



SPRINGFIELD **Business** JOURNAL

June 2024

Q&A with Bob Sibert

third-generation president of Bound to Stay Bound Books

Chris Stone to produce cannabis-infused beverages

Springfield: Not just a stopover, but a stay over



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The only thing constant is change

Although I went to college in Jacksonville and lived there for a couple years after graduation, I did not know much about Bound to Stay Bound Books before researching the business as part of this month's Q&A with Bob Sibert, the third-generation company president (p. 6).

"People just don't read anymore," is an oft-heard lament, but Bound to Stay Bound Books is one of Jacksonville's largest employers, with 125 people working out of a 110,000-square-foot facility. I found a fascinating timeline on the company's website detailing how the technology, physical buildings and services have all evolved during more than 100 years of operation.

Perhaps I identify with this particular company because people often put books in the same category as newspapers and magazines, considering them relics of the past, like landline phones and typewriters. Meanwhile, we've been putting out SBJ every month for 27 years now and Illinois Times every week for nearly 50 years without ever missing an issue, even during the pandemic. We'll have to keep at it a while longer to hit the century mark, but both publications continue to evolve to stay relevant and to reach readers in other formats in addition to print.

A willingness to change with the times is the key to successful companies and communities, and Jacksonville has decided to get creative when it comes to recruiting new residents (p. 25). After losing nearly 10% of its population from 2010-2020, the town is now trying to capitalize on the trend of people moving away from major metropolitan areas. Since the start of the pandemic, the nation's three largest metro areas – New York, Los Angeles and Chicago – have all seen significant declines in population. For many people, remote work has freed them to move out of congested cities and into areas with much lower costs of living.

Regardless of whether Jacksonville's incentive program is ultimately successful, a willingness to try new things instead of waiting for circumstances to improve is to be admired, and many of us would do well to take this same approach. When asked what advice he would give to people entering the work force, Bob Sibert said, "Be prepared for change, and be prepared to constantly learn." That's good advice for all of us.



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a Q & A with

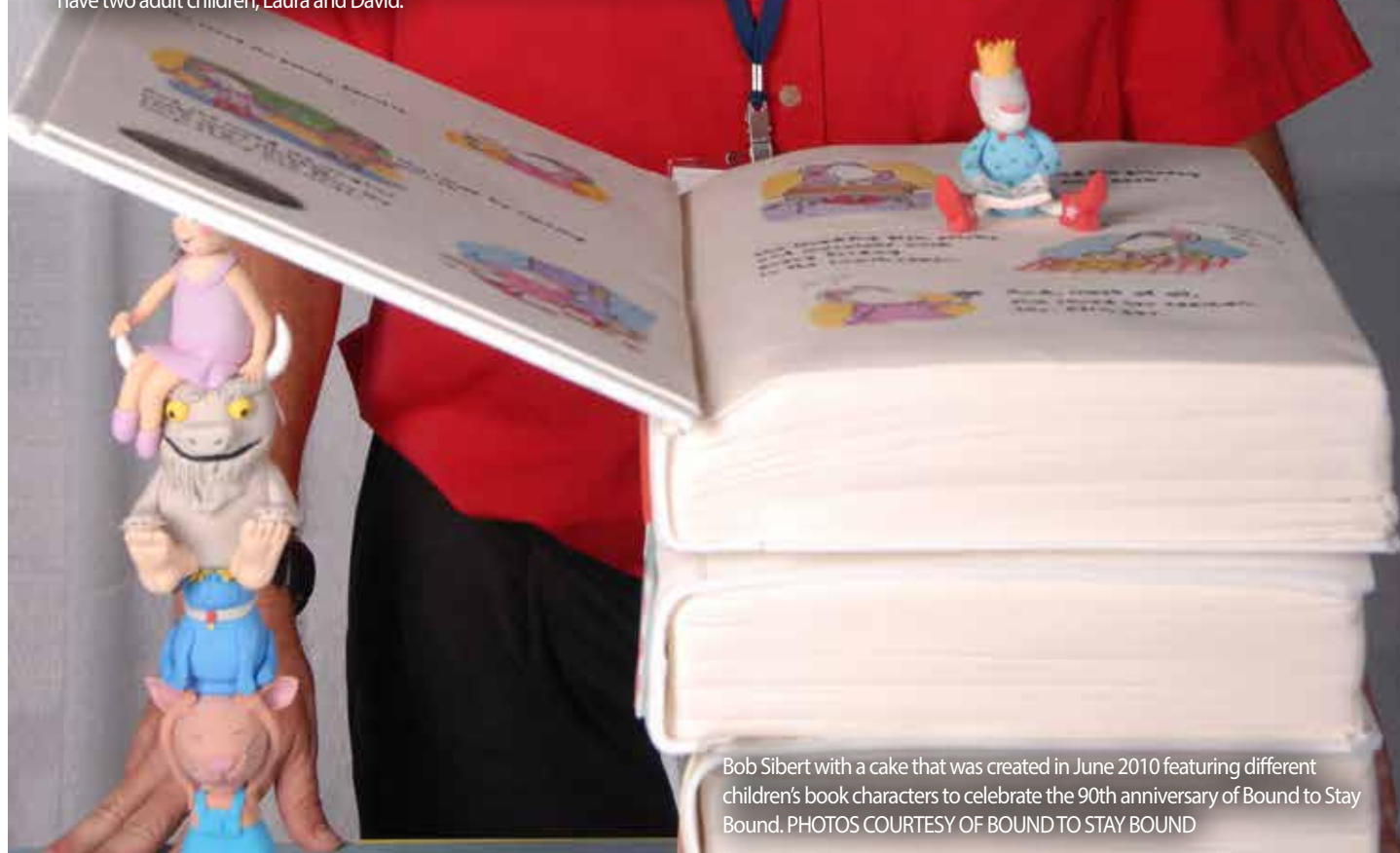
Bob Sibert

By David Blanchette

Bob Sibert is the third generation of his family to serve as president of Bound to Stay Bound Books. His grandfather, Lawrence D. Sibert, began working for a Jacksonville printing and bookbinding company in 1908 and later started his own company with a business partner. Originally known as the New Method Book Bindery, Bound to Stay Bound Books now operates out of a 110,000-square-foot facility on the western edge of Jacksonville.

Bob was born and raised in Jacksonville and graduated from Augustana College, then later obtained his MBA from Columbia Business School. He officially joined the family business in 1978, although he had been helping out there since the age of 8. Bob succeeded his father as president in 1992.

Bob lives in Jacksonville with his wife, Karen, and way too many books. They have two adult children, Laura and David.



Bob Sibert with a cake that was created in June 2010 featuring different children's book characters to celebrate the 90th anniversary of Bound to Stay Bound. PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOUND TO STAY BOUND



In 1959, a new headquarters was constructed at 1880 W. Morton Ave. It has been added on to several times over the years, and 125 employees now work out of a 110,000-square-foot facility. PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOUND TO STAY BOUND

What are your first memories of the family business?

When I was a kid, I used to go down to the business on weekends and help my dad with the mail. They would open up the mail on Saturdays to get a jump on the week. When I was a teenager, I started working there over the summer doing odd jobs around the office.

When did you decide you would follow in your father's footsteps to run Bound to Stay Bound Books?

When I was in business school getting my MBA from Columbia, I kind of got a feel for what life in the big corporations was like and decided that really wasn't for me. So I decided a smaller business like Bound to Stay Bound was maybe a good idea.



Bob Sibert with his father, Robert F. Sibert, around the time Bob joined the company in 1978. PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOUND TO STAY BOUND

What did you learn from your grandfather and father about operating the business?

My grandfather was a big stickler for quality. There were folk tales or legends about how he could just go out and walk through the bindery and look at the stacks of books everywhere. If one book was not right somewhere he would notice it, pick it out and someone would have to fix it.

My father made friends with all of the publishers we dealt with, and they all had great respect and admiration for him. I would consider him to be a kind of consummate salesman.

How has the business changed during the years in which you have been involved?

Everything keeps changing. There have been a lot of changes in automation, in the machinery and the materials we use. There have been changes in who you do business with. The books are constantly changing as well. But mostly it's been change for the better.

What feelings do you have about running a business that has been in Jacksonville for more than 125 years?

I'm proud that we have lasted that long, but there is pressure to keep it going. I also feel gratitude for all of the people who have helped the business and who have helped me along the way.

What is your secret to keeping your many long-term employees?

We have great employees. There's a certain amount of loyalty that you get if you take care of them, and then they want to take care of you because we have a shared purpose. Keep preaching what you're doing, why you're doing it, and how it's good for society and for people. If they

believe in it, then it gives them a reason to want to keep helping you. I consider our employees to be family, so it's a family business in more ways than one.

Why do you feel it is important to give back to the Jacksonville community?

That's where we operate, and there are all kinds of people in this community that have helped me through the years, and it's where our employees are based. So by helping the community we are helping them. You don't object when people come and say, 'We have a Little League team that needs sponsoring,' or something like that. In fact, we expect such requests.

What advice would you give to young people today who are entering the work force?

Be prepared for change, and be prepared to constantly learn.



The Illinois State Historical Society presented Bob Sibert with an award in 2019 to recognize Bound to Stay Bound as an Illinois centennial business. PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOUND TO STAY BOUND

What might people be surprised to learn about you?

I heard the shot that killed John Lennon. I was going to school in New York City, and my apartment was just a block away from the Dakota apartment building where he lived. I heard about who got shot later that day on the radio. I was amazed. I had heard all of these horrible things about New York City crime but had not really seen any up until that point. It was a shock when I found out what had happened. **SBJ**

WOMEN



1.



2.



3.



4.

Each year, *Springfield Business Journal* partners with Security Bank to recognize women from the public and private sectors who have made outstanding contributions to the local community. The recipients are selected from nominations submitted by community members throughout the year.

On Tuesday, May 14, Security Bank hosted a reception at Island Bay Yacht Club for the recipients and their family and friends. Previous recipients were also invited to attend. Stephan Paul Antonacci, president and CEO of Security Bank, presented awards to this year's recipients.

1. This year's Women of Influence recipients: Jennifer Bettis, Ava Carpenter-McPike and Kayla Edwards
2. Michelle Ownbey, left, and Paul Antonacci, right, present Jennifer Bettis with her award.
3. Father Odie Carpenter, mother Pat Carpenter, Ava Carpenter-McPike, brother Tony Carpenter and Charles Griffiths
4. Erin Sommer, Taylor Kuentler, Kayla Edwards, Casey Hughes and Emily Pasley

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High expectations

Anticipating growing market share, Chris Stone opens facility to produce cannabis-infused beverages

By Dean Olsen

The small-scale, \$8 million marijuana cultivation center expected to open in June on Springfield's northeast side would be the largest site of its kind in the state, and perhaps the nation, to produce beverages infused with cannabis and hemp oil.

So says Christopher Stone, a Springfield-based cannabis entrepreneur and managing partner of CoPak Industries, 3451 Lumber Lane. CoPak is on track to become the Springfield area's first "craft grow" to join Illinois' \$1.6 billion-per-year legal cannabis industry.

Stone, 52, and his fellow investors are betting on the growing popularity of cannabis- and hemp-infused beverages and the interest of young adults as a potentially safer alternative to alcoholic drinks and without the risk of hangovers.

