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July 2023

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Continuing the missions

Last month's issue of *SBJ* highlighted this year's class of Forty Under 40. Our longest-running awards program recognizes outstanding young professionals in the community, and they were invited to a reception and awards ceremony on July 13, along with their family and friends. While always an inspiring and uplifting event, this year's celebration took place while the community was still collectively in shock from learning the day before that one of our young people had been taken from us much too soon.

At just 24 years old, Emma Shafer had already accumulated a long list of professional achievements and nonprofit organizations that she actively supported. She almost certainly would have gone on to be recognized as a Forty Under 40 herself. "Emma was the type of person who knew everybody and liked everybody," said Elizabeth Ross Wake, one of this year's Forty Under 40 recipients who was also Emma's employer through her new downtown business, The Wakery. "She had this gift for making people smile and making people happy."



Emma had strong feelings about the future of Springfield, and after college in New York and many travels, she returned to her hometown, determined to make it a better place to live for everyone. She focused on the concept of "planning to stay," writing in an *Illinois Times* Guestwork column, "In a world where climate change, racism and inequality deeply harm communities, it is important to plan our cities in a way that allows future generations to prosper."

Now the Springfield community is left to carry on the work without Emma, and her parents, John Shafer and Cathy Schwartz, offer this suggestion: "To honor Emma's memory, we can all work to continue her missions: to create thriving communities, to embrace each other with kindness always, to fill our spaces and times with love, laughter, arts and music."



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CANNABIS

NOW A GROWTH INDUSTRY

Springfield entrepreneur
Chris Stone sees a
bright future

By David Blanchette





Share's new dispensary is on S. Sixth Street Frontage Road, just north of the I-55 interchange in Southern View.

Recreational cannabis is a growth industry, and Springfield resident Chris Stone plans to take full advantage of the potential behind the once-banned substance.

"Eight percent of the population uses cannabis regularly, so how do we get to the other 92%?" Stone asked. "There is a large majority of people out there over 21 years of age that we could bring into the fold to use the product regularly."

Stone operates Share, a new cannabis dispensary on South Sixth Street Frontage Road just north of the I-55 interchange in Southern View. The property owners from whom Share leases the building plan to develop an adjacent 25,000-square-foot cultivation center, allowing the sale of locally produced cannabis products in the Share dispensary and throughout the state.

Around year's end, Stone plans to have proprietary cannabis-infused beverages on the market that he hopes may replace beer or wine for many recreational drinkers. Stone sees these and other cannabis products taking a substantial market share from other beverage industries.

"When I entered the cannabis market in 2013, that was my strategy all along, to move people from alcohol to cannabis-infused beverages," Stone said. "The primary reason is that it doesn't cause a hangover, and it's also a lot healthier for your body than alcohol."

Stone is very familiar with the alcohol industry with which he plans to compete. Stone began his professional career as a government affairs director for a Chicago-based wine and liquor distribu-

tor and worked in that industry for several years, taking an active role in legislation that affected alcoholic beverage businesses.

Stone learned a lot from the alcohol industry that he is using in the cannabis business.

"There are always new alcohol products coming into the market and you've got to be able to pivot and to adjust," Stone said. "Learning from the way they market and distribute alcohol, the way the regulations work, has been a great base to develop a business model that works for cannabis."

After a stint as a consultant, Stone next found himself in the center of the new video gaming industry in Illinois. In 2008 he founded Lucy's Place, Illinois' first chain of entertainment video gaming cafes, and built the chain into the state's largest grossing video gaming/entertainment company.

His years in the nascent video gaming industry taught Stone some valuable lessons that he was able to use when he entered the cannabis business. The most important lesson was, don't expect to turn a profit right away.

"We were the first video gaming parlors in the state, and the state forced us to build out the facilities and actually staff them with employees even though we had no games to actually use," Stone said. "So, we sat there for almost nine months and burned a bunch of cash waiting for the state to allow us to put the machines in place."

"Knowing how the state operated on that, I told the cannabis investors that we were probably going to burn cash for the first year if they were going to operate the same way they did

with video gaming," Stone said. "We might not be able to get product, we might not be able to get open for a while even after we build something out. So we incorporated that into our business model and it was definitely the right move."

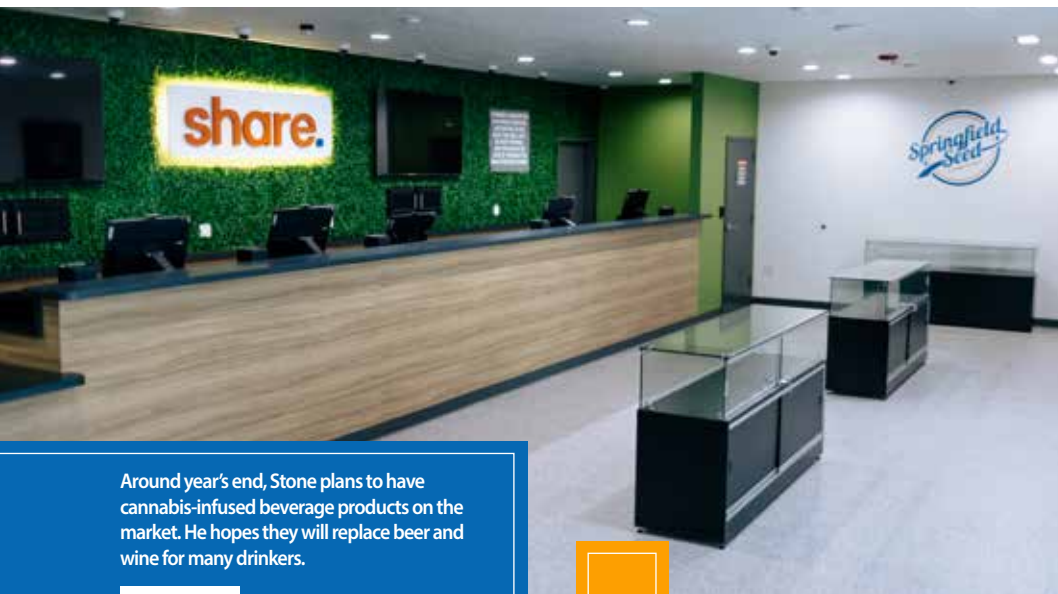
So Stone had his eyes fully open when he founded HCI Alternatives, an Illinois cannabis dispensary chain, in 2014 and served as its chief executive officer until it merged with Ascend Wellness in 2018. He was the CEO of Ascend Illinois until 2020 and continues to serve as a strategic adviser to Ascend Wellness Holdings, one of the largest cannabis systems in the United States. In these capacities, Stone helped to draft many of the initiatives contained in the Illinois General Assembly's bills that legalized medical and recreational use cannabis.

Those recent years were an exciting, but challenging, time to be involved in the process of turning pot into legitimate profit.

"With any new program there are going to be glitches. The application process has been an absolute bear, and COVID-19 didn't help that cause," Stone said. "The way the previous administration implemented cannabis on the medical side, they really did a number in terms of slow-rolling it out. This prevented businesses like ours from being able to build the business at the very beginning."

"But the businesses and the state worked together to try to iron out some things, including some of the initial unnecessary regulations," Stone said. "And we've grown together the last seven and a half years into a better program."

But it's not easy money for the cannabis



Around year's end, Stone plans to have cannabis-infused beverage products on the market. He hopes they will replace beer and wine for many drinkers.



industry. Stone said the profit margins aren't typical of a normal business because the same tax deductions are not available to the cannabis industry, which is legal in Illinois and several other states but is still deemed illegal by the federal government.

"I tell people that if you're going to get into this business, the time you make money is when you sell it," Stone said. "You can make money as you operate it but you need to operate very, very efficiently. A lot of the places in the state don't operate efficiently, and that's why you see that most of them have sold their businesses to bigger entities."

Stone and his fellow investors had efficiency in mind when developing Share in Southern View. Required security precautions and systems account for one-third of the operational costs of the business but there are other areas where the profit margins could be increased, from new and local product development to the customer marketing and purchase experience.

