hazlip	Feb. 27 Beth Bolhous	March 5 Briggs Bridgeman
Feb. 21 Kris Oleson Anna Sexton	Feb. 26 Natalie Powell	March 2 Addison Perkins	March 6 Nicole King

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

Coffee Break

King Crossword

ACROSS

1 Actress Hatcher

5 Slender

9 Venomous viper

12 — Bator

13 Director Wertmuller

14 Cutesy- —

15 Beau

17 "Nova" aier

18 Oodles

19 Media mogul Winfrey

21 Brother of Moses

24 Concerning

25 Large amount

26 Novelty dance at a wedding

30 Pampering, for short

31 Sri —

32 Tokyo's historic name

33 Quarantines

35 L-Q bridge

36 Baseball legend Willie

37 Mission man

38 Arizona city

40 Pants part

42 Flamenco cheer

43 Exceed

48 — -Manuel Miranda

49 Clump of grass

50 Locks

51 Young bloke

52 Summers in Paris

53 Sciences' partner

DOWN

1 Vat

2 "Xanadu" band

3 Comic Romano

4 Cash received

5 Skirt feature

6 Fibs

7 Hostel

8 "Vogue" singer

9 Collar, as a suspect

10 Japanese noodles

11 Ritzy

16 Director Howard

20 Snoop

21 Sparkling Italian wine

22 Shakespeare title starter

23 Advise

24 Pen fluids

26 Cave creatures

27 French article

28 Air freshener target

29 Vatican VIP

31 Infant's outfit

34 Napkin's perch

35 Green tea variety

37 — de deux

38 Bridge fee

39 Director Kazan

40 Ump's ruling

41 Tolkien creatures

44 Trench

45 Oft-pierced body part

46 Petty peeve

47 ER workers

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Weekly SUDOKU

2	6	5		1	9	7		
	1		8		6			
7		8		2		9		6
6			7	8		4		
5	8							1
		2		6			9	
				5	7			
		1			8		7	
9		6			4		8	2

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

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦♦♦

♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging
♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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CryptoQuip

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

Clue: R equals T

J E R J V K R T P L R V E R S O X Y B G L W
E H B W R X U S O L U L O O L G
F L R E H H B J O B P C B P C W X T P G W :
" F K U E Y X O B R L R B P C W . "

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King Crossword

Solution time: 23 mins.

Answers

2	6	5		1	9	7		
	1		8		6			
7		8		2		9		6
6			7	8		4		
5	8							1
		2		6			9	
				5	7			
		1			8		7	
9		6			4		8	2

Answer

"My Favorite Tings":
a list of preferred
Catchy tune that provides
answer

CryptoQuip

SPORTS

RTHS Boys Basketball

Seniors come up clutch during win over LaSalle-Peru

Rochelle celebrates Senior Night with 78-73 victory against Cavaliers on Friday

BY RUSSELL HODGES
SPORTS EDITOR

ROCHELLE—Senior guard Carson Lewis kept a shooter's mentality despite seeing some unfortunate bounces off the rim Friday evening, when the Rochelle Hubs celebrated Senior Night before taking on the LaSalle-Peru Cavaliers in an Interstate 8 Conference matchup.

Lewis made one of the biggest shots of the night, draining a 3-pointer from the corner to give Rochelle a slim lead during the final minute of the fourth quarter. The senior made multiple big plays down the stretch, delivering a pair of clutch assists in the final minute that allowed the Hubs to finish the game on a 9-4 run and beat the Cavaliers 78-73. It's the second Interstate 8 victory of the season for the Hubs (9-18, 2-7 Interstate 8) who will host Rock Falls on Saturday.

"It feels good to come out on top for once," said Lewis, who scored 15 points in the win over LaSalle-Peru. "We didn't have a lot of energy in the first half, but we played with a lot more energy late in the third quarter and in the fourth quarter. Coach [Thompson] told us during halftime that we needed to play with more energy... I knew one of those shots would go down because a lot of my misses were in and out. I kept shooting knowing the next shot would go in."

Junior guard Van Gerber buried three first-half triples and totaled 13 points in the game for the Hubs, who faced a slight deficit throughout the first two quarters. Despite LaSalle-Peru gaining the early lead, the Cavaliers were unable to create much separation, as the Cavaliers struggled to contain Rochelle forward Brody Brunns. The 6-foot-5 sophomore Brunns had his low-post offense working early, using his left hand and good footwork to hit four first-half field goals.