"They are more conscious about what they are taking into their bodies," Stone said.

The category that's one of the fastest growing in the cannabis industry is edible products, including candy-flavored gummies and beverages. Cannabis beverages make up 1% to 3% of all cannabis sales globally, amounting to between \$1.23 billion and \$2 billion in 2023.

"If we got to 20% in the next 10 years, that would be pretty incredible," Stone said. "And I think it's possible."

Industry analysts from Future Market Insight predict the worldwide cannabis beverage industry will be worth almost \$5.9 billion by 2033 – a compound annual growth rate of 17%. And data from Headset, which bills itself as a "business intelligence platform for the cannabis industry," indicate the popularity of cannabis beverages has grown 40% in North America since 2021.

Illinois officials don't break out infused beverages in their reports of cannabis sales. Beverages are lumped with gummies and other products infused with "liquid marijuana." That product category accounted for \$1.9 million, or 1.3%, of the \$148.9 million in retail cannabis sales in March, according to state data.

CoPak's goal is to produce 9.6 million canned beverages in the first year and reach maximum capacity – 20 million cans – within two years, Stone said. He plans to do that with about 15 employees, though he said the untapped potential of infused beverages in Illinois and nationwide could help the facility expand over the next decade to 150 million cans per year produced by 50 employees.



Christopher Stone, managing partner of CoPak Industries, standing in the canning room of the business at 3451 Lumber Lane in Springfield, says CoPak's niche in the legal marijuana industry will be canned beverages infused with THC – tetrahydrocannabinol – the psychoactive chemical compound derived from cannabis and hemp.

PHOTO BY STEVE HINRICHS.

Stone said he isn't able to make revenue or profit projections for CoPak yet. But based on low-end wholesale price estimates of \$2 to \$3.50 per can, it appears the business could generate gross revenues of \$19 million to \$33 million in the first year and \$70 million or more annually after

that.

Stone said CoPak Industries – originally founded as Cyclone Labs when it won one of the state's initial 88 craft-grow licenses – will be unique in that it will handle everything under one roof in a 20,000-square-foot building near farm

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fields and a few businesses east of Interstate 55 and south of Camp Butler Road.

Craft grows, as well as huge cultivation centers such as the 168,000-square-foot Cresco Labs site

plants at a time if they are successful.

Slightly more than a dozen craft grows, mostly in the Chicago area, have received Illinois Department of Agriculture approval to open thus far and

made up of CoPack investors and other central Illinois investors, Stone said.

"Everything in this facility will go into oil-based THC products," he said.

CoPack also will can THC-infused beverages based on brand-specific recipes owned by other companies, including Los Angeles-based CANN – a major player in the infused beverage industry.

"Everything's in one shop," Stone said. "It's more efficient, less costly and provides a benefit not only to the contract canning clients but also to the local economy. This is a better system for producing a better product."

Stone said he hopes restrictions loosen at some point so infused beverages can be sold in bars, restaurants and other places where only people 21 and older can buy them.

But drinks infused with THC from hemp – the same species of plant as marijuana but with lower THC levels – can be sold at restaurants, bars and supermarkets, and shipped across state lines because of a lack of regulation in Illinois and many other states.

"What we're trying to do is develop a portfolio of brands, whether we own them or whether we contract-manufacture, that we can sell out into the marketplace," Stone said.

The contract-manufacture arrangement in the beverage industry is known as copacking. The Red Bull energy drinks are a prime example, Stone said. Red Bull pays other companies to produce its recipes.

CoPack Industries still needs to get regulatory approval from the ag department to can products



The six-acre property that CoPack Industries occupies at 3451 Lumber Lane in Springfield limits entry to people 21 and older, is surrounded by a barbed-wire fence and is outfitted with more than 250 indoor and outdoor video monitoring cameras. PHOTO BY STEVE HINRICHS.

in Logan County outside Lincoln, have state authorization to create infused products and other cannabis-based products on-site as part of their state licenses. Their products can be sold only in state-regulated dispensaries in Illinois.

Craft grows in Illinois are allowed to have up to 14,000 flowering plants at a time, with each plant requiring about one square foot or more of indoor space. The state allows the facilities to start out with 5,000 plants and then expand by 3,000

are operating. Some facilities focus on producing high-quality cannabis for smokable products. Co-Pack's niche will be infused beverages, Stone said.

The company will grow the marijuana plants it will use to extract and distill oil containing specific concentrations of the psychoactive chemical compound THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol.

CoPack will take that oil and infuse it in beverages – mostly 12-ounce cans – as part of recipes owned by another company, Springfield Seed,



The canning room at CoPack Industries, with part of the room's assembly line in the foreground, sets the Springfield business apart from other "craft grow" cannabis centers in Illinois, and perhaps in the nation, when it comes to the volume, quality and variety of THC-infused beverages that will be produced, according to CoPack Managing Partner Christopher Stone. PHOTO BY STEVE HINRICHS.

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infused with hemp in addition to cannabis. But Stone said he is confident that this hurdle can be overcome so the cultivation of marijuana and the canning of beverages can begin this summer.

a \$1 million security system that includes facial-recognition technology for real-time and archived video footage.

Each plant grown is tracked, based on state rules, and each batch of plants used for infusion will be recorded with bar codes on each can,

chief of staff at the Illinois Department of Public Health who oversaw COVID-19 operations, said the canning process at CoPack will be “no different than at Anheuser-Busch, just on a smaller scale.”

The room’s canning equipment is made by Alpha Brewing Operations in Lincoln, Neb., which makes the same sort of canning equipment used by craft beer breweries and soda manufacturers.

Springfield Seed’s initial beverages to be produced are all fruit-flavored and lightly carbonated: papaya and lime, cucumber and lime, guanabana and a lemonade iced tea. Users of the products won’t taste or smell the marijuana used to produce them, Stone said.

CoPack would purchase cannabis distillate for infusion until its first crop is harvested. Hemp oil emulsion would be purchased for infusion in beverages, and hemp wouldn’t be grown at the site, Stone said.

The need for hemp regulation

Illinois, like most states, hasn’t enacted legislation to regulate hemp, which was legalized for production by Congress in the 2018 farm bill. The lack of regulation has led to products, including infused beverages that contain low levels of THC, to be sold in gas stations, liquor stores and supermarkets to anyone, including children.

Legislation is pending in the Illinois General Assembly to prohibit or regulate sales of THC products from hemp. Even though CoPack has a financial stake in the growing popularity of hemp-infused beverages, Stone said he hopes regulation is passed soon in Illinois.

He said CoPack wants to ensure that people younger than 21 don’t have access to them. He would also like the state to require THC content to be disclosed on labels and enforce purity standards.

“It’s still a psychoactive product that you shouldn’t allow kids to get ahold of,” Stone said. “Alcohol is regulated. Even Coke is regulated (as far as what’s in it). ... It’s an intoxicating beverage. We can’t have 6-year-olds drinking this or 11-year-olds going out and buying and drinking it. The state of Illinois is going to have to do something.”

If CoPack begins making hemp-infused beverages before such regulation is in place, Stone said the company will make sure it distributes only to retailers who are “responsible vendors” and pledge not to sell to people younger than 21.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration cautions that products infused with hemp, also known as Delta-8 THC, haven’t been evaluated by the agency or approved for safe use.

The FDA said it received 104 reports of adverse events in patients who consumed Delta-8 THC



The extraction room at CoPack Industries is where ethanol will be used as a solvent to remove THC and other cannabinoid compounds from cannabis grown at the Springfield business that has been milled, or ground up, in preparation for extraction. The ethanol later will be removed in the distillation process and the resulting THC distillate will be used for on-site infusion of beverages. PHOTO BY STEVE HINRICH.

What’s involved in CoPack Industries

The building that houses CoPack Industries has been renovated and equipped with lighting, watering and temperature-control equipment to produce a marijuana crop every 10 to 13 weeks. Rooms with ceilings 12 to 18-feet high are used to start plants from cuttings, establish root systems, grow marijuana flowers that produce THC, then cut and dry the harvested plants.

There’s a barbed-wire fence around the six-acre property and more than 250 video monitoring cameras inside and outside as part of

Stone said.

The heart of the operation is the cannery room. It features an automated assembly line with two 1,200-gallon beverage processing tanks that are two stories tall, as well as equipment to carbonate, pasteurize, put beverages in cans, then seal and package four-packs and six-packs for shipping. The equipment can accommodate various sizes of cans and bottles, depending on clients’ needs, Stone said.

CoPack Industries Chief Operating Officer Justin DeWitt, a mechanical engineer and former



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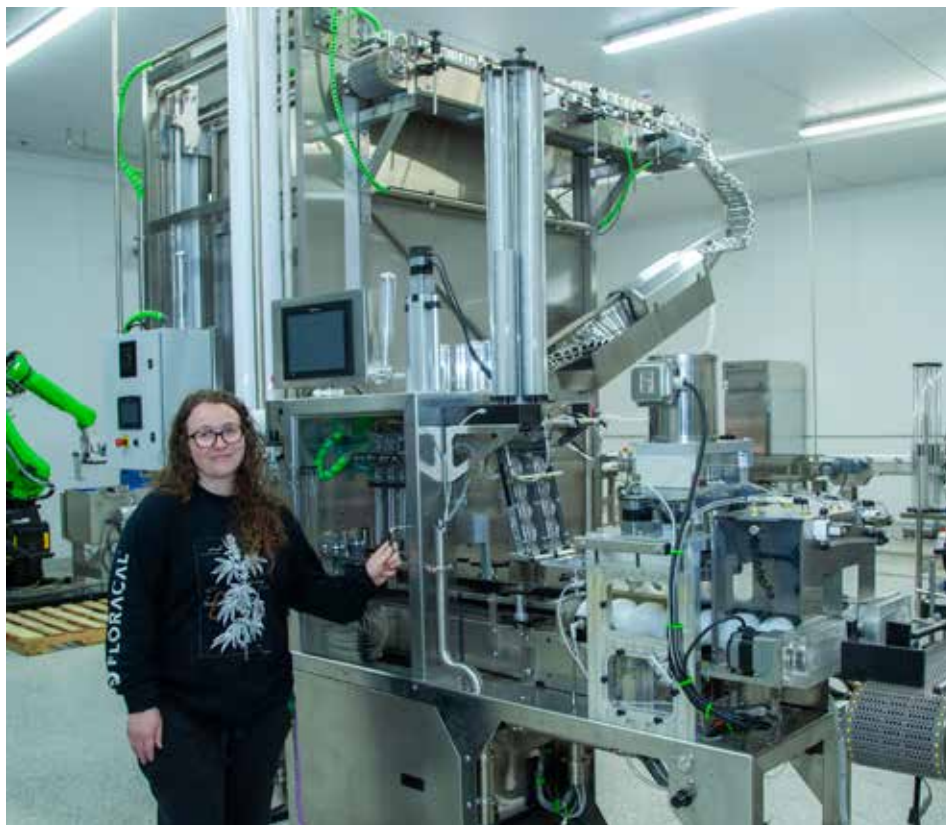
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Gabrielle Isaacks, operations coordinator for CoPack Industries, shows off the Alpha Brewing-brand equipment that will feed cans from pallets at the top of the machine into a "filling station" where the cans will be filled with THC-infused beverages and then seamed and sealed. PHOTO BY STEVE HINRICH.

products between Dec. 1, 2020, and Feb. 28, 2022. Of the reports, 77% involved adults and 8% involved patients younger than 18. The other 15% of reports didn't contain an age. The adverse events "included, but were not limited to, hallucinations, vomiting, tremor, anxiety, dizziness, confusion and loss of consciousness," according to the FDA.