Stone also had to be savvy about where he chose to locate his new cannabis dispensary. Stone purchased a license from a group that had won one in the latest state dispensary lottery and determined that one of the main entry points to the Springfield area, the Sixth Street corridor, would be an ideal dispensary location. That meant interacting with the Village of Southern View and working with village officials to get some laws changed.

"Education over the past 10 years has reduced the stigma of cannabis and I think that is why more communities are willing to work with cannabis companies," Stone said. "Plus you have

substantial tax revenues for the municipalities. The state has seen that this is an actual, viable industry that they are reaping some significant revenues from in property taxes, sales taxes and payroll taxes."

The Village of Southern View is pleased to welcome Share to the community, and village attorney Don Craven agreed that working with an experienced entrepreneur like Stone made the whole experience easier.

"The process of making necessary changes to village code went very smoothly, and the dispensary representatives were easy to work with," Craven said. "This was the first experience we had with anybody in the cannabis industry. I think if you compare the way that Southern View approached it with the way the city of Springfield approached it, Southern View was willing to accommodate reasonable requests."

The Illinois Department of Transportation plans improvements along Sixth Street between the I-55 interchange and Stevenson Drive. Share is located along the Sixth Street frontage road and therefore will be within a stone's throw of those Sixth Street improvements. Craven said the village thinks Share is the perfect business to drive retail traffic along the improved Sixth Street corridor, and Share thinks that their local ownership will allow them to fully meet the village's optimistic expectations.

"The dispensary operation and the planned cultivation center are locally owned by investors, including me," Stone said. "The benefit to the local community is full-time, good paying jobs, plus if you are making and selling cannabis here it will be cheaper for people here to buy it"

"The Springfield area is interesting, it's a relatively big city but it feels like a small town," Stone said. "People are very parochial here so when you say locally owned it really does resonate here a lot more than in some other places."

Stone also thinks the Springfield area will be a good place to produce and sell new cannabis-based products. Besides Share's new recreational beverage line, Stone envisions more products such as lotions, salves or sprays for potential customers who don't want to smoke, vape or eat cannabis. He predicts that cannabis products will be served to over-21 customers in taverns and restaurants in the not-so-distant future.

"I think there will be a big revolution in terms of marketing that's going to take people not only away from alcohol, but away from energy drinks because certain cannabis strains provide you with energy," Stone said. "I can see people moving away from coffee or soda as well."

Stone's entire career has been spent in alcohol, gambling and cannabis, and he views his work as an opportunity to open people's eyes about these so-called sin industries.

"I start out by saying, 'Let's take morality out of the picture.' That kind of disarms people, because once you take morality out of alcohol, gambling or cannabis, what are you left with?" Stone said. "Then you have a better chance of educating them about what the product really is and how it works, and we have a lot of science behind cannabis."

Stone didn't like video gambling but had to learn it for his involvement in the industry. He is also "not a huge cannabis user," but will welcome products like Share's new beverage line "that does not have a cannabis smell or aftertaste," he said.

In addition to his involvement with Share, Stone founded and continues to operate a real estate development company and a construction/property management company that owns and manages more than 700,000 square feet of commercial office real estate in three states. Stone and his wife, Erin, have six children and reside in Springfield.

Stone is open and frank when discussing the cannabis business and his current and future plans related to the industry. But no matter whom he talks to, there seems to be one question that is on everyone's mind.

"Yes, 'Stone' is an appropriate name for the cannabis industry, that's for sure," Stone said with a chuckle. "Not only that, but my office phone number used to end with the numbers '420,' which for years has been slang for cannabis consumption. I didn't orchestrate my phone number or my name, they just happened." **SBJ**

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FORTY UNDER 40 2023

The 2023 class of Forty Under 40 was recognized at an event held July 13 at the Student Union at University of Illinois Springfield. Jamie Toole, co-owner of the Lucky Horseshoes, served as the keynote speaker.

These individuals were selected based on their contributions to our local business community and the community in which they reside. The selectees' career paths, educational background and community affiliations are varied. They represent the best and brightest from a wide range of occupations. You can expect to hear more from and about these leaders in the years ahead.

Springfield Business Journal's longest-running awards program, which began in 1997, is able to continue due to the commitment of sponsors who realize the importance of acknowledging these up-and-coming business leaders and supporting community business programs.

To make a nomination for the 2024 class of Forty Under 40 or view a list of previous recipients, visit springfieldbusinessjournal.com/awards-program/forty-under-40.



Top: Jamie Toole, co-owner of the Lucky Horseshoes, served as the keynote speaker for the event.
Right: Guests enjoyed a cocktail reception at the Student Union prior to the awards ceremony.
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Sam Ganci, vice president of recruitment service for MSF&W Consulting. PHOTO BY BRANDON TURLEY

In-demand tech roles in the Springfield area

By Holly A. Whisler

In the wake of major tech companies such as Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Yahoo, Meta and Zoom laying off tens of thousands of people in tech positions, CompTIA has released "State of the Tech Workforce," a report that could be considered an optimistic take. The report highlights numerous aspects of tech, including a predicted 3% growth in the size of the U.S. tech workforce throughout 2023. The average salary of tech workers is estimated at \$100,615, or double the median salary across all occupations, and tech occupation employment is expected to grow at about twice the rate of overall employment for the next decade.

The report lists the following tech occupations that are projected to grow the most during 2023:

- Data scientists and data analysts - 5.5%
- Cybersecurity analysts and engineers - 5.2%
- Web designers and UI/UX - 4.7%
- Software QA and testers - 4.1%
- CIOs and IT directors - 2.6%
- IT support specialists - 2.4%

Closer to home, Sam Ganci, vice president of recruitment services for MSF&W Consulting in Springfield, said tech roles that are in demand locally are programmers, software developers, database developers, SQL developers, full-stack developers and people who write code. Secondary titles in demand include business data analysts and IT project managers. He said it is worth noting that the roles that require someone to write code are in greater demand due to the complexity of the position.

Ganci said many Springfield companies require tech candidates who are fluent in Microsoft, and that skill set is still very hard to find. He said, "My mantra is: If you can do anything in tech in Springfield, then there's a job for you."

Shannon Heisler, director of marketing and corporate recruiting at Levi, Ray & Shoup, explained that LRS recruits tech roles for two tracks: full-time positions for divisions within the company, and consultants who work under contract and provide tech resources for various clients in central Illinois and nationwide. Within the organization, Heisler said they are always

looking for software developers, tech business systems analysts, engineers and cybersecurity specialists, as well as infrastructure hardware and software specialists. She said, "We are filling some of these positions with people we find through college internship programs. This gives us a foundation of people to hire from."

On the consulting side of LRS, she said the top tech roles they look for are business system analysts, project managers and .NET developers.

Heisler emphasized, "We're always hiring, and we're always looking for IT talent." Commenting on the intern program, she said LRS is working with colleges locally and nationwide. "The students are full of energy, and they have rejuvenated us. In the last three years, 23 of the interns have become full-time employees."

Reiterating what Ganci said about tech roles being so specific, Heisler said, "Software developers and tech business system analysts are the most challenging roles to fill because we look for five or more years of experience. For people who have the skillset, there is great

competition and lots of options.

Heisler said that remote work has made it even more challenging, as some companies want to hire hybrid. "Recruiting outside of Springfield is challenging, but we have successfully relocated four people to Springfield recently," she said.

Ganci said this time last year the market was candidate-driven, as there were more positions available nationally than people to fill those roles. "The landscape is quite different this year," he said. "The tech candidates laid off from the large companies are going after the full-remote positions, which makes that space incredibly competitive. It's as if there's a national game of musical chairs where there are more candidates than roles to fulfill."

This compared to the great resignation, Ganci said, when people were able to just lunge at the next position, get whatever terms they requested and be able to work from home. That situation is now reversed; the candidates who are willing to work onsite command more money and are outcompeting those who want to work fully remote.

