

The background of the cover is a photograph of a construction site. In the foreground, a man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a light blue patterned shirt, stands with his arms crossed and a slight smile. Behind him, various construction equipment is visible, including orange scissor lifts and a yellow boom lift. The sky is overcast.

# SPRINGFIELD Business JOURNAL

January 2026

## Q&A with Phil Martin, Martin Engineering

### Notable construction projects

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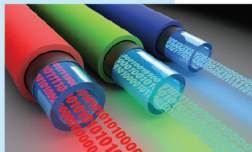
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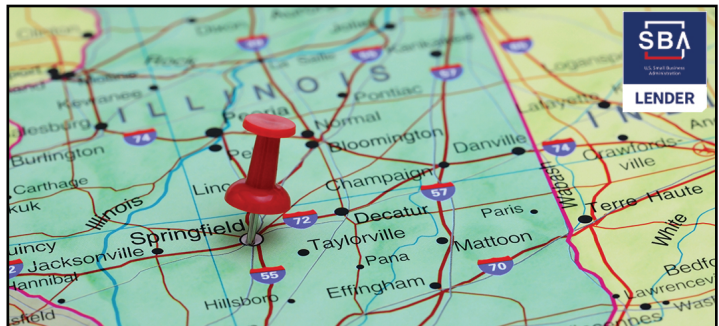
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## The only thing constant is change

Whether or not you make New Year's resolutions, January is typically a time to reflect on the past year and ponder future goals. It's appropriate that this issue of SBJ has a special section on architecture and engineering, two professions that focus on having a vision and a plan before starting work.

The coming year will be an eventful one for Central Illinois Communications, the parent company of Springfield Business Journal and Illinois Times. We spent most of 2025 working on a three-year strategic plan and the first phase of that – transitioning to a non-profit called Local Journalism Matters – is almost complete, once the federal government approves our 501(c)3 paperwork. The two publications will still operate under the same names, in the same format, and all the current staff will remain. But we are in the process of hiring a CEO to oversee the new nonprofit, and I'll become the editor-in-chief instead of the publisher.

This year, we hired a new reporter and our first-ever digital media coordinator. There are several new staff positions in the works for 2026 as we seek to increase our coverage of local issues and expand our reach. We also hope to offer more events and opportunities for community engagement.

It's shaping up to be a big year, and we appreciate our readers and advertisers who continue to make it all possible.



*Michelle Ownbey, publisher*



**Editor:** Fletcher Farrar  
fletcher@springfieldbusinessjournal.com

**Publisher:** Michelle Ownbey  
michelle@springfieldbusinessjournal.com

**Associate Publisher:** James Bengfort  
jbengfort@illinoistimes.com

**Copy Editor:** Daron Walker  
daron@springfieldbusinessjournal.com

**Production Design:** Devin Larson  
dlarson@illinoistimes.com

**digital media coordinator:** Zach Adams  
zadams@illinoistimes.com

**Advertising:**  
Yolanda Bell  
yolanda@springfieldbusinessjournal.com  
217-679-7802

Beth Parkes-Irwin  
beth@springfieldbusinessjournal.com  
217-679-7803

Ron Young  
ron@springfieldbusinessjournal.com  
217-679-7807

**Subscriptions:**  
springfieldbusinessjournal.com/subscribe  
subs@springfieldbusinessjournal.com

### January Contributors:

David Blanchette  
Kelly Gust  
Catherine O'Connor  
Thomas C. Pavlik  
Scott Reeder  
Janet Seitz  
Carey Smith  
Holly Whisler  
Leah Wilson

**Address:** P.O. Box 398, Springfield, IL 62705

**Phone:** 217-726-6600

**Email:** info@springfieldbusinessjournal.com

**Facebook:** facebook.com/SBJIllinois

**Twitter:** twitter.com/sbjmonthly

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A man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a light blue patterned shirt, stands with his hands clasped in front of him. He is smiling at the camera. The background is a construction site with orange scissor lifts, workers in orange safety gear, and a building under construction. The sky is overcast.

# Q & A with Phil Martin

*By David Blanchette*

Phil Martin started working on job sites with his father, Russ Martin, at a young age and graduated from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1984 with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. After starting his career with Turner Construction Company in Chicago, he returned to Springfield in 1991 to work at Martin Engineering Company, the firm his father had founded in 1982. Phil and Steve Walker bought the company in 2003 and have now signed an agreement to sell it to employees Adam Pallai and Tyler Walker in September.