Marijuana, as well, has been linked to adverse health effects, though limited research has also linked the substance to positive effects. Accord-

ing to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, marijuana affects brain development.

"When people begin using marijuana as teenagers, the drug may impair thinking, memory and learning functions and affect how the brain builds connections between the areas necessary for these functions," the institute says on its website. "Researchers are still studying how long marijuana's effects last and whether some changes may be permanent."

The future of THC-infused beverages

More research on the health impact of marijuana is expected if the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration moves forward with its plan to declassify cannabis as a less-dangerous drug, though the move wouldn't legalize marijuana at the federal level.

Stone and DeWitt see THC-infused beverages only growing as the smell of smoked marijuana on public roads, parks and other places becomes more and more unpopular.

"Like cigarettes, people are going to get sick of it, if they already aren't sick of it," Stone said.

CoPack is taking advantage of thousands of years of social norms, he said.

"Drinking is socially acceptable," he said. "It's also the most popular way in terms of how you socialize with people when you go out. Think how many people drink coffee, how many people drink energy drinks, how many people drink alcohol."

Added DeWitt: "You hear people say, 'Let's go out for a drink together' way more often than they say, 'Let's go smoke a joint together.'"

Stone said he won't try to convert the 17% of Americans who told the Gallup Poll in 2023 that they smoke marijuana. He wants to convince the 83% who don't to try infused beverages instead of alcohol.

"As much as I like to have an 'old fashioned' or to have a vodka water, the amount of damage it does to your body over time, if you continue to do it, is substantial," Stone said. "And in this situation, there a lot less risk in damaging your body by using a regulated cannabis or hemp-derived product than alcohol." **SBJ**

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

At the forefront of video gaming, marijuana industries

Chris Stone, who also runs legislative lobbying and real-estate companies, operates Share, the new cannabis dispensary on South Sixth Street Frontage Road, north of the I-55 interchange in Southern View. He is a San Diego native who has lived in Springfield for 24 years.

Stone founded Lucy's Place, Illinois' first chain of entertainment video gaming cafes, as well as Springfield's first medical-marijuana dispensary, HCl Alternatives. He remains an investor in the company that HCl merged with

in 2018, Ascend Wellness, and an adviser to Ascend Wellness Holdings, a nationwide cannabis company.

When Stone received Springfield City Council approval to open the city's first craft grow, a former warehouse on Lumber Lane, it was one of only a few in the city that fit within Springfield's highly restrictive zoning rules.

Restrictions have eased slightly since then, creating more options for potential craft-grow and infusion sites. But before that, Springfield's restrictions prompted several entrepreneurs to look at Lincoln and other Illinois communities where zoning rules weren't as tough.



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MAJOR EMPLOYERS

Sources: Sangamon County Growth Alliance.
*State of Illinois number includes all state government agencies, including education institutions within Sangamon County.

	EMPLOYER NAME	NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES	PRINCIPAL	PRODUCT/SERVICE	YEAR EST'D	WEBSITE
1	State of Illinois	17,800*	JB Pritzker Governor	Government	1818	illinois.gov
2	Memorial Health	5,141	Edgar J. Curtis President and CEO	Health care	1897	memorial.health
3	Hospital Sisters Health System	3,638	Damond W. Boatwright President and CEO	Health care	1875	st-johns.org
4	Springfield Clinic	3,500	Ray Williams CEO	Health care	1939	springfieldclinic.com
5	Springfield Public Schools #186	2,619	Jennifer Gill Superintendent	Education	1854	sps186.org
6	SIU School of Medicine	1,715	Jerry Kruse Dean/Provost	Higher education/ Health care	1970	siumed.edu
7	Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois	1,469	Stephen Harris President	Insurance	1936	bcbuil.com
8	University of Illinois Springfield	1,445	Janet L. Gooch Chancellor	Higher education	1969	uis.edu
9	City of Springfield	1,364	Misty Buscher Mayor	Government	1832	springfield.il.us
10	Horace Mann	1,024	Marita Zuraitis President and CEO	Insurance	1945	horacemann.com



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Airport seeks rezoning to facilitate future development

Modifies request to alleviate concerns of adjacent neighborhood

By Dean Olsen

Residents of the Val-E-Vue subdivision near Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport say they are relieved the airport backed down on a plan to change about 92 acres from residential to industrial zoning.

The proposed rezoning for the land, which acts as a buffer between the subdivision to the south and the developed part of the airport, "could potentially ruin the neighborhood," Val-E-Vue resident Gene Taylor said.

He and other subdivision residents spoke to the Springfield Planning and Zoning Commission on May 15 before the panel made a recommendation to the Springfield City Council in advance of a final decision by the City Council June 18.

Mark Hanna, executive director of the Springfield Airport Authority, told Illinois Times that the Val-E-Vue neighbors had no reason to be concerned about any imminent project at the airport that might disrupt life in their neighborhood.

That's because the 92 acres is designated as a "buffer area" beyond one of the airport's runways, and will be preserved for that purpose in the long term, in case airplanes need extra space in emergencies, Hanna said. The 92-acre section has been used for agricultural purposes.

But to avoid delays in the rezoning process, Hanna agreed to remove the 92-acre tract from the airport's overall request to rezone 1,089 acres of land owned by the airport from the current residential zoning classification to industrial. The 92 acres would remain zoned residential.

The commission voted 8-0 to support the proposal.

Taylor, 79, a retired executive director of the Illinois Educators Credit Union, moved with his wife, Cheri Taylor, 76, to Val-E-Vue, a 160-home neighborhood, in late 2019. Gene Taylor was chairperson of the Springfield Airport Authority Board in the early 1990s.

He said his neighbors in Val-E-Vue were puzzled and upset when a handful of them who live next to the 92 acres received a legally required



Gene Taylor speaks to the Springfield Planning and Zoning Commission on May 15 on behalf of residents of the Val-E-Vue neighborhood near Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport. PHOTO BY DEAN OLSEN

notice of the impending rezoning request.

Industrial zoning would allow for a wide range of uses, including warehouses and chemical processing plants, and the notices put some neighbors in "panic mode," Taylor said.

However, Hanna said no one from the neighborhood reached out to him to inquire about the rezoning plan before the May 15 meeting. He described the overall rezoning request as "more or less of a housekeeping issue."

The airport was founded in 1947 and over the years expanded into areas that were previously annexed into the city of Springfield, Hanna said. Newly annexed areas automatically were assigned a residential zoning classification by the city, and the zoning hadn't been updated, he said.

The airport authority, a unit of local government, recently asked the city to rezone all of the airport-owned land to match the rest of the industrial-zoned property. That rezoning would help the authority in promoting property to developers for commercial use, Hanna said.

"We're just preparing the property for long-term success," he said. "You just never know what's in the minds of site selectors or developers."

There's no such project pending that would

require the rezoning to move forward, Hanna said.

The residential-zoned land to be rezoned industrial includes parts of airport runways, the control tower, state- and federally-operated offices and land east of the runways that airport officials want to develop for a potential air freight processing center and other aviation-related uses.

The staff of the Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission recommended that the zoning commission and the City Council approve the entire rezoning request, including the 92 acres.

Located at Illinois Route 4 (Veterans Parkway) and Route 29 (J. David Jones Parkway), the airport covers 24,000 acres and is considered a "civil-military airport."

In addition to providing commercial flights for the public, the airport is home to the 183rd Wing of the Illinois Air National Guard, as well as the Illinois Department of Transportation's Division of Aeronautics and some businesses.

Because of the current location of runways, it's "highly improbable" that the 92-acre buffer zone in question ever would be considered for development, Hanna said.

If that's the case, Taylor questioned why rezoning of those acres would be needed. Airport officials should have done a better job of communicating with Val-E-Vue residents to avoid any unnecessary anxiety, he said.



Keeping the 92 acres as residential would give Val-E-Vue residents time to revive their dormant neighborhood association and be vigilant in case they want to oppose projects they don't like in the future, Taylor said.

Hanna said airport officials made the request to properly zone property that never should be considered for residential development.

"We're trying to be very truthful with how things are rezoned," he said. **SBJ**


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

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MAJOR MANUFACTURERS SANGAMON COUNTY

Sources: Springfield Sangamon Growth Alliance; the manufacturers
DND - Did Not Disclose. Ranked by number of full-time employees

	NAME/ADDRESS	PHONE/ WEBSITE/EMAIL	FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES	FACILITY SIZE (SQ. FT.)	PRINCIPAL(S)	PRODUCT/SERVICE	YEAR EST'D
1	BUNN Corporate Headquarters and International Corporate Office 5020 Ash Grove Dr. Springfield, Illinois 62711	800-637-8606 217-529-6601 bunn.com	550	100,000+	Arthur Bunn president and CEO	Manufacturer of a complete line of dispensed beverage solutions for coffee, tea, cappuccino, granita, juice, espresso, water filtration and more	1957
2	Solomon Colors, Inc. 4050 Color Plant Road Springfield, IL 62702	217-522-3112 solomoncolors.com	200	250,000	Adam Solomon, president, Richard Solomon, chairman Emily Fuchs CFO	Manufacturer of iron oxide pigments sup- plied to ready mix, mortar and concrete product producers. A full line of decora- tive products and dispensing equipment for metering iron oxide pigments	1927
2	StandardAero 1200 N. Airport Dr. Springfield, IL 62707	800-731-7371 standardaero.com	200	250,000+	David Pearman	Aircraft service, modification	1911
3	Simplex, Inc. 5300 Rising Moon Road Springfield, IL 62711	217-483-1600 simplexdirect.com	175	125,000	Amanda Hupp, president	Load banks, day tanks, fuel supply systems	1934
4	BRANDT 2935 S. Koke Mill Road Springfield, IL 62711	217-547-5800 brandt.co	155	125,000+	Rick Brandt, CEO	Fertilizers, crop protection, micronu- trients, spray adjuvants, seed	1953
5	Nudo Products, Inc. 1500 Taylor Ave. Springfield, IL 62703	217-528-5636 nudo.com	143	400,000	Stephen Adkins, president Andrew Wylie, vice pres. general manager	Manufacturer of wall, ceiling, floor, exterior, sign and transportation panels with a variety of finishes and substrates.	1954
6	DICKEY-john Corporation 5200 Dickey John Road Auburn, IL 62615	217-438-3371 dickey-john.com	135	225,000	Jeff Schertz, vice pres. of operations	Electronic design and manufacture of systems controls for agriculture and public works	1966
7	Mel-O-Cream Donuts Intl., Inc. 5456 International Parkway Springfield, IL 62711	217-483-7272 mel-o-cream.com	80	70,000	Eric Larson CEO	Frozen dough products and frozen pre-fried doughnuts	1932
8	Ace Sign Co. 2540 S. First St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-522-8417 acesignco.com	75	42,000	Todd Bringuet, CEO	Manufacturer of custom signage and graphics	1940
9	ICG Illinois Viper Mine 5945 Lester Road Williamsville, IL 62693	217-566-3000 N/A	66	DND	Ty Hunt production manager	Coal producer	1982
10	Cast Industries, Inc. 580 North St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-522-8292 CastInd.com	55	DND	Ron Stevens, James Stevens	Manufacturer of lead fishing tackle	1987
11	Henry Technologies 701 S. Main St. Chatham, IL 62629	217-483-2406 henry-group.net	48	110,000	Julian Parker Executive VP of Operations	Components for HVAC/industrial and commercial refrigeration	1914
12	Certified Tank & Mfg., LLC 2500 Richards Lane Springfield, IL 62702	217-525-1433 certifiedtank.com dan@certifiedtank. com	37	DND	Dan Rohr president	Manufacturer of above-ground tanks of carbon or stainless steel. Various sizes and capacities.	1944

StandardAero flies under radar in local economy

Airplane maintenance company is based at Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport

By Ed Wojcicki

Perhaps StandardAero flies under the radar in the local Springfield economy, pardon the pun, because not many locals own their jets. But StandardAero and its predecessors, Garrett Aviation and Landmark Aviation, have been a mainstay at Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport for decades, servicing planes and jets.