"If you want to be a competitive candidate and a future leader, you need to come onsite," Ganci said. "Employers need to have some flexibility that allows the job to fit into the employee's life, but employees need to understand that the pandemic is over and they need to come into the office."

Both Heisler and Ganci highlight the benefits of living in Springfield in an effort to attract quality candidates. Ganci said, "We emphasize the low unemployment rate in Springfield as compared to the national rate, and the low cost of living – both are great for recruiting. As a company, MSF&W tries to provide family-supporting salaries because we want to attract and retain families that are young and upwardly mobile. We promote positions that have a career path in a city that people can call home. We make sure these candidates understand that we want them to retire from MSF&W."

Ryan McCrady, president of Springfield Sangamon Growth Alliance, said his sole objective is the task of selling the features and benefits of Springfield and Sangamon County

to people considering working and living in the area. McCrady and the SSGA cater to all sectors of business and the SSGA website is a wealth of information for people like Ganci and Heisler to use when attracting candidates to Springfield.

McCrady noted the tech-education pipeline in Springfield begins at the high school level with the Capital Area Career Center's certificate in cybersecurity for juniors and seniors. He said students are getting jobs right out of high school with this certification. Lincoln Land Community College and University of Illinois Springfield both have student demand for their computer science programs.

Heisler said, "We love that our tech people work for an IT company. They are part of the solution we give our customers. They are vital." **SBJ**

Holly Whisler is the associate editor of Springfield Business Journal, and she appreciates technology and the people who keep it working as it should.

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Artificial intelligence needs supervision

If your business uses AI, adopt policies and rules

By Annie Fulgenzi

The number of working professionals experimenting with artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT has soared over the last year, driving workplace efficiency. However, its rapid adoption could lead to potential legal and reputational risks for organizations or businesses neglecting to implement proactive policies regarding the use of AI.

Peter Hanna is a seasoned attorney with broad experience providing legal and strategic guidance on complex regulatory and compliance matters at the intersection of technology and law. Hanna is also a professor at Chicago-Kent College of Law. In an interview with *Springfield Business Journal*, Hanna explained the importance of developing a strong, clear and ethical AI policy for your business.

Artificial intelligence is far from perfect and can, at times, hallucinate or produce inaccurate information or make mistakes in data analysis and decision making. Still, with proper oversight and accountability, the technology could offer significant opportunities for your organization.

"It is essential that the public have real transparency to understand what a given AI algorithm is doing," said Hanna. "If you're going to use any sort of AI solution, the public should know exactly how it's being used, why it's being used and have pathways for questioning or challenging machine-driven decisions that affect their lives."

Clear communication about the use of AI ensures that stakeholders are well-informed and protects against potential legal liabilities and regulatory scrutiny. This also requires internal transparency about employees' use of the technology – which you may or may not know.

A recent survey conducted by Fishbowl, a social networking platform for discussing career-related topics, found that 43% of the 11,793 professionals surveyed have used AI for work-related tasks. Of the respondents who had used AI, 70% admitted that they were

doing so without their employer's knowledge or permission.

Hanna advises that ignorance won't protect a business that might find itself in hot water for an employee's misuse of the tool: "Typically, in any civil negligence case, ignorance is not a valid defense," he explained.

"In the United States, most employers typically have wide latitude to track employee activities when using company computers and networks – for example, to detect whether employees are accessing inappropriate material or transmitting confidential information outside the company," said Hanna. "The same tools can also be used to determine how widely AI tools like ChatGPT are being used. It is unrealistic that a sophisticated organization could plead total ignorance of its employees' accessing ChatGPT on company computers."

Given this, a laissez-faire approach to AI use could leave your organization open to serious consequences – emphasizing the need for strong and clear guardrails for responsible AI use.

"Transparency about how a company uses AI solutions in ways that affect people's lives is the bare minimum. Responsible companies will need to implement robust internal policies delineating

appropriate uses for AI and establishing strong, meaningful safeguards to ensure the ethical and responsible use of AI technology," said Hanna. "There needs to be real accountability – at the very top – for misuse or abuse of these technologies."

Without such policies, your company could risk not just legal consequences but potential material damage. For example, a worker could upload sensitive company data for an open-source AI program to analyze, leaving the door open for unauthorized access or use of such data. Developing protections that prevent such scenarios could prove vital for trade secret protection, privacy and even civil liberties, depending on context.

Finally, Hanna advised that policies should be mindful of algorithmic bias. While AI is often touted for eliminating prejudice in decision making, its evolving nature can be problematic.

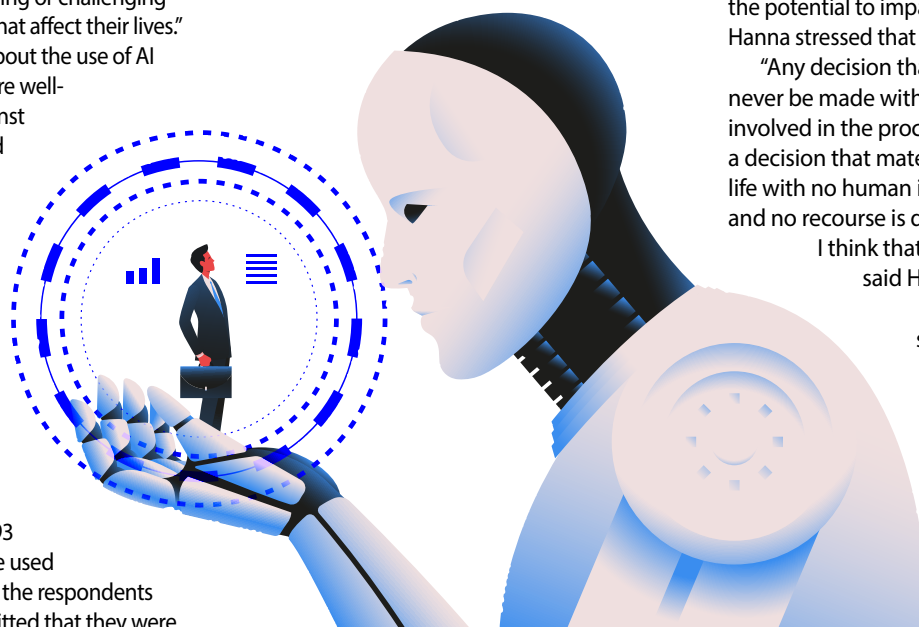
For instance, one resume-screening algorithm was recently revealed to favor candidates named Jared who played high school lacrosse – a flaw that meant other applicants were inadvertently being discriminated against. It is best not to leave AI on autopilot.

As many are beginning to adopt AI for use in hiring practices and other decisions that have the potential to impact people's livelihoods, Hanna stressed that human oversight is key.

"Any decision that affects a person should never be made without at least one human involved in the process. The idea of AI making a decision that materially impacts a person's life with no human input, no transparency and no recourse is dangerous and dystopian.

I think that's really, really dangerous," said Hanna.

While AI presents significant opportunities for organizations, it is imperative to create responsible policies to address the accompanying potential risks. By embracing proactive policies, your organization can navigate the





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Artificial Intelligence is the next industrial revolution

"We don't want Springfield to miss it."

By Annie Fulgenzi

The next Industrial Revolution is here, whether you are prepared for it or not. According to local experts who recently took part in a panel discussion on the state of Artificial Intelligence, the consensus was: You can either get in, or get left behind.