*PHOTO BY ZACH ADAMS*



## Where were you born and raised, and what was your first job?

I was born in Fort Belvoir, Virginia, but only lived there until I was six months old. My parents moved back to Illinois, and I was raised in Springfield. My first house was in Laketown.

My first job was working for my dad, also an engineer, who formed a company with a partner in the 1970s. I started going out with him when I was young, and recently one of my employees found some of my field notes from 1973 when I was 12 years old and worked with my dad on a parking lot. I have the framed notes in my office. I was also the janitor, and every Sunday we would go to the office where dad would work, and I would clean the toilets and vacuum.

I graduated from University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign with a civil engineering degree, and my first big boy job was in Chicago with Turner Construction Company. My first project up there, and I'm still very proud of it, was the United Airlines Terminal One at O'Hare Airport. I was the first man on the job; we knocked down the old international terminal and built the one that's still there today.

## How has the use of the latest technology such as Global Positioning System and Computer Aided Design changed the way your company operates?

I just missed the boat on CAD. If my first job had been a design job instead of construction management, I probably would have been on CAD the whole time. I'm one of the old guys around here, and maybe the only one now who doesn't do any CAD. I learned how to do drafting with a pen and a sheet of Mylar. But things have come a long way, and it's amazing how much more quickly you can get a set of plans done now with CAD.

Global Positioning System is another one. I used to go out on the survey crew when I was a kid, and we did it the old-fashioned way, you had a guy with the gun on one end, and I was the one holding the orange and white pole on the other. Now my guys can stake out curbs for a project based off of satellites.

## While technology can be great, will it ever replace a seasoned engineer's experience in the field?



Left to right: Tyler Walker, Adam Pallai, Phil Martin and Steve Walker shake hands upon signing an agreement for Tyler and Adam to purchase the company from Phil and Steve effective Sept. 30. PHOTO COURTESY PHIL MARTIN

You have to learn through experience. Too much reliance on technology is something you need to guard against. It's like using artificial intelligence; you have to be careful writing letters to make sure it's writing what you intended. It's the same thing with CAD. You have to make sure the answers you are getting make sense and they are the most efficient way to do it. You don't want to just rely on the technology, and then you end up with two pipes running into each other underground.

## What are the latest trends in engineering?

I've talked to people in the industry, and AI is being used more and more. We are a smaller firm and are usually late to the party on technology.

Drones are becoming more widely used, and I predict our office will be buying drones soon. That way when we have a big job, we can just fly over a field and cut down the time needed for our field crews. Right now we're not using drones – some of the bigger firms are – but that may change soon.

## Do you see engineering as a growing field with a lot of career opportunities for both men and women?

Yes. We always need more engineers. We are always looking.

## What are some current projects you're working on that may interest our readers?

We have Scheels Sports Park; everybody's talking about that now. At Southeast High

School we just did a football field, and we're getting ready for phase two, which will be parking lots. Phase three in 2027 will be a new field house.

Way out west on Wabash Avenue by Green Nissan, we are preparing a site for SIU School of Medicine. What you're seeing there is a new turn lane, and the beginning of the Bradfordton Road extension which will eventually go all the way up to Old Jacksonville Road.

We are doing the tiny veterans' homes on the east side; those are under construction now. The city's water department by where the John Hay Homes were is being dislodged by the railroad relocation project, so they're building a new facility for them and the Public Works Department over on Clear Lake by the Adams

## Wildlife Sanctuary.

We're going to do another phase of Panther Creek West next summer. We're doing some new apartments with Corky Joyner, one of our biggest clients, over by the theater complex on Mercantile Drive. At Comer Cox Park on Martin Luther King Drive we just converted a tennis court into a parking lot, and we are resurfacing the walking paths.

Behind Cedarhurst Senior Living on Old Jacksonville Road, we are about to do some cottage homes like they have at Evertrue Concordia Village. We are also doing some new duplexes called Wellington Estates in Chatham on Gordon Drive.

## What is your advice to young people who might consider engineering as a career?

First of all, make sure you like math and are good at math. If not, you're probably not going to make it. In high school, when it comes time to select a career path, a lot of students come over and job shadow. We'll create a day for them where they can experience drafting, surveying or a job site. I always encourage them to get an internship or two during their college years, as many as you can get.