"It's actually woven into the fabric of Springfield because the workers' moms and dads worked here and now their children do, so everybody knows everybody here," said David Pearman, vice president and general manager of StandardAero's Springfield facility.

The local maintenance and repair organization provides federally required maintenance and inspections on jets from all over North America. With additional operations in Georgia, Texas, California and other places, including several foreign countries, StandardAero enjoys Springfield's central location that provides easy access for a large pool of customers and their aircraft. The Springfield facility also provides the creative services of interior design and redesign and a highly touted aircraft painting operation.

"Over the years, we have found our Springfield site to be a key to our operations," said Kyle Lundquist, corporate senior vice president of marketing and communications. "We highly value our talented employees and ability to recruit new employees there."

One way it does that is by recruiting several interns every year from the LRS Aviation Maintenance Training Center at Lincoln Land Community College. The LLCC Workforce Institute has an 18-month training program that leads to licensing for airframe and powerplant technicians. That is important because having the federal license is a requirement for signing off on work done on planes at StandardAero.

"I take advantage of students (from LLCC) because they're right here on the airfield," Pearman said. "When the interns finish their program, we try to get first right of refusal to hire them directly."

Mark Hanna, executive director of the Springfield Airport Authority, calls the relationship between StandardAero and LLCC a "vital partnership (that) is a key element to StandardAero's future in Springfield. We are grateful to be the host airport."

The Springfield facility currently has 172 employees but would like to have 190, so there is ongoing recruitment.



Lincoln Land Community College received a \$500,000 grant from the Federal Aviation Administration in 2023 to help combat a national shortage of aircraft mechanics and expand its existing training program. PHOTO COURTESY LLCC

A sign of StandardAero's commitment to Springfield was its fall 2023 announcement of a \$10-\$12 million modernization of the local MRO facility. Scheduled work includes hangar door overhaul, interior door replacement, resurfacing of hangar floors and paint facility equipment upgrades. Some of that work is being completed now, and the next phase will be HVAC upgrades, Pearman said. The improvements are being handled in four phases and will continue for at least another year.

The long history of aviation maintenance started with Capitol Aviation in the flight department of Sangamo Electric in the 1950s as a service center for Beech and Mooney aircraft. That led to the servicing of the Garrett TPE331 engine, the Falcon aircraft and later, a partnership with Pan American Airlines. Since then, ownership of the MRO has changed hands several times, with the local facility expanding and growing under Garrett Aviation, Landmark Aviation and now StandardAero.

Typically, there are 18 airplanes getting serviced in Springfield at any given time, and each one stays an average of one to three months, depending on what's needed. Nearly all of the work is what Pearman calls scheduled maintenance and inspection, and when interviewed in early May, he was fully booked until the end of September.

Describing Springfield as a full-service center, Pearman said, "We also do full avionics modifications and upgrades and installs. We do full interi-

ors. You can get the seats recovered – new carpet, new headliners, things like that."

Pearman has been in Springfield since June 2021 as part of his 30-year career in aviation, moving here from Florida after working for Bombardier Aviation for about 18 months. He grew up in California, earned a bachelor's degree from California Coast University and spent 26 years with Gulfstream Aerospace in several locations as a general manager. Those experiences qualified him for the kind of work done in Springfield on Gulfstreams, Bombardiers, Falcons and Hawks. He mentioned meeting Harrison Ford and Oprah Winfrey while at previous jobs but said in Springfield, it's normally the jets' directors of maintenance and not the owners flying into Capital Airport.

Hanna said aircraft can have extended stays in Springfield, which has a residual positive effect for the local economy. "Usually the aircraft owners, managers or crew will stay with the aircraft during the service periods, providing demand for local lodging, meals and entertainment during their stay in Springfield," Hanna explained. "StandardAero is certainly a key economic catalyst for not only the airport, but for the entire region."

SBJ

Ed Wojcicki is a Springfield resident who freelances after retiring from University of Illinois Springfield and the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police.

MAJOR MANUFACTURERS MORGAN COUNTY

Sources: Jacksonville Regional Economic Development Corporation; the manufacturers
DND - Did Not Disclose. Ranked by number of full-time employees.

	NAME/ADDRESS	PHONE / WEBSITE/EMAIL	FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES	FACILITY SIZE (SQ. FT.)	PRINCIPAL(S)	PRODUCT/SERVICE	YEAR EST'D
1	Reynolds Consumer Products 500 E. Superior Ave. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-243-3311 reynoldsconsumerproducts.com	800	360,000 (west plant), 508,000 (east plant)	Clinton Thompson plant manager	Polyethylene bags and films	1962
2	Perma-Bound Books, a division of Hertzberg-New Method, Inc. 617 E. Vandalia Road Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-243-5451 perma-bound.com	300	320,000	James Orr owner/president Bill Hull plant manager	Prebound books for schools and libraries	1953
3	CCK Automations, LLC 500 Capitol Way Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-243-6040 cckautomations.com	172	100,000	Mark Stephenson CEO	Printed circuit board assemblies, industrial control panels, injection molded parts, engineering services	1999
4	Nestlé USA 1111 Carnation Drive Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-9511 nestleusa.com	165	30 acres	Caryl Sanders factory manager	Non-dairy creamer	1970
5	Bound to Stay Bound Books 1880 W. Morton Ave. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-5191 btsb.com	125	110,000	Bob Sibert, president Lori Smith vice pres./general manager	Prebound children's library books	1920
6	ILMO Products Company 7 Eastgate Drive Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-2183 ilmoproducts.com	110	40,000 (8 acres)	Brad Floreth CEO/president Elizabeth Standley executive vice president	Wholesale/retail distributor of industrial, medical, laboratory EPA protocol, propane and specialty gases and welding equipment sales and service	1913
7	Jacksonville Machine Inc. 2265 W. Morton Ave. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-243-1119 jmimachine.com	55	42,000	Jeff Rodems president	CNC job shop	1919
8	Pallet Repair Systems (PRS) 2 Eastgate Drive Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-291-0009 prsgroupinc.com	30	50,000	Jeff Williams	Manufacturer of machinery	1989
8	Rutland Products 7 Crabtree Road Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-7810 rutland.com	30	60,000	Mike Linn vice pres. of operations	Manufacturer of stove and fireplace repair products	1961
8	UGL 550 Capitol Way Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-243-7878 ugl.com	30	43,000	Scott Knott	Home maintenance and repair items	1985
8	BPC, LLC 1933 Old Naples Road Meredosia, IL 62665	217-584-1110 bpctoll.com	30	75,000	Scott Dunk	Conducts comprehensive analytical testing of resin compounds and conducts trials and DOE to produce specially compounded materials and engineered resins	2012
9	Eli Bridge Company 800 Case Ave. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-7145 elibrige.com	17	66,000	Patty Sullivan president, CEO Tim Noland GM/Treasurer	Amusement ride manufacturing and metal fabrication	1900
10	Tarps Manufacturing 1000 State Highway 104 Meredosia, IL 62665	217-584-1900 tarpsmfg.com	8	28,000	Rich Ott	Construction containment tarps and roll tarps for trucking and agriculture	2003
11	Gaither Tool Co. 2255 W. Morton Ave. Jacksonville, IL 62650	800-452-5010 gaithertool.com.	7	30,000	Richard Brahler II	Manufactures tools and systems to service and maintain tire and wheel assemblies	1988

Motivation to move

Jacksonville offers \$5K to qualified workers willing to relocate to the community

By Scott Reeder

Some people will soon be paid \$5,000 to move to Jacksonville, Illinois.

The Jacksonville Regional Economic Development Corporation is offering the bounty as part of its ongoing effort to lure professionals to the community of 17,600 and surrounding Morgan and Scott counties.

According to the U.S. Census, during the second decade of this century Jacksonville

lost 9.2% of its population. Since then, it has faced other economic setbacks, such as the closure of 174-year-old MacMurray College.

Kristin Jamison, executive director of the JREDC, said businesses in the community are struggling to recruit qualified candidates.

"The two sectors that we're really honing in on are manufacturing and health care. We have (open) professional positions in both of those areas from engineers to drafters to technologists to robotic welders – some really interesting positions that people might not know about," she said.

Trevor Huffman, CEO of Jacksonville Memorial Hospital, said his organization also struggles to fill positions. In addition to dealing with the nationwide nursing shortage, he said his hospital also finds itself bereft of qualified applicants for other openings.

"Technologist positions – like X-ray techs – are really hard for us (to fill.) Medical lab technologists have been difficult for us as well. And then there's always a need in physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy," Huffman said.

The JREDC, which is funded with both local tax dollars and contributions from area employers, is advertising positions extensively online, Jamison said.

But it is also launching a pilot program this



The Jacksonville Regional Economic Development Corporation will soon start offering \$5,000 cash and other incentives to qualified professionals who are willing to relocate to the community. PHOTO COURTESY JREDC

year in which three people, who now live at least 70 miles from Jacksonville, will be cut checks to move to the community. JREDC is working with Make My Move, an Indianapolis-based company that offers an online directory to help connect people willing to relocate with municipalities offering incentives.

"I'm really pleased that JREDC is willing to offer \$5,000 cash incentives to three individuals who decide to move to Jacksonville," Jamison said. "It's exciting because we have great jobs here. But we just may need a little bit of help in making sure that people know about them and know about our area."

While only three people will receive the cash bounties, the JREDC anticipates that the program will actually result in more people moving to the Jacksonville area, she said.

Jamison said she believes many people will apply online for the cash incentives. When they do this, they will fill out an application that lists their qualifications for various jobs. Those applications will become part of a database of people willing to move to the Jacksonville area and it will be shared with various employers.

Huffman said nothing would preclude area employers from offering incentives on their own to hire applicants off the list.

"The more data you have, the more options that you have," he said. "But I think the big thing too is when they go to that site and see the number of community leaders who have joined – providing different services – it shows the level of activities and support that we have in this community. I think it shows that we have a lot going on over here, and that we're not just a small town that would be boring

to come to."