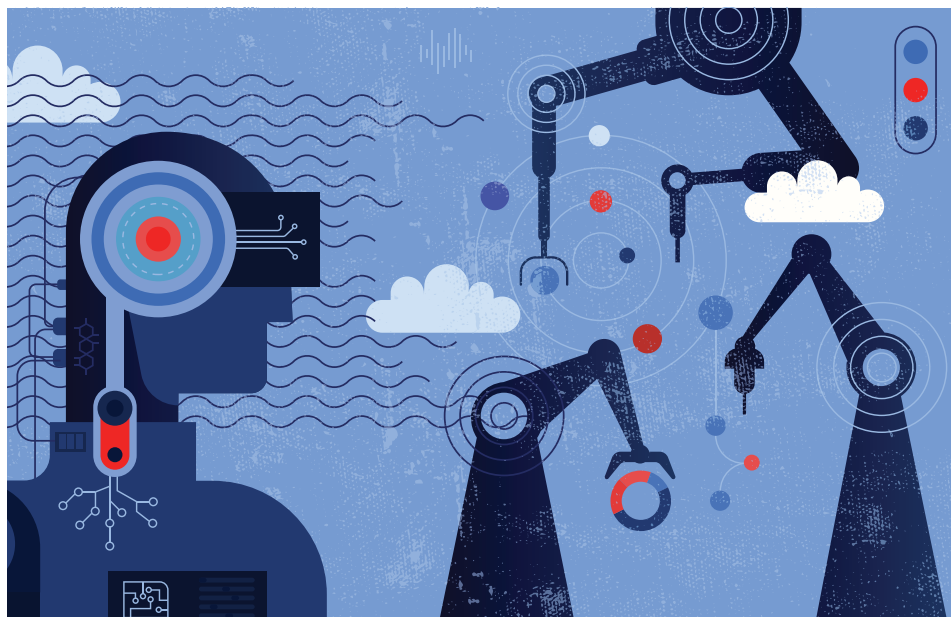
Artificial Intelligence in the business world refers to the implementation of intelligent computer systems that analyze data, learn patterns and make informed decisions to streamline operations, enhance customer experiences and drive innovation and efficiency. Most commonly, businesses are using AI in hiring practices and fulfilling mundane daily tasks, such as writing emails and letters, scheduling meetings or doing research. Though the technology is still relatively new, its applications are advancing rapidly in a wide array of industries.

Businesses and entrepreneurs in Springfield are beginning to recognize the potential of AI and are eager to learn more about how they can implement and capitalize on the revolutionary new technology, according to Bruce Sommer, director of economic development and innovation at University of Illinois Springfield.

When UIS and Innovate Springfield co-hosted their "Current State of AI" panel discussion April 13, Sommer said he was thrilled by the level of interest demonstrated by the over 150 attendees.

"I've been at the university for 12 years, and started in this administrative position four years ago when we were launching our Innovation Center and Illinois Innovation Network. [Compared to past programs], I've never seen more activity from the community," said Sommer. "Springfield is not the most innovative or progressive community – we tend to be late-adopters. But with AI, the interest is double, triple what we've seen in the past with our local entrepreneurs."

During the panel discussion, participants from various industries shared their experiences of how AI is benefiting their sectors. For example, a representative from the medical field discussed how AI is being utilized for diagnosing and treatment. In finance, AI can be employed for tasks like data analysis, risk assessment and developing investment portfolios. An official from the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology even discussed how the government is beginning to adopt AI to better connect citizens with public resources.



Jeff Schneider, founder and CEO of marketing performance platform BrandOps and local AI expert, said that he recommends businesses begin experimenting with the technology to see how it could benefit them.

"An example I give is to prompt the AI to look at 10 of my competitors' websites, analyze their marketing message, compare and contrast them, write up a summary and send it to my staff as a PDF and schedule a meeting for us to discuss it at a later point in time," said Schneider. "The easiest application we see is businesses using it to write their marketing copy. Blog posts, press releases, emails that go out to customers, things of that nature – it does a good job of mimicking a style of a brand for the purposes of efficiently writing copy at a cost-effective price of under a nickel per blog post."

While there are still many that are more hesitant to embrace AI, Schneider believes it's only a matter of time before it is unavoidable.

"You're not going to have a choice, really. The analogy is like the emergence of the internet," said Schneider. "Whether you want it or not, AI-based agents are going to be the way that you interact with businesses, government agencies, academic institutions – it's a-coming, so it's a matter of whether you go into it kicking and screaming or

by trying to find ways to leverage it to increase your IQ, make more money and be more productive."

This realization is what prompted Schneider and Sommer to partner in creating a business accelerator in Springfield that will provide AI technologists and entrepreneurs with financing and business and technology know-how.

"I am currently leading Innovate Springfield, but I'm scheduled to leave the university this summer to fully launch Thought Studio," Sommer explained. "Both Jeff Schneider and I are founders of Thought Studio, and hope this effort will significantly benefit Springfield and the region in growing our technology economy through a variety of AI companies and attract more technology talent to Springfield," said Sommer.

Schneider and Sommer say they look forward to working with entrepreneurs to develop their AI start-ups as well as helping existing local businesses find new innovative ways to implement the technology into their existing operations.

"We don't want Springfield to miss the AI revolution," said Sommer. "If you're an entrepreneur, you really need to be on the cutting edge of AI right now because your competitor is going to be and you're going to be outcompeted if you're not." **SBJ**

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Succeed with social media marketing

Here are best practices for businesses in 2023

By Brett Jackson

In today's culture, social media has become a primary source of entertainment and information for many individuals. Whether scrolling through endless feeds or participating in viral challenges, people are constantly connected to their phones and social media platforms. As a result, businesses have recognized the importance of utilizing social media as a marketing tool and have integrated it into their overall marketing strategies. To succeed in social media marketing in 2023, businesses must follow certain best practices.

Prioritize authentic content: Consumers prefer genuine, unfiltered content as opposed to overly polished and stylized posts. Brands should strive to deliver on their promises, stay true to their values and cater to the needs of their customers.

Research your target audience: Understanding the characteristics and preferences of your ideal customer is essential for developing an effective social media marketing strategy. Businesses can gain valuable insights to inform their content creation and targeting efforts by analyzing current followers and comparing them to an ideal customer description.

Focus on preferred networks: Build a presence on the social media channels that your target audience prefers. Different demographics have different platform preferences, and businesses can allocate their resources more efficiently by determining their preferred platforms. Adapt and reach wider audiences by staying updated on emerging platforms.

Put your audience first: Instead of making your brand the hero, address your audience's pain points and challenges. Listen to their thoughts and experiences related to your brand and your industry and provide meaningful solutions.

Optimize posting times: Analyzing social media data can help identify the most effective times to post on each platform to increase engagement. By strategically timing their posts, businesses can increase the likelihood of their target audience seeing and interacting with their content.

Maintain regular posting: Consistency is critical in social media marketing. Businesses should maintain regular posting schedules, ensuring they reach their audience and avoid overwhelming them. Reviewing the best practices for each platform to determine the ideal frequency of daily posts is crucial.

Reduce response time: Consumers expect timely responses from brands. Businesses should aim to shorten their response times, utilize chatbots for 24/7 coverage and simplify their processes to eliminate customer friction.

Improve customer care: Strong customer care practices are essential. Using separate handles (usernames) for customer care and leveraging social customer service tools allows businesses to engage effectively with their customers. Build trust, loyalty and positive brand associations by providing excellent customer care.

Create engaging content: Short-form videos, images and live videos have proven effective in driving engagement. Repurposing videos into other formats and planning for consistent video production can further enhance engagement levels.

Invest in video production: Elevate the quality of content produced by allocating resources, potentially growing the team or outsourcing video production needs. Developing a solid video plan and securing the necessary budget and buy-in can ensure the creation of impactful and engaging videos.

Highlight your offerings in action: Demonstrate value and empower target consumers to overcome challenges by highlighting offerings in action. Build customer trust by showcasing real-world examples of a product or service through social proof.

Utilize real testimonials and demos: Feature authentic testimonials and product demonstrations from real customers in your social content. By highlighting real customer experiences, businesses can build credibility and encourage potential customers to convert.

Get personal with your content: Infusing content with personality is another way to


forge emotional connections with followers. Stand out and build a loyal following by highlighting the brand's personality and communicating in a relatable and personable style.

Partner with creators: Collaborate with content creators who align with your brand to inspire communities and reach new audiences. Allocating a portion of the social media budget to working with creators can result in highly engaging and shareable content.

Tap into employee advocacy: Encouraging employees to share information about the brand online and launching an employee advocacy program can amplify content and engage the audience. Employees can act as authentic brand ambassadors, showcasing their enthusiasm and belief in the brand.