## What may people be surprised to learn about you?

I'm a C-SPAN junkie. I like to watch public hearings and things like that. It's very interesting to me. SBJ



# Notable projects underway in Springfield

By Catherine O'Connor



The Springfield Clinic Dome is a nearly 200,000 square foot inflatable dome that can be configured as six basketball courts or 12 volleyball courts, sporting a full-synthetic field that can be either two NCAA softball fields or full-size football or soccer fields. PHOTO BY ZACH ADAMS

## Scheels Sports Park

With the success of Legacy Pointe anchor SCHEELS, developers Steve Luker and Dirk McCormick have partnered with local organizations and the city of Springfield to create Scheels Sports Park, part of a 276-acre mixed-use development located off MacArthur Boulevard near the I-72 interchange. One of their innovative partnerships is with tenant Springfield Clinic, which has constructed a facility on site to offer rehab and performance enhancement, along with sports training, nutrition monitoring and mental-health conditioning.

But the shining star of the more than 50-acre sports complex is the Springfield Clinic Dome, a nearly 200,000-square foot, blimp-shaped orb designed by ASATI, a New York company which provides custom turnkey inflatable structures, delivered throughout the country to be finished on site with local labor, according to general manager Brandon

Dougherty.

Truly an engineering marvel, the region's first air-supported dome is the world's largest constructed to date. Three independent air handlers, each with a weather station, monitor structural factors by calculating exterior temperature and wind speed to control air pressure and volume. Each unit has its own power supply, backup generator and gas supply to ensure redundancy so that if one goes down the dome won't collapse. Also, a protective steel cable "hairnet" supports the exterior.

At roughly 275 feet across by 715 feet long and 100 feet high, the dome can be configured as six basketball courts or 12 volleyball courts, sporting a full-synthetic field that can be either two NCAA softball fields, or full-size football or soccer fields. It's actually a balloon tied down to a big concrete and rubber sport court with vast areas of green turf for any field sport imaginable. The massive

all-weather space is lit with LED-reverse pendant lights and coupled with batting cages, public viewing areas, a food court and retail areas, creating a variety of possibilities.

Additionally, the complex includes an outdoor venue called The Yard which is 25,000 square feet of ADA grass allowing for Special Olympics and other recreational activities. Dougherty explained the concept of this park is about building in diversification so that an array of programs can be offered and people can travel to Springfield for a good experience.

The grand opening for SCHEELS Sports Park at Legacy Pointe is planned for May 2026, although a soft opening was held Dec. 12 in conjunction with the Midwest Open Indoor Archery Tournament.

The sports complex already has more than 100 signed contracts for events planned for 2026 through 2028, ranging from basketball, volleyball and football to a 14-field baseball tournament.









Isringhausen Imports has broken ground on a new Porsche dealership in downtown Springfield. The new building at 100 E. Madison St. will be located across from the existing BMW facility. PHOTO BY ZACH ADAMS

make up Isringhausen Imports and luxury Porsche, BMW, Volvo and Mercedes Benz dealerships there still remains many a cultural-history lesson. Libka explained that below the Volvo facility are remnants of what look like chutes from the building's former use as a chicken hatchery.

The front of the modern Porsche space will have floor-to-ceiling windows, allowing natural light to highlight the eras of classic Porsche models and vintage equipment highly valued in the world of collectors and auto restorationists. The museum-like experience is further enhanced by a video wall where continuous images of Porsche racing and brand lifestyle are highlighted. Comfortable seating pods allow buyers to relax while selecting their preferred models and custom features right down to thread color used to stitch together choice leather. It's about making a Porsche a unique expression of themselves.

In addition to participation in and support of Porsche factory and club-road racing, the company also plays a significant role in community philanthropy with its Isringhausen DRIVE Grants for start-up businesses who want to locate downtown.

"Downtown is part of our fabric. This is where we have planted the flag. It would be easy to build a building out on the west side. It is difficult to renovate historic buildings and make it work, but we believe in putting our money where our mouth is and investing in a thriving downtown," Libka said. **SBJ**

*Catherine O'Connor has held administrative, communications, education and advocacy roles in state government, regional and national organizations. Her work focuses on exploring social and cultural context, making our history and environment more accessible and relevant through storytelling.*





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Sources: The engineering firms.  
Ranked by number of licensed engineers in Springfield/Jacksonville.  
Number of full-time employees in engineering division may vary from total employee count.