Ryan McCrady, president and CEO of the Springfield Sangamon Growth Alliance, said there have been informal discussions within his group to offer incentives to get individuals to relocate to the Springfield area. But nothing has come of those discussions.

He noted the housing market in Springfield is tight, making it difficult for newcomers.

"People who have houses aren't putting them on the market," he said. "And the houses that do go on the market sell pretty darn quickly," he said.

McCrady added different communities need to take different approaches.

"I think a community should always work hard on the foundational things that make a community great," he said. "That's really going to be the best incentive program in the long run: great schools, good housing, a safe community, arts and cultural activities for people to do, restaurants and also a community that is friendly, kind and welcoming. You have to have all of those things in place, or any incentive program won't work. And when I look at Springfield, I think of those foundational qualities." **SBJ**

Scott Reeder, a staff writer for Illinois Times, can be reached at sreeder@illinoistimes.com.

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panthercreekcc.com
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Piper Glen Golf and Social Club

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217-483-6537
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Poe's Catering

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Springfield Park District

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springfieldparkdistrict.org

State House Inn

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217-528-5100
thestatehouseinn.com

The Pasfield House

525 S. Pasfield St.
217-670-2449
Pasfieldhouse.com

Venue 1929

711 S. Fifth St.
217-899-5688 or 217-899-9061
venue1929.com

VFW Post 755

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217-546-9515 or 217-836-6032

Wyndham Springfield City Centre

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217-789-1530
wyndham.com/hotels/49084

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217-391-2380
Curedcaters.com

Bullard's 311 South Sixth

311 South East Sixth, Morrisonville
217-827-0587
cbullard1957@yahoo.com
bullardslonghouse.com

Broadgauge

101 N. Seventh St., Petersburg
events@broadgauge.com or
Broadgauge.com

Clayville Historic Site

12828 State Route 125, Pleasant Plains
217-481-4430
clayville.org

Edgewood Golf Club

16497 Kennedy Road, Auburn
217-438-6131
golfedgewood.com

Elkhart Hill Farm

4 Drake Lane, Elkhart
217-523-4466
ElkhartHillFarm.com

Hamilton's at 110 North East

110 N. East St., Jacksonville
217-675-2720
hamiltonscatering.com
info@hamiltonscatering.com

Hamilton's at the Lake

2244 4-H Club Road, Jacksonville
217-675-2720
hamiltonscatering.com
info@hamiltonscatering.com

Hill Prairie Winery

23753 Lounsbury Road, Oakford
217-635-9900
hillprairiewinery.com.

The Homestead

Northwest of Springfield on I-97 in Tallula
217-502-0019
homesteadreceptioncenter.com

Paul's Paradise

12430 State Route 125, Pleasant Plains
217-971-7876
paulsparadise@mail.com

Prairie View Reception Center

8865 State Route 4, Chatham
217-483-7999
prairieviewreception.com

Oak Terrace Resort

100 Beyers Lake Estates, Pana
217-539-4477
koltmanns@oakterraceresort.com

RiverBank Lodge

522 S. Sixth St., Petersburg
217-632-0202
Riverbanklodge.com

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CATERERS & FOOD TRUCKS

Sources: The caterers
Listed alphabetically.

NAME/ADDRESS	PHONE WEBSITE/EMAIL	OWNER(S)	MIN/MAX SERVED	PRICE RANGE PER PERSON	YEAR EST'D
Arena Food Service, Inc. 3036 Normandy Road Springfield, IL 62703	217-698-2944 arenafoodservice.com info@arenafoodservice.com	Shaun Moore Sherri Madonia	25-5,000	varies	1985
Bloom Hospitality & Catering	217-725-3451 bloomcaters.com info@bloomcaters.com	Gabi Thompson	Up to 500	varies	2023
Ciara's Kitchen Online	217-498-3656 ciaraskitchen333@gmail.com	Ciara Brooks	20-150	varies	2018
Conn's Catering & Events 835 S. Second St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-523-4466, x2308 connscatering.net angiec@connshg.com	Karen and Court Conn	Any size group	All events individually quoted	1948
County Market Catering 1099 Jason Place Chatham, IL 62629	217-577-1354 countymarketcatering@niemannfoods.com	Niemann Foods	Up to 300	\$8-\$17.99	DND
Cured Catering 110 E. McManus St. Buffalo, IL 62515	217-391-2380 curedcaters.com curedcaters@gmail.com	Brian and Melissa Reilly	25-1,000	varies	2017
Emerald's Eats	217-971-1538 emeraldseats.com marisa@emeraldseats.com	Marisa DeLay	Up to 500	varies	2022
Fulgenzi's Catering 2700 W. Lawrence Ave., Suite T Springfield, IL 62704	217-971-7517 fulgenziscatering@gmail.com www.fulgenziscatering.com	John John Fulgenzi	1-3000	\$15-\$40	1997
Hamilton's Catering 101 Main St. Franklin, IL 62638	217-675-2720 hamiltonscatering.com info@hamiltonscatering.com	Kyle Hamilton Gina Hamilton	50-5,000	\$15 and up	1913
Hy-Vee 2115 S. MacArthur Boulevard Springfield, IL 62704	217-726-1001 1640cateringmgr@hy-vee.com Hy-vee.com	Hy-Vee	Any size group	All events individually quoted	2014
Irie Jerk Chicken Truck	217-820-3722 www.facebook.com/jamaicanmehungry876 kiddwilliam1961@gmail.com	Wayne Kidd	Any size group	\$5-\$20	2017

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CATERERS & FOOD TRUCKS

Sources: The caterers
Listed alphabetically.

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Just The Basics Mobile Bar 231 E. Walnut St. Chatham, IL 62629	217-381-8108 JTBmobilebar.com info@jtbmobilebar.com	Madison Regan	25-5,000	\$12+	2017
MJ's Fish and Chicken Express 716 E. Enos St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-816-5683 j69641983@yahoo.com	Jerome Taylor	50-300	\$12-\$15	2016
Nelson's Catering 3005 Great Northern Road Springfield, IL 62711	217-787-9443 Nelsonscatering.com wanda@nelsonscatering.com	Josh Lindvall John Bale Mindy Beeler Margo Maynerich Wanda Croxton	25-10,000	Varies per event	1995
Poe's Catering 295 E. Andrew Road Springfield, IL 62707	217-487-7601 poescatering.com poecater@msn.com	Lance Poe Angela Poe	20-10,000	\$12.50 and up	1998
Robert's Seafood Market & Catering 1615 W. Jefferson St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-546-3089 www.robertsseafoodmarket.com arobert@robertsseafoodmarket.com	Dean "Robbie" Robert Andrea (Robert) McLaughlin	Depends on the event	\$15 and up	1916
Skippers Island Oasis	701-630-4899 skippers777@yahoo.com	Jason Richardson	Up to 250	varies	2015
Soul Shack 2800 S. Walnut St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-691-1795 ashleyward223018@icloud.com	Ashley Ward	20-200	varies	2019
Tada! Catering	217-549-2319 tadacateringandevents.com tadacateringevents@gmail.com	Chelsey Ziebler	Up to 200	varies	2022
Turasky's Custom Catering P.O. Box 916 Springfield, IL 62705	217-775-4351 Turaskyscustomcatering.com turaskycatering@outlook.com	Lucas Turasky	50-5,000-plus	\$14-\$100	1988
Twyford BBQ & Catering	217-370-2274 twyfordbbq.com randy@twyfordbbq.com	Randy Twyford	Any size group	All events individually quoted	2008



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Illinois legislature makes efforts for the environment

By Catherine O'Connor



A pair of Senate bills that aim to reduce plastic use in hotels and require waste recycling for event facilities are making their way through the Illinois legislature. Senate Bill 2960, introduced by Sen. Laura Fine, D-Glenview, takes aim at the overwhelming global issue of plastic pollution by prohibiting single-use toiletries in hotels. A separate bill introduced by Sen. Karina Villa, D-West Chicago, requires event facilities that accommodate more than 3,500 people to recycle paper, glass and plastic refuse and compost organic waste.

Darin Dame, general manager of SpringHill Suites by Marriott and a member of the Illinois Hotel & Lodging Association, supports the Small Single-Use Plastic Bottle Act. According to Dame, most larger hotel brands have already proactively replaced mini-toiletry products with more environmentally friendly, refillable, pump-style containers and only offer travel-size items upon request.

The Illinois Environmental Council recognized Fine, the bill sponsor for her leadership on the effort to strengthen sustainability efforts and waste reduction within the hospitality industry. The council cited the environmental impact of single-use, personal-care products which can result in millions of plastic containers thrown away each year.

According to the Ocean Conservancy, this measure follows similar bans by other states such as California, New York and Washington,

which cracked down on single-use hotel toiletry bottles last year. Jeff Watters, vice president of external affairs at Ocean Conservancy and an Illinois native, issued the following statement: "Decades of Ocean Conservancy data show that single-use plastics are a huge threat to our ocean, and this kind of legislation is exactly what we mean when we say we need upstream solutions to the plastic pollution crisis. Illinois and the Great Lakes are directly connected to our ocean through the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Mississippi River."

The House added an amendment to SB2960 that stipulates local home-rule governments may not override this statewide ban on single-use bottles. It also grants enforcement authority to state or municipal attorneys. The bill, which appears likely to pass, sets a gradual phase in beginning July 1, 2025, for hotels with 50 rooms or more, and a Jan. 1, 2026, start date for hotels with less than 50 rooms.

The Large Event Recycling and Composting Law requires event facilities with a legal occupancy of at least 3,500 people to establish a recycling program for refuse they generate including glass, aluminum cans, cardboard, paper, plastic beverage cups or bottles and organic waste, which must be collected and composted separately from the recyclable materials. The law would apply to facilities holding public meetings or events including baseball games, football games, hockey games,

automobile races or other musical, dramatic, artistic, social or athletic events.

Hotels and school stadiums are excluded from the provisions of the bill, and an amendment was added in the House that would also exempt county fairs. Currently, large-event facilities are not required to recycle or compost any material.

"We must do everything we can to reduce the amount of waste in our landfills," said Villa. "By promoting methods of environmental sustainability, we are securing the future of the next generation."

Sen. Steve McClure, R-Springfield, whose district includes the Bank of Springfield Center, the Decatur Civic Center and a performance center in Effingham, voted no on the measure. He cited the impracticality of expecting attendees at sporting and other events to sort their trash, and the added burden of cost for venue operators who would be responsible for transporting items to recycling centers. In addition, he felt that lawmakers were left with several unanswered questions about how many facilities within the state would be affected by the new regulation and how much waste would actually be collected and successfully recycled.

Both bills have passed the Senate and House and are now awaiting final amendment concurrence from the originating chamber. The General Assembly is scheduled to adjourn by the end of May. **SBJ**



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Springfield: Not just a stopover, but a stay over

By Holly A. Whisler

Springfield hotels are coming off of a record-setting year, according to Scott Dahl, director of Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau. He said 2023 hotel revenue was higher than any other year in the past two decades, due to a combination of occupancy performance and higher average daily rates.