Trailing 35-32 entering

the third quarter, Rochelle opened the second half on a 12-2 run, taking a seven-point lead after a 3-pointer from senior guard Elijah Harley and a pair of fast break layups off turnovers. A quick timeout allowed the LaSalle-Peru to reset and respond with a 7-0 run led by guard Mikey Hartman, who drilled a key triple to help the Cavaliers tie the game at 44-44.

The Hubs were unfazed, however, as Brunns took over the game on offense with a dominant display in the low post. LaSalle-Peru had no answer for Brunns or his left hand, as the talented sophomore scored 17 third-quarter points on eight field goals, including one mid-range jumper, to help Rochelle take a 59-54 lead into the fourth quarter. Brunns scored 33 points in the game.

"We wanted to go out and help our seniors win one of the last home games on our schedule," Brunns said. "My teammates knew that I was able to score down there and they kept feeding me the ball. I have to give my teammates the credit for passing me the ball. Coach [Thompson] said that we were lacking energy in the first half and we needed to get the ball down low because that's where we were scoring most of our points. We executed that in the second half."

A valiant effort from LaSalle-Peru's Nick Olivero, who scored nine of his 16 points in the game during the fourth quarter, enabled the Cavaliers to rally back and tie the score at 69-69 with roughly two minutes remaining. Rochelle's senior delivered clutch plays down the stretch, though, as Lewis rained down a triple from the corner before delivering a line-drive pass to a cutting Harley for a layup and a foul that drew a roar of applause from the Senior Night crowd.

"It's a big confidence boost for us because L-P is a good team," Lewis said. "We know we're going to

have to beat some good teams in the regional if we want to win a regional title."

Lewis also sank two free throws in the final seconds for the Hubs, who have one week left in the regular season before beginning the IHSA 3A Freeport Regional with their semifinal matchup on Wednesday, Feb. 26 at 7:30 p.m. Harley finished with nine points for the Hubs, who drew the No. 5 seed in the regional and will face No. 3 seed Woodstock in the semifinal round. Rochelle defeated Woodstock in last year's regional tournament, which was held at Rockford Boylan.

Prior to the game, Rochelle honored its four senior boys basketball players Carson Lewis, Elijah Harley, Jack Tilton and Krew Sullivan in a pregame ceremony. Rochelle also honored senior dancers Damaris Macias and Julia Livingston as well as senior cheer team members Marianna Saldana, Naleia Fonfara, Jocelyn Cervantes, Trent Kreider, Abbey Jarvis, Jasmynn Lipscomb and Bryn Kissack. The senior band members honored were Julissa Torres, Emma Kennay, Noah LeFevre, Lucas Smardo, Drake Ramos, Makayla Ludwig and Allison Drobick.

Rock Falls

Junior guard Van Gerber and senior guard Carson Lewis combined to drain nine 3-pointers and fuel the Rochelle Hubs during their varsity basketball game against Rock Falls.

Lewis finished with 17 points and Gerber totaled 16 points for the Hubs, who shot roughly 45 percent from the field and buried 13 triples in a high-scoring matchup with the Rockets. But the offensive fireworks weren't enough, as Rock Falls shot almost 54 percent overall and forced 15 turnovers in a 90-85 win over Rochelle. Sophomore forward Brody Brunns posted a team-high 22 points and 10 rebounds for the Hubs (9-19, 2-7 Interstate 8),



(PHOTOS BY RUSSELL HODGES)

The Rochelle Hub varsity basketball team honored its four seniors Friday evening. Above from left to right are Jack Tilton, Elijah Harley, Carson Lewis and Krew Sullivan. Below are the senior band, dance and cheer team members.

who host Winnebago on Tuesday.

"It's huge going into the regional that Carson's feeling better shooting the ball," head coach Tim Thompson said. "He's shooting with more confidence and Van has shot the ball well all year long. Van is right around 40 percent for the season. We just need to make sure that, when we aren't hitting those 3-point shots, we aren't letting those missed shots turn into runouts."

Senior guard Elijah Harley totaled nine points and a team-high six assists for the Hubs, who held a 44-42 halftime lead over the Rockets on Saturday. Despite struggling from the free-throw line and from 3-point range, Rock Falls executed its half-court offense at a high level, scoring 58 points in the paint and shooting 60 percent on 2-point baskets in the game. Austin Castaneda poured in 22 points and was a perfect

10-for-10 from the field to aid the Rock Falls offense.