	NAME / ADDRESS	PHONE WEBSITE / EMAIL	EMPLOYEES LIC. ENG.	ENG. DIV.1	PARTNERS/ PRINCIPALS	NOTABLE PROJECTS	YEAR EST'D
1	<b>Hanson Professional Services</b> 1525 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-788-2450 hanson-inc.com marketing@hanson-inc.com	60	202	Sergio Pecori Jeff Ball Ronda Folkerts Dennis Hollahan Mina Biggs	Smart City applications; Distillery Lab, Peoria; Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport Terminal; Springfield Rail Improvement Project; Springfield Sangamon Transportation Center; Illinois State Fairgrounds Coliseum Rehab; Orlando International Airport Phase 1 Commissioning; Indianapolis Airport, JFK - Terminal-4 Energy Roadmap, BNSF Sandpoint, Idaho bridges, Fish habitat restoration bridge, Seattle; 3rd Street Greenway - Phase 1, Springfield; Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport: Smart Airport and regional Logistics Planning Project, Springfield.	1954
2	<b>Crawford, Murphy &amp; Tilly</b> 2750 W. Washington St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-787-8050 cmtengr.com questions@cmtengr.com	38	132	Bill Bailey Adam Burns Brad Hamilton Todd Young Jeff Large Kristy Allen Ali Williams Chris Stritzel Christy Crites	IDOT 1-55 six-lane expansion and Sixth Street Improvements; Sangamon County Water Reclamation District Combined Sewer Overflow Improvements; Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport Airfield Improvements; Public Works Facilities, Springfield, IL; Scheels Sports Park; Active Transportation Plan, Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission. Peoria, IL Stormwater Program Management; Joliet, IL Alternative Water Source Program; Kansas City International Airport Master Plan; City of St. Louis, MO Transportation Mobility Plan; Runway Rehabilitations at Dulles and Ronald Reagan Airports, Washington, DC; CSX Railroad Bridge, Jacksonville, FL.	1946
3	<b>Quigg Engineering</b> 2351 S. Dirksen Parkway Springfield, IL 62703	217-670-0563 quiggengineering.com lquigg@quiggengineering.com	24	65	Lori L. Quigg	I-74 Mississippi River Crossing between Moline and Bettendorf, IA, IowaDOT Chicago to St. Louis High Speed Rail, IDOT Bureau of Railroads I-294 (Tri-State Tollway) Mile Long Bridge Reconstruction, Illinois Tollway IL Route 4 - Meredosia Tied Arch Bridge, IDOT District 6 IL Route 75 - Rock River to IL Route 2, IDOT District 2 Interstate 55 Reconstruction: Toronto Road to Sherman Boulevard/Business 55, IDOT District 6, Weber Road Diverging Diamond Interchange, MoDOT Design Build I-70.	2006
4	<b>WHKS &amp; Co.</b> 3501 Constitution Drive, Suite B Springfield, IL 62711	217-483-9457 whks.com cchamberlain@whks.com springfield@whks.com	20	31	Fouad K. Daoud William K. Angerman Scott D. Sanford Scott Sweet Cory Chamberlain Chad Hodel Derek Thomas Tim Hrushka	Bridge replacements for Drawbridge Road and Churchill Road in Springfield; Bridge replacements for Taylor Road, Grove Road, and Garfield Avenue in Decatur; Brush College Road realignment in Decatur; Farmington Road realignment in West Peoria; IL 84 over Apple River bridge replacement in Hanover; I-74 over the Mississippi River; IL 17 over the Illinois River bridge in Lacon; IL 3 over Nine-Mile Creek roadway Realignment in Randolph County; I-80/I-74 interchange reconstruction and bridge replacement in Henry County; Tub Girder bridge project in Champaign County; New Water Treatment Plant for Glen Carbon; IL Rt. 104 Water Transmission Main for Otter Lake Water Commission; Water Treatment Plant Operation Trial for Collinsville. Adloff Street Improvement and Wheeler Street Improvement in front of the Drawbridge and Churchill bridge projects for the City of Springfield.	1948