While the first quarter of 2024 hasn't broken any records, tourism in Springfield typically ramps up in the spring and summer. Darin Dame, past chair and member of the board of directors for the Illinois Hotel & Lodging Association and general manager of SpringHill Suites by Marriott, said Springfield hotels saw a downturn in occupancy numbers in April but an increase in the average daily rate, which resulted in total revenue being down 4%.

Dame believes that people are watching their budgets and staying in hotels fewer nights than they might have previously. Business is wrapping up in two days instead of three, and family reunions are requiring just one night in a hotel instead of two, Dame said.

The good news is that leisure tourism is pushing the rebound, according to Dahl. "We are seeing a record level of domestic tourism that is elevated by international tourists returning to visit the U.S.," he said. "They use Chicago as a gateway, arriving there first and then filtering down to Springfield."

In spite of the slight downturn in occupancy numbers in April, Dahl said Springfield saw international business from 25 different countries that month. He noted that visa wait times have decreased, making it easier to travel abroad.

Interest in historic Route 66 and Abraham Lincoln sites are largely what drives international visitors to Springfield. Dahl predicts this trend will continue to increase as the centennial

anniversary of Route 66 approaches in 2026. Shea's Gas Station Museum on Peoria Road has recently reopened, which he thinks will draw a great deal of interest, as well as the many other sites along Route 66 in the Springfield area. In

occupancy year," Dahl said. "Since 2016, we've had a goal of getting city hotels to 60% occupancy. Generally, the city runs at 55% occupancy, and with several national conventions meeting in Springfield and an

uptick in leisure travel, I believe we have the opportunity to reach the 60% threshold.

"We typically sell 800,000 room nights annually, and have a goal to sell 1 million room nights annually by 2027. We want Springfield to not just be a stopover, but a stay over."

This optimistic outlook is bolstered by the economic investment the state has put into invigorating multiple historic sites, improvements to the Illinois State Fairground and the Capitol complex upgrades. In addition, the much-anticipated Scheels Sports Park at Legacy Pointe is slated to be finished in 2025.

"Our bread-and-butter is still conventions and meetings during the week, which are not back to pre-pandemic numbers," said Dame. However, he said there is still a need for more hotel rooms to support the sports park once it opens.

Dame is part of a local hotel ownership group, Legacy Hospitality, that broke ground this month on a new hotel at Legacy Pointe. Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott will be located just south of and adjacent to the existing SpringHill Suites by Marriott. Dame said construction activity

will be ramping up as weather permits.

"The reason we are expanding is based on the conception of the sports park and what we envision it to be," Dame said. "We hope Legacy Pointe is completely developed by 2027 or 2028 and that it will be a strong draw for visitors that will also benefit downtown and west-side retail outlets as well."

Dame said he anticipates tourism traffic ramping up over the next couple years. "It will be busy, but a very fun 2026." **SBJ**



Scott Dahl, far right with microphone, at the lighting ceremony for the Gate 2 Route 66 Experience at the Illinois State Fairgrounds. PHOTO COURTESY OF VISIT SPRINGFIELD CVB

2023, the Route 66 Experience opened inside Gate 2 of the Illinois State Fairgrounds. The self-guided educational exhibit is open year-round and highlights businesses in 92 communities along Route 66 in Illinois.

Also, History Comes Alive and the reading of the Gettysburg Address returns to Springfield this summer along with a trolley that will take riders on a 30-minute tour of the downtown historic sites.

"We are anticipating 2024 to be a record



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HOTELS

Source: The Hotels
Ranked by number of rooms.

	NAME/ADDRESS	PHONE WEBSITE/EMAIL	NUMBER OF ROOMS	NUMBER OF MEETING ROOMS	ROOM RATE SINGLE/DOUBLE	GENERAL MANAGER
1	Wyndham Springfield City Centre 700 E. Adams St. Springfield, IL 62701	217-789-1530 wyndham.com	369	20	\$119 - \$229	Gosia Wray
2	President Abraham Lincoln Springfield - A DoubleTree by Hilton 701 E. Adams St. Springfield, IL 62701	217-544-8800 dtspringfieldil.com	310	18	\$109 - \$299	Christi Rios
3	Crowne Springfield Convention Center 3000 S. Dirksen Parkway Springfield, IL 62703	217-529-7777 cpspringfield.com	288	32	\$109 - \$229	Holly Smith
4	Holiday Inn Express 3050 S. Dirksen Parkway Springfield, IL 62703	217-529-7771 hiexpress.com	140	2	\$89 - \$165 (2 suites)	Holly Smith
5	State House Inn 101 E. Adams St. Springfield, IL 62701	217-528-5100 springfieldstatehouseinn.com	125	6	\$99 - \$399	Sidd Fouad
6	Hilton Garden Inn Springfield 3100 S. Dirksen Parkway Springfield, IL 62703	217-529-7171 springfieldil.gardeninn.com	117	7	\$119 - \$250 (10 suites)	Lenae Pilkington
7	Drury Inn & Suites 3180 S. Dirksen Parkway Springfield, IL 62703	217-529-3900 druryhotels.com	116	0	\$99 - \$210	Miranda Bergman
8	Candlewood Suites 2501 Sunrise Drive Springfield, IL 62703	217-522-5100 candlewoodsuites.com gm.cwsuites@gmail.com	110	1	\$125 - \$150	Justin Roesch
9	Extended Stay America 3185 S. Dirksen Parkway Springfield, IL 62703	217-529-1100, x3 ESAspringfield@gmail.com	108	0	\$75 - \$135	Ben Anthony
9	Residence Inn Springfield South 2915 Stanford Ave. Springfield, IL 62703	217-527-1100 marriott.com/spiri	108	1	\$179 - \$299	Mark Vanhala
10	Northfield Inn, Suites & Conference Center 3280 Northfield Drive Springfield, IL 62702	217-523-7900 northfieldinn.com	105	8	\$119 - \$149	Tony Curtis
11	Route 66 Hotel and Conference Center 625 E. Saint Joseph St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-529-6626 route66hotel@gmail.com	103	4	\$72 - \$249 (10 suites)	DND
12	Motel 6 6011 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62712	217-529-1633 gm6@gmail.com	101	0	Based on availability	Parcharth Patel
13	Ramada Springfield North 3281 Northfield Drive Springfield, IL 62702	217-523-4000 springfieldramada.com	97	2	\$109 - \$139	Mike Grant
14	Hampton Inn & Suites 2300 Chuckwagon Drive Springfield, IL 62711	217-793-7670 hamptoninn.com	83	1	\$119-\$299	Phyllis DeRosear
15	Staybridge Suites 4231 Schooner Drive Springfield, IL 62711	217-793-6700 staybridge.com	82	1	\$100 - \$200 (all-suite hotel)	Kyle Johnson
16	Comfort Inn & Suites 3675 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-529-8898 comfortinn.com	80	1	\$90 - \$160	Sarah Dietrich
16	SpringHill Suites Springfield Southwest 3921 S. MacArthur Blvd. Springfield, IL 62711	217-789-0000 Marriott.com/SPISH	80	2	\$149-\$199	Darin Dame

NETWORKING GROUPS

Source: The individual networking groups
Ranked by number of members.
Many groups are meeting online at this time. Contact the groups for more information.

	NAME MEETING ADDRESS	PHONE WEBSITE & EMAIL	MEETING TIME	NUMBER OF MEMBERS	CONTACT	DUES	YEAR EST'D
1	Illinois Women in Leadership (IWIL) Illini Country Club 1601 Illini Road Springfield, IL 62704	iwil.biz info@iwil.biz	Third Thursday of each month	300	Sarah Goleman	\$80 annually	2004
2	RISE Springfield Event locations vary	gsc.org/RISE ngentile@psbank.net bailey.woolsey@irs.com	See website for event info	175+	Nick Gentile Bailey Woolsey	No dues	2023
3	Women Entrepreneurs of Central Illinois (WE-CI) Meeting location varies	217-306-2005 wecspringfield.org christine@bfi.us	Second Wednesday of each month	70	Alyssa Furling	\$75 annually	2010
4	The Association for Women in Communications Meeting location varies	awcspringfield.org brandyrenfro@gmail.com	Meeting days and times vary	45	Brandy Renfro	\$25 plus national dues, various membership categories	1977
5	Capitol Area Networkers (CAN) Habitat for Humanity of Sangamon County, South Sixth Street	217-313-0580 sarsanyells@yahoo.com	First and third Tuesday 8:30 a.m.	27	Deb Sarsany	No dues	2018
6	League of Our Own Toastmasters Club Springfield Urban League, Inc. 100 N. 11th St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-698-8767 1179206.toastmastersclubs.org	Second and fourth Friday 11:30 a.m.	16	Kathy Brennan	\$12.50 monthly New members \$20	2008
7	McBrian Lincoln-Douglas Toastmasters Club 3040 S. Lincoln Ave. Springfield, IL 62704	217-546-8624 mcbrianlincoln.toastmastersclubs.org randaln1@yahoo.com	Thursdays 6 p.m.	15	Nate Randall	Six months \$66 international new member \$20	1936
7	Capital City Toastmasters IDOT Building (Hanley Building) 2300 Dirksen Parkway Springfield, IL 62764 Currently meeting on Zoom	217-210-0185 1313356.toastmastersclubs.org president-1313356@toastmastersclubs.org	Wednesdays 12 p.m.	15	Brittany Henton	Six months \$75 12 months \$135	2009
8	The Networking Group Meeting location varies	217-899-5099 kbrittin@springnet1.com	Second Tuesday of each month 11:45 a.m.	14	Kaye Brittin	Lunch \$15 monthly	2000

Making downtown Springfield more marketable

Study recommends new hotel, doubling size of BOS Center

By Dean Olsen

Doubling the Bank of Springfield Center's size would result in a similar increase in conventions coming to the capital city, and construction of a new 300-bed hotel adjacent to the center would maximize the expanded facility's potential.

Those were two of the major conclusions from a recently completed feasibility study of the potential impact of a newly formed tourism improvement district on downtown Springfield. The district was formed in December by the Sangamon County Board and covers the entire county.

A proposed expansion of the publicly owned BOS Center is estimated to cost \$92.95 million without the hotel.

The project's cost would be financed in part through an additional tax that guests would pay on hotel rooms in the county on top of regular hotel-motel taxes.

But the company that conducted the study, Conventions, Sports & Leisure International (CSL), suggested that the tax be limited to 2% rather than the state-authorized limit of 5% so Springfield remains competitive with other mid-size communities in Illinois outside Chicago.

The convention center expansion would be built on a 60,000-square-foot parking lot immediately south of the current BOS Center and across East Adams Street, with either a skybridge or ground-level enclosed walkway connecting the two structures.



Looking southwest at the corner of Ninth and Adams streets, a preliminary rendering shows what a proposed expansion of the BOS Center could look like.

RENDERING COURTESY OF EVAN LLOYD ARCHITECTS

The Abraham Lincoln Springfield, a DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel that offers 310 rooms, and the Wyndham Springfield City Centre Hotel, with 369 rooms, both serve as "headquarters" hotels for events at the BOS Center.

But CSL said both "are considered substandard headquarters hotel properties relative to modern design standards for full-service, convention-quality hotel products."

County Administrator Brian McFadden, who presented an executive summary of the feasibility study to the Sangamon County Board, said the study's results were encouraging to him and other county and city officials who want to see a revival of downtown Springfield, an increase in business at the BOS Center and related economic benefits that would ensue.