"We were able to get Brody touches where he needed touches and a lot of our action wound up with Brody touching the ball on the left side of the block," Thompson said. "We got him a decent amount of touches this weekend and we were able to get into the offense we wanted."

Kuitim Heald scored a game-high 27 points to lead the Rockets, who outpaced Rochelle by seven points during the second half to emerge with the victory. Rock Falls capitalized on turnovers throughout the afternoon, scoring 20 points off turnovers. Despite the loss, Rochelle turned in one of its best shooting performances of the season, taking advantage of the fast pace of play. Freshman guard Cohen Haedt drilled three triples to finish with nine points Saturday.

"We've struggled all

year with keeping guys out of the paint," Thompson said. "Rock Falls is really shifty and they have four guys who can really handle the ball and be explosive with double moves. They were constantly getting into the paint and when we're always having to overhelp, it leads to open threes or layups. We haven't been rotating quick enough. Our half-court defense is something we've focused on all year, but we just haven't been able to get it solved."

Junior forward Brode Metzger chipped in seven points for the Hubs, who have one week left in the regular season before beginning the IHSA 3A Freeport Regional on Wednesday, Feb. 26. The Hubs received the No. 5 seed and will face the No. 3 seed Woodstock in the semifinals at 7:30 p.m. The winner will face either Freeport or Rockford Boylan for the championship.



RTHS honors senior band, dance and cheer team members Friday evening

The Rochelle Township High School senior band members honored Friday evening include Julissa Torres, Emma Kennay, Noah LeFevre, Lucas Smardo, Drake Ramos, Makayla Ludwig and Allison Drobick.

The senior dance members honored are Damaris Macias and Julia Livingston. The senior cheerleaders honored include Marianna Saldana, Naleia Fonfara, Jocelyn Cervantes, Trent Kreider, Jasmynn Lipscomb, Abbey Jarvis and Bryn Kissack.

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ASHTON NEWS



Ashton-Franklin Center Elementary School hosts Blockfest 2025

Blockfest 2025 at Ashton-Franklin Center Elementary was a huge success. Students and families enjoyed getting creative on Global School Play Day. (Courtesy photos)



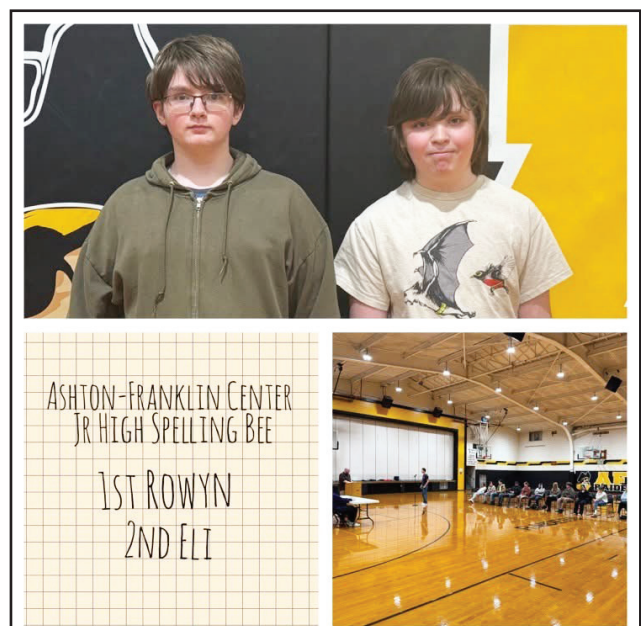
Viall competes at Section 2 FFA Meats Judging Event

Kate Viall represented Ashton-Franklin Center FFA at the Section 2 FFA Meats Judging Event on Saturday at Eickman's in Seward. She placed eighth overall and fifth as a team in the section. She also placed fifth overall in questions in the Senior Division of the Illinois Meats Series. (Courtesy photo)



Bonito named Raider of the Week

Brianna Bonito was recently selected as Raider of the Week for Jan. 31. "Brianna was nominated for stepping out of her comfort zone to attend a leadership conference! Awesome!" a district Facebook post said. (Courtesy photo)



Junior High Spelling Bee winners named

The Ashton-Franklin Center School District recently congratulated its Junior High Spelling Bee winner, Rowyn, and runner up, Eli. Rowyn will move on to the regional spelling bee on Feb. 20. (Courtesy photo)

Locals named to HCC Fall 2024 Dean's List

FREEPORT — Highland Community College proudly announces the dean's list for the fall 2024 semester. Students who have completed 12

credit hours or more during the semester and have a minimum 3.25 grade point average (GPA), based on a 4.0 scale, are included on the dean's

list. The Highest Honors are awarded to students with a perfect 4.0 GPA. High Honors are given to students with a 3.50 to 3.99 GPA, and Honors

students have earned a GPA between 3.25 and 3.49.