Experiment with emerging tech: Integrate artificial intelligence tools into your workflow to increase productivity and efficiency. Research the potential of AI in marketing and experiment with emerging technologies to have a competitive edge.

Test new platforms: Stay open to exploring new social media platforms. By exploring and adopting new platforms, businesses can expand their reach and tap into untapped audiences.

By following these best practices, businesses can capture their audience's attention, drive engagement and increase sales through social media marketing. Happy creating. 

Brett Jackson has been advising organizations on strategic brand and growth initiatives for more than a decade. As the CEO of Systemax, Brett meets with customers to understand their current challenges, then provides ways to change their processes to generate extraordinary results. He has a passion for culture, which has earned him and his team a ranking on Entrepreneur Magazine's Top Company Culture list, along with Systemax being named to the Best Places to Work in Illinois list. Named one of the top Influential CEOs in the U.S. and one of the most Innovative, Brett utilizes that knowledge to help organizations across the world tackle the largest branding, marketing and advertising challenges.



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Show me the money

Mayor says only half of the economic incentives offered to Wyndham by previous mayor are available

Dean Olsen

The way Springfield Mayor Misty Buscher figures it, economic incentives available to the owner of the Wyndham City Centre hotel for a proposed \$58 million renovation total about half of what the previous mayor estimated.

Rather than the \$18.75 million in tax-related incentives described by former mayor Jim Langfelder, Buscher said the assistance package of property, hotel-motel and sales taxes instead would add up to \$9 million or \$10 million.

"The incentives that were offered before just simply are not there financially," Buscher told *Illinois Times* after a City Council meeting in June.

The reason for the math discrepancy is unclear. It's also unclear whether the reduced number is the reason Wyndham owner Al Rajabi and his associates at Tower Capital Group – also referred to as Sky Capital – haven't returned to the city with a reaction or counteroffer.

Rajabi and his firm, based in Texas, haven't replied to *Illinois Times*' requests for comment.

But the 30-story, 50-year-old downtown hotel at 700 E. Adams St. remains open. And Buscher said the Wyndham project will remain on the council's agenda, as it has since she was sworn in in early May, until Rajabi replies.

The council's lack of support for zoning approval that would allow Rajabi and others to remodel and convert the 369-room hotel into a hotel and market-rate apartment complex was a source of frustration for Langfelder, who advocated for more apartment options downtown and at the Wyndham.

When Langfelder was mayor, the council turned down three previous options that would have required approval because the options would have exceeded the current limit of 200 apartments at the site.

The council's resistance prompted New York-based real-estate developer David Mitchell of Good Homes to withdraw his

offer to buy the Wyndham from Rajabi for redevelopment.

Council members expressed concerns that the options wouldn't preserve enough hotel rooms at the Wyndham to support future commitments for downtown conventions that want convenient hotel space.

The latest plan for the project involved an incentive package put together by Langfelder's administration in which a special tax-increment financing district would be carved out of the existing downtown TIF district and only include the Wyndham.

Under that scenario, Rajabi would convert the hotel into a 250-room Delta by Marriott hotel. The targeted TIF district would generate property tax proceeds over a 23-year period to offset some of the renovation costs by drawing from the incremental increase in property tax paid by the hotel.

The incentives also would include the city's pledge to give back some of the hotel-motel taxes and city sales taxes collected at the property over the 23 years.

Council members said before the mayoral election – in which Buscher, the former city treasurer, defeated Langfelder in his attempt for a third four-year term – that the council would wait to vote on the plan until shortly after the election.

After Buscher was sworn in as mayor, her administration's vetting of Langfelder's numbers led to a delay in voting when Rajabi failed to respond, Buscher said.

Rajabi "would have a decision to make if he was going to rehabilitate the hotel with the monies that are available," Buscher said. "He owns the hotel. It's operating right now. He's not threatened anything."

Rajabi told the council April 9 that he was upset about the delays and that the city didn't appreciate him as a downtown employer and his dedication to keep the Wyndham open during the worst parts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Illinois Times requested, but hasn't received, a breakdown of dollar amounts

for the incentives from the Buscher administration.

Langfelder said a breakdown of his estimates wasn't released to the public when he was mayor but was discussed in negotiations with Rajabi. Langfelder said July 11 that he didn't recall the breakdown and didn't have a copy of it.

Ryan McCrady, president and chief executive officer of the Springfield Sangamon Growth Alliance, who has been helping city officials evaluate Rajabi's proposed renovations, said he never received a breakdown of incentives from Langfelder.

McCrady said it appears, from his review of Buscher's numbers, that \$10 million in economic incentives would be available over a 23-year period. Of that total, \$7.06 million would come from the targeted TIF district, \$2 million would come from hotel-motel tax rebates, and \$1 million would come from sales-tax rebates.

McCrady said it appears it would cost Rajabi \$70,000 to \$80,000 per room for renovations and that Rajabi's cost estimates, which also include energy-efficiency and other infrastructure upgrades, are reasonable.

The top floor would be developed as a "sky deck" for tourists, as part of Rajabi's plan.

The hotel would continue to operate, hosting travelers and convention attendees, during the renovations, McCrady said.

Council member Lakeisha Purchase, who represents Ward 5, where the hotel is located, said she believes Rajabi remains interested in renovating the building. But Rajabi's demeanor, which has been less than respectful, "doesn't sit well" among council members, she said.

To secure council support, Purchase said Rajabi "would have to come to us with a great plan to execute this project ... from start to finish." **SBJ**

Dean Olsen is a senior staff writer at Illinois Times. He can be reached at dolsen@illinoistimes.com, 217-679-7810 or twitter.com/DeanOlsenIT.



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Know your rights

The Biometric Information Privacy Act could cost violaters millions

By Thomas C. Pavlik, Jr.

Most people don't know, but Illinois was the first state to address a business's collection of biometric data. The Biometric Information Privacy Act (BIPA) was enacted in 2008 and sets forth certain requirements that must be followed in collecting this type of data.

First, what is biometric data? Basically, it involves the measurement of a person's unique characteristics like fingerprints, palm prints, voiceprints or facial, retinal or iris measurements. These markers are then used as unique identifiers.

The BIPA specifies that "biometrics are unlike other unique identifiers that are used to access finances or other sensitive information. For example, Social Security numbers, when compromised, can be changed. Biometrics, however, are biologically unique to the individual; therefore, once compromised, the individual has no recourse, is at heightened risk for identity theft, and is likely to withdraw from biometric-facilitated transactions."

The Privacy Act provides: "No private entity may collect, capture, purchase, receive through trade, or otherwise obtain a person's or a customer's biometric identifier or biometric information, unless it first:

(1) informs the subject or the subject's legally authorized representative in writing that a biometric identifier or biometric information is being collected or stored;

(2) informs the subject or the subject's legally authorized representative in writing of the specific purpose and length of term for which a biometric identifier or biometric information is being collected, stored and used; and

(3) receives a written release executed by the subject of the biometric identifier or biometric information or the subject's legally authorized representative."

The Privacy Act provides for potential damages of \$1,000 or actual damages if an entity negligently violates the law, \$5,000 or actual damages if an entity intentionally violates the law, attorneys' fees and costs and other relief deemed appropriate by the court.

The Privacy Act didn't gather much at-



tention until a class action was filed against Facebook based on the Act. Plaintiffs claimed that Facebook violated the law by using its face-matching software to suggest names to be tagged in a picture. Facebook settled the lawsuit for \$650 million. Illinois Facebook users who joined the suit received around \$340 million. U.S. District Judge James Donato said, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, "This is real money that Facebook is paying to compensate them for the tangible privacy harms that they suffered."

Since then there has been a flood of additional litigation. Of particular significance are two recent Illinois Supreme Court decisions. The first held that BIPA is subject to a five-year statute of limitations. This means that violations as long as five years ago are fair game for plaintiffs. The second case held that each time an entity scans or transmits an individual's biometric identifier, a separate cause of action accrues. So, if your employer scans you multiple times a day, the numbers really add up. In this case, White Castle required its employees to scan their fingerprints to access their pay stubs and computers. To authorize each employee's access, a third-party vendor would verify each scan. In doing so, however, White Castle never gained its required employees' consent under BIPA. In this 4-3 decision, the majority noted that damages could exceed \$17 billion dollars – which caught the attention of many employers.