"The great news is they think we have a winner if we expand the BOS Center," he said. "But they're saying to maximize that winner, you have to do the hotel as well. Whether there's the willpower to do something like that in the community is to be determined."

McFadden said recommendations and options from the study will be considered by a working group that includes representatives from

Sangamon County and Springfield governments, local hotels and the Springfield Metropolitan Exposition and Auditorium Authority Board. The property tax-supported SMEAA and its board owns and operates the BOS Center.

"There are a lot of moving pieces here," McFadden said.

County Board chairperson Andy Van Meter, a Springfield Republican, said, "The goodwill and support of this project" from governmental and civic leaders in Sangamon County "has been enormous," though many details and potentially sticky issues associated with the funding need to be resolved.

Scott Dahl, director of Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau – a part of city government – has been a longtime advocate for a tourism improvement district. The study "validates that we need an exposition center expansion," he said.

"This is telling us what we already know," Dahl said. "Now it's a question of moving it to the finish line. The main take-away is we need more space."

CSL said the "most desirable situation involving a new headquarters hotel" would be the site of the Wyndham. But CSL says it's not possible to renovate the Wyndham to meet modern design standards.

One option would be to tear down the 30-story, 51-year-old structure and build a new hotel in its place, CSL said. The new hotel ideally would be connected to the expanded BOS

Center via a skybridge, the study said.

But it's unknown whether the Wyndham site is a viable option. The Wyndham is owned by Al Rajabi of San Antonio, Texas, and his associates at Tower Capital Group, and Rajabi has been frustrated by his inability to receive zoning approval to renovate the Wyndham into a market-rate apartment complex.

However, Springfield officials wouldn't have to deal with the Wyndham at all because there's space on the county-owned parking lot for a new 300-bed hotel next to the potential two-level expansion of the BOS Center, according to CSL.

Another option for building a new hotel would be a 36,000-square-foot parcel immediately southwest of the parking lot, CSL said. That parcel is privately owned and currently is the site of Saputo's restaurant at 800 E. Monroe St., as well as a one-story strip of state offices.

With a maximum recommended 2% surcharge, assistance from the state would be needed to help finance the bond issue to expand the BOS Center, McFadden said. Economic incentives for investors would be needed for any future public-private partnership to build a new hotel next to the BOS Center expansion, he said.

CSL also suggested local leaders consider instituting an additional tax on restaurant food to help pay for the project. Such a tax couldn't be instituted by the Sangamon County Board, because the county isn't a home-rule government, but it could be put in place in Springfield by the Springfield City Council.

The BOS Center expansion is needed to create bigger and more convenient spaces that can be used only for conventions, the CSL study said. The BOS Center opened in 1979 and was renovated in 2010.

The project would have a \$77

million annual economic impact and create 557 temporary construction jobs, McFadden said. The project would add 232 permanent jobs to the BOS Center's current 175 part-time and full-time jobs, he said.

Supporters of the tourism improvement district had hoped to begin construction on a BOS Center expansion sometime in 2024. McFadden said he doesn't know how the feasibility study results might affect the timeline.

The current total of 61,300 square feet of "sellable space" for conventions would more than double through the proposed expansion. The new total sellable space would be 126,300 square feet.

"A convention space expansion of the BOS Center would allow the Main Hall to focus primarily on spectator/entertainment/sports events, while the new space will be unfettered by these events," the study said. **(SB)**



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New rules for non-compete agreements

By Thomas C. Pavlik Jr.



I've had lots of questions lately about the new rule issued by the Federal Trade Commission that significantly restricts the use of non-compete clauses in employment contracts. This decision, announced in early 2024, aims to enhance labor mobility, foster competition and ultimately benefit both workers and the economy at large. Whether it will actually do so is up in the air.

Non-compete agreements are clauses included in employment contracts that prohibit employees from working for competitors or starting similar businesses for a specified period after leaving a company. Traditionally, employers have argued that these agreements are essential to protect trade secrets, proprietary information and investment in employee training. However, critics have long contended that non-competes are often used excessively and unjustly, stifling competition, suppressing wages and limiting job mobility.

A few years ago, Illinois enacted legislation that restricted the enforceability of non-competes: Employees with a salary of less than \$75,000 per year cannot be held to the terms of such agreements. There are exceptions to these restrictions, depending on the specific business circumstances, such as agreements entered into in connection with the sale of a business or dissolution of a partnership. I've also found that many employers are completely ignorant of these developments.

Another fairly recent change in Illinois law on this topic dictates that non-competes must be supported by adequate "consideration" – which is defined as two years of continued employment or payment of additional professional or financial benefits.

Building on this trend, in January 2021, President Joe Biden issued an executive order,

Promoting Competition in the American Economy, which specifically encouraged the FTC to address the use of non-compete clauses. This directive underscored the administration's view that these agreements could undermine fair competition and harm workers by locking them into their current jobs.

Acting on that order, this spring the FTC made a particularly aggressive move to broadly ban the use of non-compete clauses across most sectors. The rule applies to both future contracts and existing agreements, requiring companies to rescind any current non-competes and inform employees of this change. It will become effective as of Sept. 4, 2024. If not invalidated by a court, it will reshape the American labor market.

Key provisions of the rule include:

- It generally prohibits employers from entering into or maintaining non-compete agreements with workers. This applies to employees, independent contractors, interns and volunteers. It does not apply to nonprofit entities.
- Companies must actively void existing non-compete agreements and notify affected workers that such clauses are no longer in effect.
- There are few exceptions to this rule. One notable exemption is for non-competes associated with the sale of a business, but only where significant ownership interests are held.
- There is another exception for "senior executives." To fall under this exception, an employee must (a) have a salary of at least \$151,000 and (b) be in a "policy-making position." A policy-making position is defined as

someone who has policy-making authority to make decisions that control a major aspect of a business.

The new rule is likely to face legal challenges. Critics argue that the FTC has overstepped its authority or that the rule infringes on states' rights to regulate employment contracts. These legal battles could shape the future enforcement and refinement of the rule. Suits challenging the rule have already been filed by the United States Chamber of Commerce and the tax service firm Ryan.

"Companies will face substantial legal costs as they are forced to resort to other tools to attempt to protect their investments," the Chamber of Commerce said. "And the economy as a whole will suffer as startups and small businesses are unable to prevent dominant firms from hiring their best employees and gaining access to their confidential information."

Assuming a court issues a stay or preliminary injunction, employers and employees will be in limbo while the litigation (including appeals) plays out. That being said, I expect that employers will start looking to non-disclosure agreements as an alternative to non-competes. Unlike non-competes, NDAs do not restrict where an employee can work, but they do prohibit the use or disclosure of proprietary information.

Also, keep in mind that non-solicits are not addressed by the FTC's rule. A non-solicit generally prohibits an employee from calling on an employer's clients, customers or using its contact lists after separation of employment. They also typically prohibit soliciting a fellow employee to leave his or her job for another employer. Note, however, that a non-solicit agreement in Illinois will only bind an employee who makes more than \$45,000 a year. However, I would not be surprised to see the FTC set out to put restrictions on non-solicits in the future. **SBJ**



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Jay Roszhart to become president and CEO of Springfield Memorial Hospital



PHOTO COURTESY SPRINGFIELD
MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

The Springfield Memorial Hospital board of directors has approved Jay Roszhart as the next president and CEO of the nonprofit hospital.

Roszhart, who currently serves as president of the Memorial Health Ambulatory Group, will assume the role on July 1.

"I'm honored by the opportunity to lead a hospital that has such an impact in central Illinois and beyond," Roszhart said. "SMH plays a crucial role in ensuring the health and well-being not only of people in Springfield, but across our region."

Roszhart, a Springfield native, first worked at SMH as a phlebotomist while attending high school and college. He began his full-time career at Memorial Health in 2009 as an administrative fellow and has held progressively increasing responsibilities in the areas of case management, population health, managed care and care coordination, culminating in his leadership of Memorial's ambulatory services, including Memorial Behavioral Health, Memorial Care, Memorial Specialty Care and Memorial Home Care.

He has a master's degree in health care administration from the Saint Louis University School of Public Health and a bachelor's degree in molecular and cellular biology from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

"Jay has spent nearly his entire career at

Memorial, and I know he has a deep pride in the work we do and our commitment to the community," said Memorial Health CEO Ed Curtis.

Roszhart replaces Dr. Chuck Callahan, who has announced his intent to leave Memorial on June 30 to seek other professional opportunities.

"Jay's commitment to Memorial and his extensive knowledge of the Springfield community make him an ideal candidate to lead SMH," said Dr. David Griffen, chair of the SMH board of directors. "We look forward to working with Jay as we continue to fulfill our mission in the years to come."

As hospital CEO, Roszhart will also continue to lead Memorial Behavioral Health. This combined role will enable increased collaboration to meet the growing mental health needs of patients in the hospital and community behavioral health settings.

"One of Jay's strengths as a leader is his ability to look ahead and ensure Memorial is able to meet the needs of tomorrow, as well as the needs of today," said Kevin England, who will become president of Memorial Health on July 1. "I believe he is the right person to lead SMH into the future."

SIU School of Medicine grants degrees to class of 2024

New physicians at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine received their diplomas May 18 at the school's 50th annual commencement. The ceremony at the Performing Arts Center at the University of Illinois Springfield celebrated the achievements of the graduates and featured speeches from faculty members, alumni and administrators.

A total of 79 learners received medical degrees, and one student received a master's degree. It was the school's largest class of graduating physicians ever. It included SIU's charter class of Lincoln Scholars, who completed four years of medical training focused on rural health care in downstate communities.

SIU School of Medicine Dean and Provost Jerry Kruse awarded diplomas to the medical students, and Dr. Daniel Mahony president of Southern Illinois University Carbondale, conferred the degrees.

Dr. John Mellinger was the commencement speaker. Mellinger is vice president of the American Board of Surgery and professor emeritus in SIU Medicine's Departments of Surgery and Medical Education. He touched upon the importance of discipline, altruism and a focus on meaning as the young physicians embark on their new careers.

A doctor should have a deeper sense of purpose in their work beyond titles, awards and

reputation, Mellinger said. Recognize the nobility in service, in treating patients with empathy and compassion, especially those who are marginalized or overlooked.

"The beauty of your professional calling is that you will be able to do this daily. My advice would be to lean into this every chance your energies allow... Help a nurse make up a soiled bed, get a patient a glass of water, notice the grieving loved one at a bedside, and take your hand off the doorknob. Sit down and be silent and present with them."

The new SIU physicians will begin residency training in their chosen specialties in June.

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The power of business networking

By Kelly Gust

The phrase “networking event” sounds like a cringey waste of time, doesn’t it? Even as a verified extravert, the thought of talking to strangers and making meaningless conversation gives me a visceral reaction – pounding heart and sweaty palms as I imagine all of the awkward silences.

At first, networking can seem intimidating, or at a minimum just one more social obligation to squeeze into your already busy life. But as you learn the power of growing your professional network, you’ll find there is a lot more to networking than exchanging business cards and making nervous small talk over cold appetizers.