High Honors: Ashton: Brianna Gonnerman, Adeline Tinsman.

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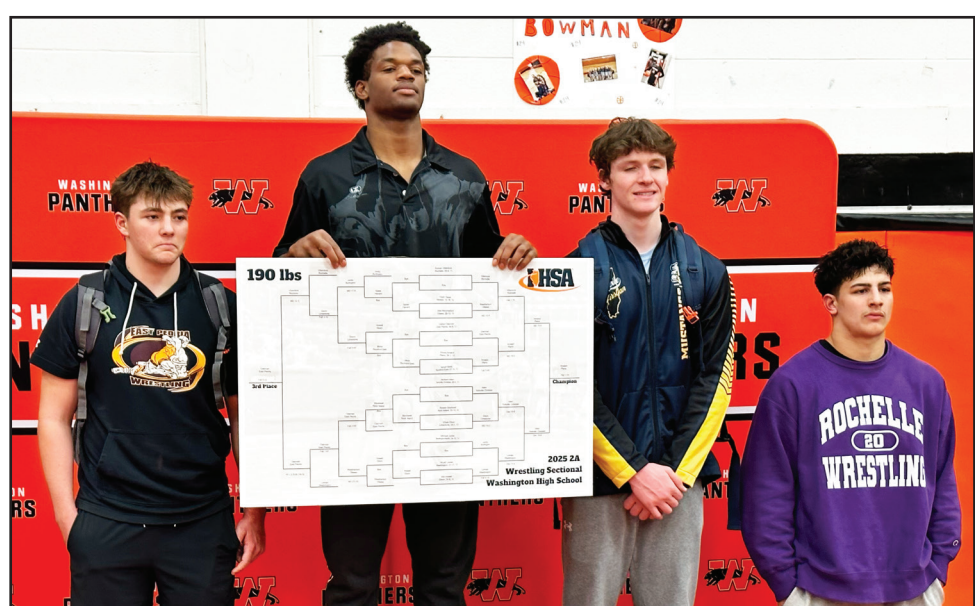