The Supreme Court did throw businesses a bone by holding that courts do have discretion in awarding damages and do not automatically have to award the statutory maximum. In fact, the majority opinion stated that while there is "no language in the Act suggesting legislative intent to authorize a damages award that would result in the financial destruction of a business," it is up to the legislature to "review these policy concerns about potentially excessive damage awards" and "make clear its intent."

Unless and until the legislature takes up the Supreme Court's invitation, any entity that uses biometric data should adopt some best practices. Those practices would include:

Reviewing all technology to determine if biometric data is being captured.

Reviewing insurance policies to determine if there is coverage for a violation.

Updating employee handbooks.

Implementing a process for obtaining consent every time biometric data is collected.

Making sure that consent is documented and saved.

Regarding those consents, BIPA requires that they be in writing and that they state "(1) the fact that a biometric identifier or biometric information is being collected or stored and (2) the specific purpose and length of term for which it is being collected, stored, and used." Retention is permitted until "the initial purpose for collecting or obtaining such identifiers or information has been satisfied or within three years of the individual's last interaction with the private entity, whichever occurs first." Finally, the retention schedule must be publicly posted.

Given that recent settlements in a handful of Illinois cases have ranged from \$34 million to \$100 million, anyone using biometric data (or who has a third party collect such data for them) would be wise to undergo a thorough review of those practices. **SBJ**

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Sustainability In Action.

Comcast, a strong community partner

Providing grants and laptops to Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Illinois

By Janet Seitz

In today's digital age, connectivity is crucial for work and school. Sometimes access can be a challenge due to location or income.

Comcast, the media and technology company, is dedicated to using its resources, platforms, research and business expertise to advance digital equity, according to Carl Jones, Jr., Comcast's regional vice president of government and external affairs.

"Over the years," said Jones, "we've worked with hundreds of partners across the region, from nonprofits and school districts to elected officials, to make digital equity a reality. We're especially proud of our Internet Essentials program, which provides quality low-cost internet service to eligible income-constrained households with students from grammar school to college, senior citizens, veterans, people with disabilities enrolled in a variety of government assistance programs and public housing residents. Internet Essentials launched in 2011 and has helped 1.9 million Illinois residents access the internet at home since then."

In 2020, when the COVID-19 crisis hit, Comcast recognized that schoolchildren who do not have access to internet connectivity could be left behind. In response, Comcast created WiFi-connected spaces called Lift Zones that were strategically located in trusted areas within communities such as the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Illinois' Central Unit Club and the Springfield YMCA. Jones said children can go to a Lift Zone and get online to do schoolwork, and adults can get online to learn new digital skills, search for jobs and access an array of services. Comcast has more than 90 Lift Zones in this region, Jones said.

"We have been fortunate to receive financial support from Comcast through various sponsorships, donations and community grant programs offered by the Comcast NBC Universal Foundation," said Tiffany Mathis, executive director of Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Illinois.

Comcast has provided more than \$40,000 in direct financial support over the last three years to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Illinois to support digital skills training and programs for club members. In 2021, the company donated 100 laptops and gave the club a \$10,000 grant. Last summer, said Jones, Comcast gave the club a \$22,750 grant and just recently gave the club another \$10,000 grant to support digital skills training programs.

"Our most recent Comcast grant that we were awarded this year," said Mathis, "is in support of our teen workforce development program called Career Launch. Comcast's support will provide the funding needed to give our teens access to cutting-edge technology from Transfr virtual reality, which takes an existing workplace environment and replicates it into virtual reality, mimicking all aspects, equipment and potential scenarios that employees are faced with in their day-to-day jobs through an in-depth design and development process. Transfr works with Fortune 500 companies to replicate their training requirements into scalable simulations that can be used as career exploration for youth job seekers. We are so excited to incorporate this technology into our Career Launch program this year.

"As Comcast invests to bring broadband service to more communities in Illinois," said Jones, "we're also seeking to enhance access to

digital and workforce skills training, which helps residents prepare for and take advantage of educational and job opportunities that broadband connectivity makes possible. Organizations like the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Illinois are vital to reaching people in these communities and helping them build digital skills.

"I am fortunate to get to do a lot of cool things in my role," Jones added. "However, my most memorable experience was the first time I launched a Lift Zone and handed a student a laptop. I'd seen it done before, but there was really something special about being in a community where we were the ones meeting a community and personal need." Following the Lift Zone ribbon cutting, while laptops were being handed out, Jones said, "One of the students asked me if it was really theirs to keep, and I assured them it was. The joy in their eyes and the smile across their face is something that sticks with me every day."

"Comcast has truly been the epitome of what a strong community partnership can look like," said Mathis. "Even though Comcast is a large corporation, their continued partnership and investment in the Boys & Girls Clubs still maintains such a local and personal feel. All our interactions have been positive. They continue to seek ways in which they can help us achieve our goals and programmatic outcomes through their amazing team of professionals and philanthropic initiatives. It has been an absolute pleasure to work with Comcast and even more amazing to collaborate with a corporate partner that truly wants to see our organization continue to thrive." **SBJ**

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WOMEN'S EVENT CALENDAR

Women Entrepreneurs – Central Illinois will host an August luncheon on "Creating Your Social Media Plan." Join local experts Amy Beadle, marketing manager for the Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau, and Julie Craig, marketing and communications digital manager at Springfield Clinic, to learn how to create and design your social media plan for Facebook postings, video production and placement on Reels, plus best practices for managing your business Facebook page.

The luncheon will be held on Wednesday, Aug. 9, from 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Illinois Educators Credit Union, 3101 Montvale Dr. Lunch will be provided by Bloom Hospitality and Catering. The cost is \$20 for members or \$28 for non-members. Visit wecspringfield.org to register.

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HSHS welcomes two new leaders to executive team

Hospital Sisters Health System (HSHS) has welcomed two new leaders to the executive team. Dr. Bonny Chen joins HSHS as the new chief health informatics officer, while Frank Rademacher is system vice president and chief information officer.

Chen comes to HSHS from Ascension, where she most recently served as vice president and chief medical IS officer. She has also held leadership roles at AdventHealth and AMITA Health in Chicago, including chief medical officer and chief health information officer.

Prior to her administrative roles, Chen served as an attending emergency medicine physician for nearly 20 years. Since 2013, she has also been an international surveyor for The Joint Commission, assisting hospitals world-

wide in improving processes, patient safety and quality of care.

Rademacher comes to HSHS from Trinity Health in Livonia, Michigan, where he most recently served as vice president of Trinity Information Services. He held multiple leadership roles in his 15 years at Trinity Health and his scope of responsibility included 90-plus hospitals, four regional hospital systems, 40-plus home care and hospice, 50-plus continuing care facilities and 14 PACE Centers.

"We take pride in finding exceptional leaders who relentlessly pursue our mission to provide high-quality Franciscan health care to all people," said Damond Boatwright, president and chief executive officer of HSHS. "Dr. Chen and Frank are excellent additions to our team."



SIU School of Medicine names new associate dean for graduate medical education

Dr. Careyana Brenham has been selected as the new associate dean for graduate medical education (GME) at SIU School of Medicine. She succeeds Dr. Karen Broquet, who is transitioning to a new role with the school after an accomplished career in psychiatry and serving as associate dean for GME since 2001.

Brenham is a family medicine physician and professor of family and community medicine at SIU School of Medicine. Since joining the school 20 years ago, she has also served as the residency program director at SIU Family Medicine in Springfield for 10 years while assuming other leadership initiatives. She was part of Family Medicine's journey to become a Federally Qualified Health Care clinic.