5	<b>Benton Engineering</b> 1970 W. Lafayette Ave. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-4146 bentoneng.com info@bentoneng.com	18	55	Reginald H. Benton Jamie L. Headen William J. Sleman Keneth E. Stugeon Matthew B. Hardy Benjamin M. Spreen Douglas J. Erickson C. Cameron Jones Stefanie J. Ballinger	Jacksonville WTP; Taylorville water system improvements; new Taylorville WTP; US 67 Jerseyville Bypass; SNAWS rural water Round Prairie rural water Beardstown Sanitary District WWTP improvements; Jacksonville WWTP CSO; I-64 bridges - St. Clair county; I-55 bridges - Madison county; McDonough county transit facility; North Morgan rural water system; SMG Rural Water System; Beardstown flood damage improvements; Hayes residential/commercial development Jacksonville, Jacksonville WWTP, Pana Spillway, Intake & WTP Improvements, Taylorville West Main Cross Improvements, Taylorville East Main Cross Reconstruction, IDOT US 30-Stockton Resurfacing, IDOT US 30-Rock Falls Resurfacing, IDOT Bridge Repairs SIUE Entrance Road, IDOT IL 156-Waterloo Resurfacing and ADA Improvements. Astoria WTP Improvements, Industry Wastewater Improvements, Carrollton New Tank and Water Treatment Plant, Oldham County (KY) New WWTP, Sellersburg (IN) WWTP Improvements, Macon (MO) High Service Pump Station Improvements, Charlestown (IN) WWTP improvements; Kirksville (MO) WTP Clarifiers. Rushville IL Schuyler County Dental Clinic; Kirksville MO North Sewer Shed Inflow & Infiltration Study; Macomb IL Active Transportation Vision Plan.	1970
5	<b>Hutchison Engineering, Inc.</b> 1801 W. Lafayette Ave. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-7164 hutchisoneng.com info@hutchisoneng.com	18	44	Joe Hutchison Jim Burke Shane Larson	L Rte 9 Reconstruction - Bloomington, I-74 Corridor Expansion - Quad Cities, Hilldale Avenue Reconstruction - Washington Ridge Road Reconstruction - Grundy County US Rte 51-Business Reconstruction - Bloomington & Normal Various City Street Reconstruction for Carle Health Development - Danville, IL Rte 3/IL Rte 150 Reconstruction & ADA Improvements - Randolph County 19th Street & Mississippi River Shared Use Paths - Moline Rock Island Parkway & 85th Avenue Improvements - Rock Island Subdivision Design Services - Swift Pork Company (Beardstown) East and West State Street Improvements - Jacksonville Pioneer Parkway and North University St Improvements - Peoria County Highway 15 Widening and Resurfacing - LaSalle County County Highway 9 and County Highway 11 Improvements - Marion County Glen Avenue Construction Services - Peoria Ford County Windfarm Road Use Agreement - Ford County Capitol Avenue Improvements - Mt Sterling Beardstown Bridge Improvements - Beardstown.	1945
6	<b>Veenstra &amp; Kimm, Inc.</b> 2417 W. White Oaks Drive Springfield, IL 62704	217-544-8033 v-k.net vk@v-k.net	16	30	Mark Henderson Christopher Kohlrus Mark Vasconcelles Shalya Pfaffe	Central IL: Chatham Road over Jacksonville Branch Creek, I-55/I-72 Interchange Bridge Rehabilitation, Drainage Improvements at Wabash Ave. and I-72, Springfield Clinic - Main Campus East, West and West Wabash ADA and parking lot improvements, Blessed Sacrament School Addition, Stone Creek Subdivision, White Oaks Mall/LA Fitness, Mt. Pulaski High School Addition, IL Route 125 Resurfacing and Intersection Improvements. Peoria IL: IL 116 over Kickapoo Creek, UP Railroad, and Kickapoo Creek Road; US-24 and IL 116 Interchange Bridge Rehabilitation, Main Street over Farm Creek Bridge Rehabilitation. Northern IL: Lake Le-Aqua-Na State Park Roadway Improvements, Rock Cut State Park Site Improvements, East Moline Water Treatment Plant (Ultraviolet Disinfection Process), East Moline WWTP Improvements, US 150 over BNSF RR Bridge Replacement and Roadway Realignment (Galesburg), Cambridge Commercial Park - East Oak Street (Cambridge). Southern IL: I-57 over Pond Creek, I-57 over Middle Fork of Big Muddy River, IL 148 over Wolf Creek.	1961