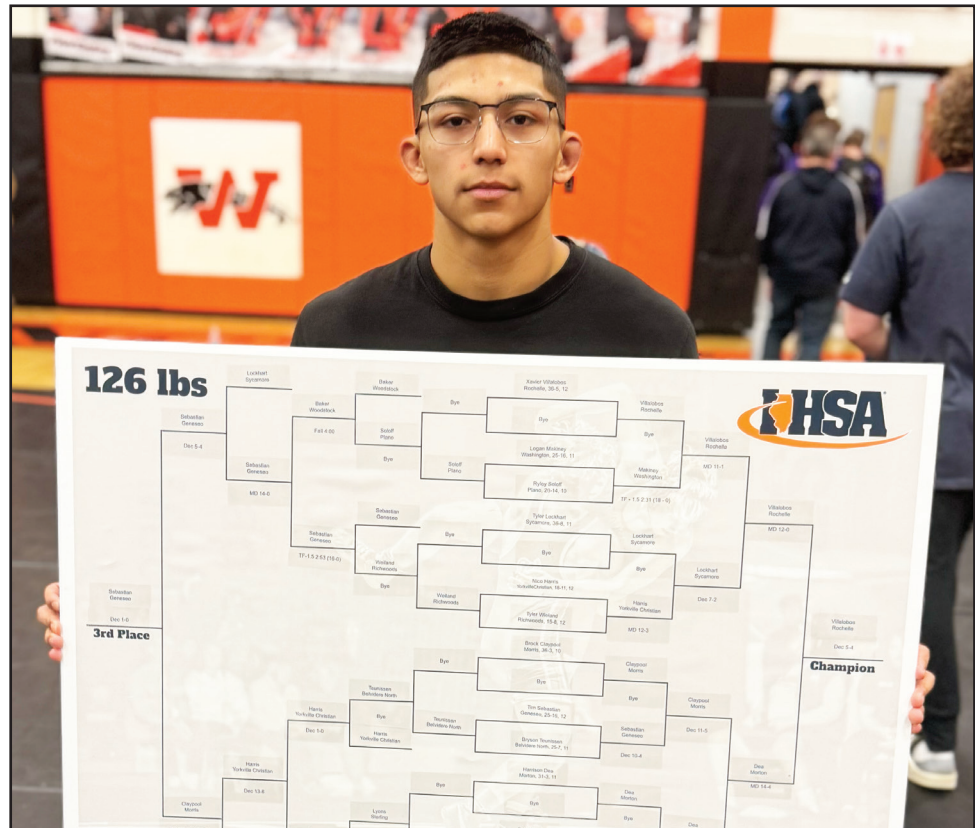
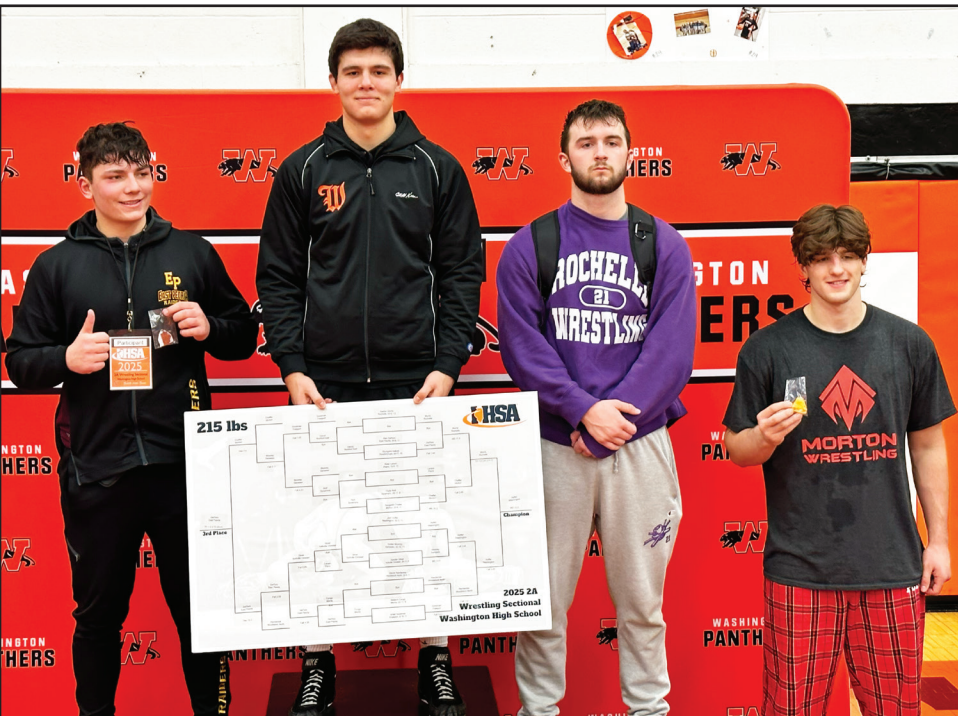
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SPORTS