I recently had coffee with a colleague who had been through some tough changes at work. As she got her career back on track and regained her confidence, she reached out to her network and was intentional about reconnecting with former coworkers and nurturing new connections. She devoted time to weekly networking. The efforts paid off – her new contacts led to an even better career opportunity.

When I first started my business, I had a website and a lot of ideas, but no clients. Networking was a way for me to establish relationships and communicate value to business owners who would eventually become clients, business-owner friends and even trusted advisers in my business.

What exactly is business networking?

Networking is a way to build and nurture relationships. It’s not a contest to see who can forge the most LinkedIn connections (I’m at about 2,000) or attend every single event in town (Watch out for the third Thursday: the most popular night of the month). It’s about forming genuine connections that result in synergies and benefit both parties.

What events should I attend?

There are all kinds of networking opportunities.

Speaking engagements and roundtable discussions can provide an opportunity for you to share your knowledge and expertise with a group and engage in meaningful dialogue with others. Or if being the center of attention is not your thing, try attending lectures, conferences or workshops where you can focus more on participation. Evening happy hours or morning coffee meetups offer opportunities to chat in a relaxed setting over a beverage. You can choose to focus on alumni groups, golf outings, communities of interest or volunteer groups.

Why bother?

- **Opportunity:** The most obvious benefit of networking is the opportunities it can bring. Whether it’s new clients, job leads, partnerships or friendships, networking can open new doors.

- **Knowledge:** Ever faced a difficult problem at work? Networking connects you with people who have been there and done that. You can tap into their expertise, learn from their experiences and gain knowledge to help you navigate your own professional journey.

- **The human element:** Building relationships in person allows you to showcase your personality, passion and expertise in a way that a cold email or LinkedIn message simply can’t match.

- **Stay updated:** Networking keeps you in the loop about the latest trends, technologies and developments in your field.

- **Boost your confidence:** Networking forces you out of your comfort zone. The more you interact with new people, the more your confidence grows. This confidence boost can be a game-changer when it comes to pitching ideas, negotiating deals or simply speaking up in meetings.

Tips for effective networking:

- **Be curious:** You will make more connections by asking people about themselves, their job, career path or even their hobbies. Come prepared with questions you can ask or conversation starters you can use.

- **Be genuine:** Authenticity goes a long way. People respond better to sincerity than to a rehearsed elevator pitch.

- **Give before you get:** Networking is a two-way street. Offer your help or expertise without expecting an immediate return. One popular networking group calls this the Giver’s Gain.

- **Follow up:** Don’t let those business cards gather dust. Follow up with an email or LinkedIn message to reinforce the connection. Move conversations from a group event to a more personal coffee or lunch meeting.

- **Diversify your networks:** Don’t limit yourself to industry-specific events. You never know where your next big opportunity might come from – a chance encounter at the golf course or even a friend’s dinner party.

- **Be consistent:** Repetition is key. In order to do business with you, people need to know, like and trust you. Such relationships are built over time.

Now you can see that business networking isn’t just a cringey necessary evil – it’s a powerful tool for personal and professional growth. So, embrace a few networking events, strike up conversations and remember that every new connection is a potential door to exciting opportunities. Who knows? Your next big break could be just a handshake away. **SBJ**

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Twisted Fork

By Thomas C. Pavlik



Grilled reuben PHOTOS BY BRANDON TURLEY

The St. Nicholas Hotel building seems to have been a cursed place for restaurants over the last 10 years or so. We're hoping that Twisted Fork, a new downtown restaurant, will break that curse.

Twisted Fork identifies itself as "Comfort food with a twist! Not a greasy spoon . . . a Twisted Fork." And that's a pretty good summary of the place.

We visited very early in the lunch hour and were the first guests to be seated. My dining companions were a bit skeptical of my choice and needed some convincing to join me, but the offer to pay for their lunch won them over. Turns out they liked it so much I was tempted to ask them to pay me back.

Twisted Fork's space is open and airy. The mosaic floor, vaulted ceilings, dark colors and repurposed tables give off some good vibes. You can really feel the splendor of Springfield's past. It's classic, but certainly not stuffy and formal. It's a good balance, and Twisted Fork has taken maximum advantage of the beautiful space. We preferred the seating against the windows (always nice to be seen), but there are plenty of other options, including a separate private room presumably available for events.

Our fellow diners were mostly tourists (we saw many enjoying an adult beverage), and by the time we left, Twisted Fork had a pretty good crowd.

There is a separate lunch menu that's pared down from the larger dinner menu. It's pretty basic – smashburgers, chicken sandwiches, a pork tenderloin sandwich, some salads and a few other items. Fun items included the S'mac Yo Mama mac and cheese (available with barbecued pulled pork and croutons), The Smoking Garden salad (mixed greens, apples, red onion, celery, cranberries, cashews and smoked gouda, served with house-made honey mustard dressing), and the chicken tenders (Mister Sanders-style with 12 herbs and spices, choice of dipping sauces). All sandwiches come with fries, and for a \$3 upcharge, premium sides like cheese curds or beer-battered mushrooms can be substituted.

We decided to each start with the Holy Mole Chile, which was advertised as a mole-based chili



Pizza PHOTOS BY BRANDON TURLEY

with no beans. It was an excellent start to the meal. It came with sides of cheese, onions and crackers. The taste was complex and rich with a small bit of tang on the backend. None of us found the mole to be particularly noticeable, but it was a fairly unique and delicious dish.

For our entrees, we decided on the OG smashburger, the Meat Your Maker smashburger and the breaded pork tenderloin.

Both burgers featured a beautifully caramelized, crispy-edged patty topped with melted, oozing cheese. The Meat Your Maker featured Swiss cheese, whiskey balsamic onions and a house-made Maker's Mark bourbon mushroom sauce. The OG came topped with American cheese, whiskey balsamic onions, shredded lettuce and a house-made burger sauce. Flavorwise, these were both reported as umami bombs. The beef, which appeared to be simply seasoned with salt and pepper, shined with its rich, beefy taste enhanced by the Maillard reaction, which created those deeply caramelized crusty edges. The cheese added a classic, slightly salty creaminess that paired perfectly with the meat. Both

guests reported that their respective add-ons tied together well and enhanced, rather than dominated, the dish.

Although neither of my guests complained, I did note that while the OG was supposed to come on a sesame bun and the Meat Your Maker on a kaiser, both came on a whole-grain bun. I would have preferred to see a simple brioche or potato bun.

Other than the whole-grain bun, the breaded pork tenderloin sandwich was also a winner. It was definitely house-made. A golden brown, crispy pork cutlet extended beyond the edges of the lightly toasted bun, showcasing its generous size. Fresh, vibrant toppings like crisp lettuce, juicy tomato slices and dill pickles peeked out invitingly. The sandwich was neatly assembled and promised a satisfying bite. It excelled in texture. The breading on the pork was perfectly crispy, providing a delightful crunch that contrasted with the tender, juicy pork inside. The fresh lettuce and pickles added an additional layer of crunch, while the tomato offered a juicy, refreshing bite. Finally, the pork cutlet was seasoned just right, enhancing the natural flavors of the meat. The breading was flavorful and not overly greasy, allowing the taste of the pork to shine.

All of our meals came with a generous helping of fries, which were well-seasoned and crispy.

Service was good and friendly, although it did take some time for our meals to come out. But I chalk that up to the fact that we were the first diners of the day.

Twisted Fork is certainly a great addition to the Springfield dining scene. We will definitely be back.

SBJ

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Breaded tenderloin Railsplitter PHOTOS BY BRANDON TURLEY

Illinois Women in Leadership is taking a service trip to Kenya

By Janet Seitz



IWIL member Jen DeJong has traveled to Kenya six times for service projects and is organizing a July trip for 10 women from the organization. PHOTO COURTESY JEN DEJONG

Illinois Women in Leadership has been empowering area women for two decades, and the nonprofit group has about 200 members in the Springfield area. Its IWIL credo promotes professionalism and leadership through purposeful inclusion, education, mentoring, networking and community involvement.

Through its history, IWIL members have mentored many people and made an impact in various ways. Now it is taking its leadership-building actions overseas for the first time with a service trip to Kenya in July. IWIL is currently soliciting donations to cover expenses for materials and resources with a goal of raising \$10,000 by July 1.

Taking the lead on this trip is IWIL's immediate past president, Jen DeJong, who has been involved in philanthropic activities her entire adult life. "As a former youth director, I organized and led many service trips domestically and internationally for teenagers and have also participated in church service trips through the years organized by others," she said. "I joined IWIL shortly after moving back to Springfield in 2014. At the time, I was a church consultant working from home and traveling for work, and felt like it would be a great way to network in the community.

"IWIL has become a group that I treasure greatly," DeJong continued, "not just the programs and events, but the people. I have become dear friends with many women in Springfield because of my involvement in IWIL."

DeJong said she first traveled to Kenya in 2002 with a church group while living in Nashville. "It was an inaugural-service trip for that church, and I was so drawn to the idea of being immersed in a new culture while doing my part to help them help themselves," she said.

The trip to Kenya in July will be DeJong's seventh in 22 years and the third trip she has organized. She now runs a small travel business that organizes trips to Sicily and took a group of IWIL members to Sicily in 2022 and 2023.

"Because of my involvement in IWIL, some of the women knew about my service trips to Kenya in the past and thought we would have enough interest to offer that as our next IWIL travel experience," DeJong said.

Planning for the trip began over a year ago, and 10 members are slated to travel to Kenya. They will be working with DeJong's friend and missionary, Stu Ross, whom she's known since her initial 2002 trip.

"My husband and I have been supporting Stu

financially through The Outreach Foundation since 2002, and four of my previous six trips were to do projects with Stu," she said. DeJong noted that the IWIL group will be the first time that Stu has worked with an all-female team, and it's also unusual to have a group that's not affiliated with a church.

"Our goals are to focus on projects that impact women and children. Stu has been associated with some of these projects for over 20 years," DeJong said.

"Our projects," DeJong continued, "include time with children at an elementary school that was created by Stu and his wife, Annie, to provide education to those in the area that would not likely be able to attend school otherwise. Public school can be prohibitive because the students are required to pay for and wear uniforms and some families can't afford them. We will fund and help complete the building of a dorm block at a girls' boarding school. We will visit and provide food to a Girls Rescue Center that serves girls who have run away from their Maasai villages because of female genital mutilation and/or child marriage. We will provide a motivational talk at a boarding school for girls. Finally, we'll spend some time with residents at a nursing home, provide hygiene kits and do some landscaping to beautify their property."

Jamie Stout, a longtime IWIL member and former IWIL president, is looking forward to the trip and participating in various tasks. "This trip interested me to make an impact on the greater world," she said. "I have a strong desire to make the world a better place. I try to do that in my local community and jumped at the opportunity to do so (on a larger scale)."

Fellow IWIL member Molly Berendt, who also has a history of nonprofit work, said, "A couple of my best friends have lived in Kenya before and left their hearts there, as they've said, so I've always been interested in going."

IWIL hosted a fundraiser in May that featured an authentic African dinner created by Kimsimone Manning, chef and owner of Seoul 4 Soul. Donations are still welcomed. To learn more, visit <https://iwil.memberclicks.net/kenya-service-trip>. **SBJ**

Janet Seitz is a local communications professional, writer and artist. To share your story, contact her at janetseitz1@gmail.com.

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