"As an alum of both SIU School of Medicine and a graduate of the SIU Family Medicine Residency Program in Springfield, Dr. Brenham has

seen first-hand the wonderful educational and clinical opportunities that we can offer," said Dr. Jerry Kruse, dean and provost of SIU School of Medicine.

"Working with residents is my passion, and I'm thrilled to be able to play an important part as they start the journey into medicine," said Brenham. "These new physicians will get to work with the top faculty educators at SIU in their specialty programs."

A Springfield native and mother of four daughters, Brenham has received numerous awards over the years, including the Illinois Academy of Family Medicine Teacher of the Year, the Don Thorp Child Advocate Award from the Child Advocacy Center, and she has twice won the Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Award, sponsored by the Arnold P. Gold Foundation.



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How to get unstuck

By Kelly Gust

One of the best compliments I get from clients is when they say, "We've made more progress in the past six months working with you on [insert complicated problem here], than we have in the past six years." Facing a tough or ambiguous problem at work or in your personal life is like staring into thick fog. It's hard to see what lies ahead, so many people just stay put, watching the months, and eventually the years, tick by.

As someone who is equal parts change-addicted and routine-avoidant, I tend to find myself in the middle of organizational change efforts. I've helped dozens of change efforts reach the other side of the unknown abyss successfully. Below is a summary of proven techniques I've utilized when assisting organizations in their efforts to get unstuck and start moving from the stage of pontificating about "someday we should..." to realizing their new reality.

First, consider why you're stuck. Sometimes being stuck is a sign that you're unclear on your goals. What specific outcome do you crave? What does success look like? Be as detailed as possible. The more clearly you can describe your desired state, the more likely it is that it can be achieved. Another question to consider is whether you're chasing the wrong goals or pursuing them for the wrong reasons. Is your motive to make improvements, or to feed your ego? Are you trying to win for your team or just for yourself? Are your immediate goals in line with your long-term goals? Finally, a key reason for being stuck could be that you don't have support for your ideas. If you find

yourself operating alone, take time to get buy-in from your stakeholders, senior leaders, peers, partners or others needed to help make the effort successful. Gaining support could be a necessary precursor to future progress.

With confirmation of your goals and top-level support, it's time to start unfreezing and make progress on your change initiative. This feels uncomfortable, as if looking into thick fog. When driving into fog, a good idea is to reduce your speed and keep your lights low. As you move forward you can see further down the path, but you must do so slowly and deliberately to avoid uncertainty and expensive mistakes. Forward is a pace; small progress is still progress. Break your vision down into smaller, actionable steps to help you move ahead deliberately and without catastrophe.

If you're still feeling stuck, try changing your perspective. One way that has worked for me and my clients is to discuss the problem with someone distanced from it; perhaps even someone in another industry, profession or leadership level. It's easy to become myopic when surrounded by similar viewpoints. A health care client recently was feeling hopeless about high turnover in their industry, as if there was nothing they could do to improve employee engagement. Unfortunately, their health care peers shared similar views. But when she spoke with a hospitality leader about creative ways for new hire onboarding and guest service, they walked away with plenty of new ideas.

A benefit of comparing notes with other

people is that people are simply wired differently. I do a lot of work with personality assessments, and some individuals are wired for process and precision, with strong attention to detail and respect for rules and regulations. Others are wired for innovation and agility, with a big-picture vision and ability to persuade others to change. If you're the process/precision person, you might benefit from a visionary who can breathe confidence into your ideas. If you're the innovator, you will benefit from a detail-oriented partner to help bring your ideas to life.

Another way to change your perspective is to get out of the office. Some fresh air, or even an entirely new hobby that gets you out of your comfort zone can provide the inertia-breaking boost needed to inspire progress towards your goals. One client recently shared that they had tried rock climbing at a local gym, which left them feeling strong and "invincible." This feeling infused their work with new energy, and they finally made progress on a big IT initiative.

Finally, sometimes to get unstuck you need to bring in a professional coach, subject matter expert or consultant. The right professional can serve as a qualified sounding board, providing the real-world experience needed to help you overcome inertia and add confidence and actionable steps to your ideas.

Just because you're stuck in the fog doesn't mean you won't ever be able to see. It just means that you need to make small progress so that you can see further down your desired path. **SBJ**

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Ugly Restaurant and Bar, a welcome addition to Springfield's ethnic eateries

By Thomas C. Pavlik, Jr.

With a name like Ugly Restaurant and Bar, you had better have some good food and good service. Thankfully, Ugly Restaurant delivers. Ugly Restaurant is a Turkish grill. Your first thought may be kabobs, but there's a lot more to Turkish food than that, as my guest and I found out.

Ugly Restaurant is in a strip center on Wa-

bash in Springfield. I've been fortunate to have been to Turkey, and while the space doesn't resemble a Turkish grill, they still did a nice buildout. It's clean and minimalist, in a good way. Although the kitchen is partially open for viewing, it would have been nice to see the cooks at work. Long and narrow, it reminded me of the typical bowling alley Chicago bar.

We arrived just as Ugly Restaurant was opening for the day and were the first diners. As we progressed through our meal it was clear that others had heard of Ugly Restaurant, because a steady stream of patrons streamed in, including several that we knew. It also seemed to be doing a nice takeout business.

Ugly Restaurant has a dedicated lunch and

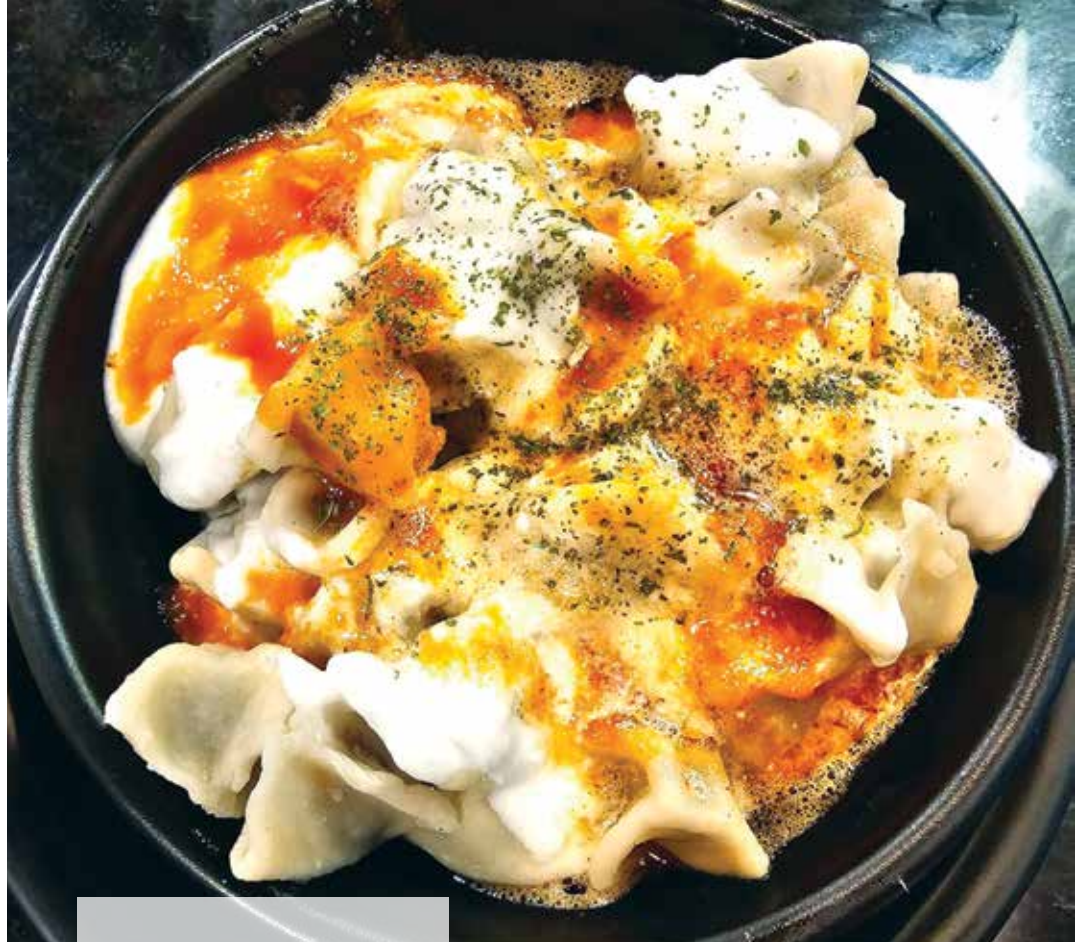
breakfast menu, as well as a separate dinner menu. Prices vary quite a bit between the lunch and main menu, as do portion sizes. If ordering off the main menu, the prices can be high for lunch (\$23-\$34) while the lunch menu is more reasonably priced (\$13-\$17). In addition to the typical offerings, one would expect from a Turkish grill, there are a variety of soups, salads and burgers/sandwiches. There is also a separate vegetarian menu. Although we went with more common dishes, we were tempted by the manti (\$15 – dumplings stuffed with spiced meat and onions, topped with tomato sauce and a garlic yogurt) and the beef guvec (\$34 – ribeye, tomato, mushrooms, onion and garlic baked in a clay pot and served with rice pilaf and onion salad).