(COURTESY PHOTOS)

The Rochelle Hub varsity wrestling team qualified four athletes for the IHSA State Championship meet this season. Above are sectional medalists Kaiden Morris (top left), champion Xavier Villalobos (top right), Grant Gensler (bottom left) and Roman Villalobos (bottom right).

WRESTLING: Four Hubs medal at IHSA 2A Washington Sectional

From page 14

“Staying composed and being healthy has been a good thing for me,” Gensler said. “We have good conditioning and we want to win. I think coach [Alphonso] Vruno does a good job of making us into winners and teaching us how to win. I think those things have helped me a lot.”

Senior Kaiden Morris (45-3) also finished second at the sectional tournament, scoring 34 points over his first two matches at 215 pounds to become a three-time state qualifier. A three-

time regional champion and one-time sectional champion, Morris turned up the heat against East Peoria’s Alec Del Toro in the quarterfinals, erasing a 4-3 deficit with three takedowns and a near fall over the second and third periods to cruise into the semifinals on a 17-5 major decision.

“My mindset was to think about the end goal, which was doing what I had to do to get to state,” Morris said. “It means a lot and the state tournament is really fun. It’s a fun experience to be there with my teammates and my coaches. It’s a big

venue with a lot of fans and it’s really loud.”

Morris locked down his trip to state with a resounding victory in the sectional semifinals, where the senior turned a pair of takedown-to-near-fall combinations into a 17-1 technical fall over Morton’s Benjamin Chaffer. A returning state runner-up after finishing second at 215 pounds as a junior, Morris will shoot for one more opportunity to compete in the state finals as a senior.

“We’re fine tuning what we’re already good at and staying consistently on the mat so we

can stay sharp at this point in the season,” Morris said. “I need to remember who I am and wrestle my match. Experience is a big thing for me and I know I’ll have more experience at state than some of the other guys. I need to wrestle my match and that should get me where I want to be.”

Junior Roman Villalobos rounded out Rochelle’s four state qualifiers over the weekend, taking fourth at 190 pounds to become a first-time state qualifier. Villalobos (37-10) reached the sectional semifinals after a fall over Ottawa’s Wes

Weatherford, but a loss in the semifinals meant that one more win would be needed to clinch a state bid. Villalobos handled his business in the wrestlebacks, scoring a 12-3 major decision against Limestone’s Ethan Dixon.

“It’s always been a goal of mine to get down to state,” Villalobos said. “Being able to do that is an incredible feeling. I felt like I was able to get to my offense and stick to the things I’m good at. I’m looking forward to being down there and wrestling on the mat because I’ve been so used to just watching from the stands... I

have an opportunity to go out there and prove something.”

Six wrestlers represented Rochelle in the sectional tournament. Junior Freddie Hernandez (34-14) won three matches at 113 pounds, falling one victory short of qualifying for state. Freshman Aidan Lopez (34-13) earned two victories at 120 pounds in his first sectional tournament. The IHSA State Championship meet will be held at the State Farm Center in Champaign and open on Thursday, Feb. 20 before concluding on Saturday, Feb. 22.

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HUB SPOTLIGHT

Vincent finishes strong at IHSA Oregon Sectional

BY RUSSELL HODGES
SPORTS EDITOR

DIXON — Senior Cassidy Vincent's illustrious bowling career concluded Saturday, when she represented the Rochelle Lady Hubs in the IHSA Oregon Sectional at Plum Hollow Lanes.

Vincent turned in one of her strongest tournament performances of the season, shooting a 1,204 series over six games and posting a high game of 223 to finish 12th out of well over 100 bowlers. Vincent, who fell just 25 pins short of qualifying for the state tournament, finishes her high school career as a four-time sectional qualifier and a four-time All-Interstate 8 honoree.

"Our regional and our sectional are some of the top tournaments in the state," head coach Eric Widick said. "Cassidy did a great job and she was rolling the ball well. I thought this was one of her best tournaments of the year in terms of her attitude and how she was throwing the ball."

The sectional tournament wraps up the 2024-25 season for the Rochelle Lady Hub varsity bowling team, which finished with a 4-12 overall record and a 3-7 record in the Interstate 8 Conference. Despite rostering only two upperclassmen, Rochelle picked up victories against Rockford Lutheran, Sycamore and Morris while finishing fifth in the conference for the season.

"I wasn't sure how strong we would be this year because we had some new bowlers," Widick said. "They really surprised me. I asked Cassidy and Kylie [McCullough] to be our co-captains and they took on those roles really well. They were really supportive of the younger bowlers. ... As a whole, I thought the girls exceeded my expectations. I saw a lot of improvement from our second-year bowlers and our first-time bowlers. They're dedicated and they want to learn."

Rochelle's top tournament performances from the 2024-25 season include a sixth-place showing at LaSalle-Peru's Cavalier Classic and a sixth-place effort at the Sterling MLK Jr. Invitational last month. Although the Lady Hubs are losing only one senior, it will be a notable loss, as Vincent brought home multiple tournament medals for her individual performances.

"Their consistency started to improve and I thought the girls really started to gel and support each other," Widick said. "We moved our girls from conventional-grip balls to finger-tip balls and we taught them the mechanics of how to start and end at the foul line. We changed everything and they were able to pick those changes up quickly. I thought they did quite well with it."

While Vincent will depart from the program, Rochelle will have five varsity starters eligible to return next winter.