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	NAME / ADDRESS	PHONE WEBSITE / EMAIL	EMPLOYEES LIC. ENG.	ENG. DIV.1	PARTNERS/ PRINCIPALS	NOTABLE PROJECTS	YEAR EST'D
7	<b>Kuhn &amp; Trello Consulting Engineers</b> 109 N. Seventh St. Third Floor Springfield, IL 62701	217-679-0044 ktengr.com kkuhn@ktengr.com	15	26	Kevin L. Kuhn Michael J. Trello	New Railroad Overpass - Williamsville, IL; Repair Multi-Purpose Arena - Illinois State Fairgrounds; Repair and Resurface Roadways - Illinois State Fairgrounds; Multi Use Trail - Williamsville to Sherman; New Rest Area - Trail Of Tears North and South Bound - Anna, IL; New Spider Monkey Exhibit - Henson Robinson Zoo; New Health Sciences Building - SIUE; Replace Cooling Towers and Chillers - Illinois Capitol Complex; Various District 186 School Additions - Grant, Franklin, Blackhawk, Sandburg, Jefferson, Washington; Department of Military Affairs New Readiness Center - East Alton, IL; New Car Wash Facility - Willard Airport U of I; Building Addition - Fire Services Building U of I.	2013
8	<b>Cummins Engineering Corporation</b> 135 W. Lake Shore Drive Springfield, IL 62703	217-726-8570 cumminsengineering.com kim@cummengineer- ing.com	11	23	Kimberly S. Cummins	Eighth Street Bridge Replacement near the Sangamon County Water Reclamation District, Sangamon Valley Trail from Centennial Park to Irwin Bridge Road. Staking and Roadway construction observation for wind farm projects in Macon, Logan, and DeWitt counties. Erection engineer for the 5th & 6th Street high speed rail overpass bridges. Restoration of the Vachel Lindsay Bridge, Interstate 55 Bridge Improvements at South Grand Avenue and near Lincoln. Design and construction inspection of Christian County CH 12 cold-in-place pavement recycling and overlay, west of Pana. Site plan and parking lot design for District 6 Sign Shop in Springfield. City of Clinton overlay and ADA ramp improvements on Center Street. Various bridge replacements in Sangamon, Christian, and Logan counties. Various surveys and right-of-way negotiations.	1998
9	<b>Andrews Engineering</b> 3300 Ginger Creek Drive Springfield, IL 62711	217-787-2334 andrews-eng.com marketing@andrews-eng.com	9	42	Kenneth W. Liss Douglas W. Mauntel Bradley J. Hunsberger	Various Illinois DOT-Statewide Hazardous: Advanced Contractor; US Dept. of Veteran Affairs; US D.O.E.; Residential development remediation Geneva, IL; Coal Combustion Residual (ASH) management/design under state and federal prgrams Central and Southern Illinois; RCRA, CERCLA, TSCA permits/corrective action south-side Chicago; IDOT-High Speed Rail corridor (construction inspection, health and safety, environmental).	1974
9	<b>Hampton, Lenzini and Renwick, Inc. (HLR)</b> 3085 Stevenson Drive, Suite 201 Springfield, IL 62703	217-546-3400 hlrengineering.com hlr@hlreng.com	9	16	ReJena Lyon Steven W. Megginson Jerry Bischoff	St. Francisville Bridge on the Wabash River, Prosperity Infrastructure Design, Lake County Bridge Inspection and Rehabilitation Designs, Christian County Bridge Inspections, Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) Bridge Load Ratings and Evaluations, I-72 Bridge Replacements at IL 121/CNRR Decatur.	1965
10	<b>Berners Schober Associates, Inc.