I'm probably going to insult someone here, but Turkish food and Greek food share some similarities – bright flavors, lots of spices and lots of vegetables. Where they differ is in the spices used (for Turkish food, think coriander, sumac, mint, cloves and rosemary) and the strong presence of bread, most typically a thin and crispy pita-like bread called lavash that puffs up while being cooked. Trust me, it's good.

We decided to start with an order of the falafel (\$9 – ground chickpeas and seasoning that are formed into balls and deep-fried) and the baba ganoush (\$11 – crushed and grilled eggplant combined with tahini, olive oil and garlic). The falafel, which was served with a fiery pepper sauce, was excellent. So, too, with the baba ganoush. Each was served with a side of lavash that complimented each dish. We were not very adventurous with our main orders. I went with the lunch doner (\$15 – sliced lamb and beef wrapped in lavash with lettuce, tomato, pickles and homemade tomato sauce) and the beef shish kabob (\$28 – grilled skewers of ribeye, served with rice pilaf, onion salad, grilled tomatoes and jalapeño peppers).

Each dish was served with a freakishly addicting onion salad. This bright and vibrant salad is made of thinly sliced onions tossed with sumac, parsley and lemon juice. The tart sumac and savory onions combined to make a bright and crunchy accompaniment to our meat-centric entrees.

Doner is made with layers of beef and lamb (or sometimes chicken) that are stacked on top of each other on a vertical rotisserie. It's a classic Turkish street food that resembles a gyro, but with some delicious and earthy meat and crispy vegetables that were



Left: Grilled wings immersed in a special in-house marinade, cooked over an opened flame, and topped fresh with a blend of Turkish seasonings. Served with a jasmine white rice pilaf, a chilled onion salad, and a grilled tomato and jalapeño pepper. Top: Manti Bottom: Chicken and beef guvec

hit with a light dusting of tomato sauce. The cumin, smoked paprika and Aleppo pepper were not overwhelmed by the tomato sauce and went a long way toward offsetting the richness of the lamb and beef. It was a delicious, if somewhat messy, meal.

My guest appreciated his kabobs. The beef was reported as tender, well flavored with a variety of spices, and not overcooked. The grilled tomatoes and jalapenos had a nice char and cook on them that accentuated their flavors. The meat and veggies are best eaten with the lavash that accompanies the dish. It was definitely a dinner-sized dish. It might have been too much for me, so I would have liked to see a smaller portion available on the lunch menu. I did manage to grab a bite and it equaled similar dishes that I had tried in Turkey and the Mediterranean. I didn't taste the rice pilaf (which was, in the traditional manner, served on a separate plate), but my guest enjoyed it and thought that it was made with oil rather than butter, which made it a lighter dish more appropri-



ate for a hot summer day.

Ugly Bar and Restaurant is a welcome addition to the increasing list of ethnic eateries in Springfield. Make sure to give it a shot and let us know what you think. **SBJ**

Address: 2312 Wabash Avenue, Springfield
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New businesses

Sangamon County new business registrations, June 16 – July 15, 2023

Kieffer Farms, 6811 N. Route 29. 414-4415. James L. Kieffer and Lori Britz.

Lil Impson Lawns, 1413 Winston Drive. 899-5689. David J. Impson.

Vestito Di Gocciolamento Clothing, 220 N. Douglas Ave. 415-9804. Corey Hobson.

Wellthy Juice Co., 2922 Plaza Drive. 939-1008. Heidi M. Clark.

A & Q Tobacco Shop, LLC, 2205 Adlai Stevenson Drive. 381-3081. Andrew Thomas Jones Jr.

Grayce Eubanks Doula Services, 124 W. Raylots St., Spaulding. 565-9875. Melody Grayce Eubanks.

Hidden Bridge Farm, 65 Sugar Creek Hills, Auburn. 899-0146. Hunter Buchanan.

AJ's Gutter Service, 948 N. Dirksen Parkway. 299-3737. Austin J. Ash-Adkisson.

R & R Handyman, 3617 North Grand Ave. E. 691-4306. Robert A. Sidener and John Richard Sidener.

Simply Sew Alterations, 2221 S. Whittier Blvd. 816-2238. Tamesha Clark.

Saric Consulting, Inc., 3330 Ginger Creek Drive, Suite A. 618-641-9700. Sara Saric.

Kingdom Kuts, 1007 W. Edwards St. 773-960-0125. Chianti Rogers.

Unique Collectibles & Gifts 4 You, 2700 Timber Pointe Drive. 741-1821. Debbie S. Castaldo.

Lil Q's BBQ, 160 Forest Ave., Lot 26. 502-1780. Cory Jonathan Alexander.

Medical Devices International, 3328 Blueberry Lane. 725-3328. Arturo S. Espejo.

Vivacious Hydration Spa, 125 N. MacArthur Blvd. 717-6012. Garrett Management Group LLC.

Gofer Guyz, 917 Clocktower Drive, Suite 300. 801-5658. MTD Lawn Care Inc.

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Anderson Properties & Credit Repair Solutions, 120 S. Wesley St. 761-5308. Jalisa M. Cheese-Anderson.

Barclay Cartage Company, 2523 St. James Road. 299-1259. Marla Auby.

Digital Inclusion LLC d/b/a MATHIS, 1608 S. Park Ave. 697-6272. Denise J. Marie Bean-Mathis and Timothy M. Mathis.

AJ's Candy & Games, 6 Apache Drive. 691-9123. Andrew Shutt.

Hammer Time Construction, 105 Stanton St. 741-9463. Austin Cody.

Doughnut King, 1216 S. Fifth St. 670-7429. Frank Evans.

Henry Daycare, 1017 N. Fifth St. 415-9946. Sherricka Henry.

Macbook Refresh, 2917 S. Walnut St. 309-644-9421. Amy Figueroa.

The image is a promotional graphic for Crowdson Creative. It features a dark background with a large, stylized camera lens on the right side. The lens has yellow crosshairs and a reflection of a city skyline. On the left, there is a yellow logo consisting of a stylized 'C' inside a circle. Below the logo, the text 'Crowdson Creative' is written in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font. Underneath that, in a smaller white font, is 'VIDEO PRODUCTION SERVICES FOR BUSINESSES & NON-PROFITS' and '217-299-8801 • imaketv.com'. At the bottom, there are three yellow rounded rectangular boxes. The first box is titled 'VIDEO' and lists 'Video Production', 'Music Videos', 'TV Commercials', 'Training Videos', and 'Testimonial Videos'. The second box is titled 'SERVICES' and lists 'Video Editing', 'Script Writing', '3D Animation', 'Story Boarding', and 'Motion Graphics'. The third box is titled 'EQUIPMENT' and lists 'Green Screen', 'Drone Videography', 'Teleprompter', and 'On Location or In-Studio Production'. In the top left corner, there are five yellow chevrons pointing to the right. In the bottom left corner, there is a small yellow play button icon.

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