(COURTESY PHOTO)

Senior Cassidy Vincent represented the Rochelle Lady Hubs during the IHSA Oregon Sectional at Plum Hollow Lanes in Dixon on Saturday afternoon.

Among those starters is junior Kylie McCullough, who was named an All-Interstate 8 Honorable Mention for the second straight season. The Lady Hubs also rostered a large number of sophomores including Ava Norris, Magaly Belmonte, Chloe Rodriguez, Karina Valdez and Paris Washington, who all earned varsity experience on the lanes this season.

"I thought Kylie turned a corner this year," Widick said. "She took on more responsibility with helping the girls and she's been working on her own to improve, so we're expecting her to be our leader. Magaly's been chomping at the bit to learn and do things right. Ava really turned her game around this year and she's ready to step into a role that Kylie had this year. Karina and Chloe made major improvements and raised their average by 20-to-30 pins from last year."

Freshman Mia Villavicencio is another underclassman to watch for as the Lady Hubs enter the offseason. In addition to participating in the local high school league at T-Byrd Lanes, Widick said that practice time over the offseason will be a key to success over the offseason.

"The goal for the offseason is to try and get our girls to work on their game more," Widick said. "They need to do some work on their own... I think the girls are realizing that they need to apply themselves outside of the season. I've asked them to join the high school league and that will give them more bowling time. We'll still be young next year, but if the girls are working over the offseason, then we can hit the ground running as we go into the 2025-26 season."

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WEDNESDAY, FEB. 19, 2025

ROCHELLE NEWS-LEADER • SECTION 1 • PAGE 14

SPORTS



SENIORS HONORED

RTHS honored its senior boys basketball, cheer, dance and band members Friday.

See page 8 for more details

RTHS Wrestling

Hubs advance four to state

Villalobos takes first to lead Rochelle matmen at IHSA 2A Washington Sectional

BY RUSSELL HODGES
SPORTS EDITOR

WASHINGTON—No wrestler in the history of Rochelle Township High School had reached the IHSA State Championship meet four years in a row until Saturday afternoon, when senior Xavier Villalobos took the mat at the IHSA 2A Washington Sectional with history in his sights.

A two-time IHSA regional champion seeking his second career sectional title, Villalobos was on the attack early, earning back-to-back major decisions to reach the final round at 126 pounds. One of three Rochelle wrestlers to battle for sectional championships on Saturday, Villalobos faced off against Morton's Harrison Dea in the finals, snatching a first-period takedown and breaking a tied score with a third-period escape to emerge with a 5-4 decision in his favor.

It was a monumental win for Villalobos, who not only clinched the second sectional crown of his career, but punched his ticket to the IHSA State Championship for a school-record fourth consecutive season. It's also a step up the family ladder for Villalobos, whose older brother Eddie concluded his wrestling career at Rochelle as a three-time IHSA state qualifier.

"It means a lot to me because I always looked up to my big brother and I always wanted to set goals

that he wasn't able to reach," Villalobos said. "It shows other schools and communities that Rochelle is a really good school for wrestling and all types of sports. Being a four-time state qualifier is a hard achievement and it means a lot to me to go back down to the state meet."

Offense has been the key to success for Villalobos late in his senior season. After securing four takedowns in his regional championship victory over Geneseo's Tim Sebastian, Villalobos picked up where he left off on Friday, advancing to the sectional semifinals with an 11-1 major decision against Washington's Logan Makiney, who Villalobos took down three times.

It was more of the same in the semifinals, where Villalobos didn't concede a single point and dominated the opening period to earn a 12-0 major decision over Sycamore's Tyler Lockhart. Villalobos (39-5), who medaled in fifth at the state tournament as a junior and was a state runner-up as a freshman, is seeking to become Rochelle's first three-time IHSA state medalist.

"It's more of a mental thing for me," Villalobos said. "If I get in on a shot or if I can get my guy going and set up shots, I know I'll be able to finish them or get into a position I'm more comfortable in. We practice really hard in the room to set up shots and become familiar with uncomfortable positions. I need to keep



The Rochelle Hub wrestling team has advanced four athletes to the IHSA State Championship meet in Champaign after top-4 finishes during the IHSA 2A Washington Sectional. Above from left to right are Roman Villalobos, Grant Gensler, Kaiden Morris and Xavier Villalobos.

the same mindset at the state meet, which means getting to my offense and believing in myself. I have faith in God and in my teammates."

Villalobos is one of four Rochelle wrestlers who qualified for the state tournament over the weekend. Senior Grant Gensler (45-5) will compete at state for the third time in his career after finishing second at 165 pounds during the sectional tournament. Gensler, who rallied off three straight wins to reach the sectional finals, opened with a fall over

Woodstock's Ayden Dobler.

"It shows how hard we work in the room," Gensler said. "We drill in practice every day and it's good to see that hard work pays off. ... I'm going to go down there and let it fly and wrestle to the best of my abilities. I want to rely on the basics and the fundamentals and not do anything too flashy or change things up because it's the state tournament. The basics will get things done."

Gensler overcame a pair of tough opponents in the sectional bracket. The senior

went into a second tiebreaker period during the quarterfinals, where he avoided defeat with a last-second takedown against Morton's Clay McKee, a 43-match winner, in the third period. A scoreless overtime period gave way to the tiebreakers, where Gensler completed a successful ride over the first 30 seconds before an escape and a stalling call resulted in two points and a 6-4 win.

Gensler met Galesburg's Anthony Makwala, who he defeated at the regional tournament, in

the sectional semifinals. In a defensive battle where neither wrestler managed a single takedown, Gensler controlled the third period, escaping and drawing a penalty point to earn a 3-1 decision and seal his bid to the state tournament. Gensler came within one point of upsetting undefeated Geneseo senior Zachary Montez in the sectional finals, falling just short via 2-1 decision.

See WRESTLING page 12

RTHS Wrestling

Atkinson moves on to state for third straight season

RTHS senior remains undefeated after placing first in IHSA Geneseo Sectional

BY RUSSELL HODGES
SPORTS EDITOR

GENESEO — Rochelle senior wrestler Dempsey Atkinson faced a tall order, literally, as she looked to finish atop the podium during the IHSA Geneseo Sectional over the weekend.

Entering the sectional tournament as an undefeated regional champion at 145 pounds, Atkinson received one of her first true tests of the season during the semifinal round, where she squared off against Macomb senior and regional champion Mikeala Mwangong. Standing roughly 6 feet tall, Mwangong's combined height and length posed a challenge for Atkinson, who overcame a second-period takedown with a reversal and clung to a 5-3 lead entering the third period.

A penalty point for Mwangong midway through the third period made the match even closer, but as the final seconds wound down, Atkinson pulled off the maneuver of the match, working for a reversal that allowed her

to clinch the victory via 7-4 decision. The win moved Atkinson into the sectional finals, where she pinned Geneseo's Mady Mooney to earn the first sectional title of her career and advance to the IHSA State Championship for a school-record third straight season.

"I was really excited and it shows that all of the hard work I've put in over the last four years has paid off," Atkinson said. "I knew [Mikeala] was really tall and I had to make some adjustments. I knew I wouldn't be able to throw her, so I was focusing on my single leg takedowns and getting to my shots. I kept pushing myself to keep going and keep working hard throughout the match."

The sectional championship is the sixth tournament victory of a perfect senior season for Atkinson (21-0), who earned a first-round bye before moving into the semifinals after a 12-3 major decision against Ottawa's Ava Weatherford. Atkinson controlled the quarterfinal match from start to finish, scoring two takedowns over the first two periods as well as a four-

point near fall late in the second period. A reversal early in the third period helped seal the quarterfinal win.

"It means a lot to me and I really want to be a role model for young girls who want to get into the sport or are already in the sport," said Atkinson, who medaled in fifth at the state tournament last year. "I'm really hoping that I can place again, but I'm just going to let it fly and try my best."

The sectional championship bout was more of the same, as Atkinson converted a first-period takedown into a fall to clinch the first sectional title of her career. It's a historic run for Atkinson, who became the first IHSA regional and IHSA sectional champion in girls wrestling at RTHS.

"I knew [Mady] was a pretty strong wrestler, so I focused on staying in good positions throughout the



Senior Dempsey Atkinson finished first at the IHSA Geneseo Sectional over the weekend and earned a spot in the IHSA State Championship meet for the third straight season.

match," Atkinson said. "I focused on hand fighting and getting to my attacks."

The IHSA State Championship will be held at the

Grossinger Motors Arena in Bloomington from Feb. 28 through March 1. Atkinson, who will face Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley's

Avery Schlickman in the first round of the state tournament, is seeking to become a two-time IHSA state medalist.