</b> 1 N. Old State Capitol Plaza #310 Springfield, IL 62701	217-528-6030 bernerschober.com info@bsagb.com	8	19	Ian Griffiths Darren Johnson John Miller Matthew Veriha Joseph Dettlaff Jim Hine Steve Srubas	HEALTHCARE- HSHS St. John's Hospital: Fourth Floor Renovation, Electrophysiology Cath Lab Expansion, WCC Recladding + Remodel, Exterior Lighting, Madison Street Parking Ramp, Infusion Center & MedicalOncology Clinic; HSHS St. Mary's Hospital: Cath Lab Replacement, Intensive Care Unit Remodel, MOB Remodel; HSHS St. Francis Hospital: Domestic Water Booster Pumps, Patient Floor Remodel, Air Handling Unit Replacements, Emergency Generator Upgrades; HSHS Holy Family Hospital: ChillerReplacement, Infrastructure Improvements, Chapel Renovation; HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital: Interventional Radiology Suite, Fifth Floor Patient Rooms, Emergency Department Remodel; HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital: Sleep Lab and Diagnostics Relocation, Orthopedic Inpatient Remodeling, Cath Lab Addition -COMMERCIAL- Brother James Court; Lincoln Land Community College; Concordia Village; District 186 Schools; Springfield Park District; Capital Development Board.	1898
11	<b>Greene &amp; Bradford</b> 3501 Constitution Drive Springfield, IL 62711	217-793-8844 www.gnbil.com kashif@greeneandbradford. com	6	9	Kashif Syed Joseph Greene	IDOT-Traffic Studies for US 51 Business in Decatur; IDOT-Bridge Repairs for 8-Bridges on I-64 over various streams in Wayne County; IDOT-Construction Inspection & Surveying for Superstructure Replacement of 7-span Bridge on I-74 over Vermilion River, Three-Sided Culvert TR303 over Lake Fork, Pana; Bridge Rehabilitation on FAS 2583 Over LaMoine River, Schuyler County; Sunset Lake Spillway Inspection and Repairs, Girard; Menard Water Main Expansion Design and Construction Inspection, Menard County; Ward III Volentines Addition of Storm Sewer in Taylorville; Lincoln Tower Apartments Structural Rehabilitation, Springfield; Woodlake Estates Dam Inspections, Springfield; Starbucks Site Development and Foundation Design, Lincoln; Rainstorm Car Wash Site Developments, Springfield; Various ALTA, LOT, Topo Surveys, FEMA Certifications, Property Surveys and Site Developments.	1972
11	<b>Bacon Farmer Workman Engineering &amp; Testing</b> 421 South Grand Ave. West Suite 1A Springfield, IL 62704	217-679-6254 bfwengineers.com brotherham@bfwengineers.com	6	9	Baccus Oliver Chris Farmer Mark Workman	I-55 Rehabilitation, north of Litchfield; IL 71 Widening & Reconstruction in Yorkville; IL 37 Shoulder Widening & Resurfacing north of Benton; I-64 Reconstruction, west of Mt. Vernon; I-70 Reconstruction/Rubblization, east of Effingham; I-57/I-74 Interchange Reconstruction (Champaign); US 150 (Elkhart Road), Mattis Avenue projects (Champaign), I-270 from I-55/I-255; I-55 Elkhart section rehab.	1996
12	<b>Feezor Engineering</b> 406 E. Walnut St. Chatham, IL 62629	217-483-3118 dfeezor@feezorengineering .com	5	18	Daniel Feezor Jenny Feezor Aaron Karlas	Prairie State Energy Campus - Residuals Management, Bridgeton Landfill Heat Extraction System, West Lake Landfill Remedial Investigation.	2000
13	<b>Martin Engineering Company of Illinois</b> 3695 S. Sixth St. Frontage Road W., Suite B Springfield, IL 62703	217-698-8900 martinengineeringco.com mecmail@martinengineer- ingco.com	4	15	Philip G. Martin Steven R. Walker Adam S. Pallai Tyler K. Walker	Springfield: Scheels Sports Park, Wabash/Bradfordton Intersection, Comer Cox Park site improvements, Green Toyota, Legacy Pointe Arcade, Fairfield Inn, Lenhart Road improvements. Rochester: Gas station/Convenience Store Swansea: U-Haul O'Fallon: U-Haul Decatur: Country Club Boat Ramp Mt. Zion Village West traffic signals. edinburg: Sloan Implement. Riverton Middle School improvements.Bloomington: Trinity Lutheran Church	1982



# MAJOR ENGINEERING FIRMS

Sources: The engineering firms.  
Ranked by number of licensed engineers in Springfield/Jacksonville.  
Number of full-time employees in engineering division may vary from total employee count.

	NAME / ADDRESS	PHONE WEBSITE / EMAIL	EMPLOYEES LIC. ENG.	ENG. DIV.1	PARTNERS/ PRINCIPALS	NOTABLE PROJECTS	
13	<b>HDR Engineering</b> 2040 W. Iles, Suite C Springfield, IL 62704	217-585-8300 hdrinc.com springfieldinfo @hdrinc.com	4	15	Matthew Cochran Tom Hein	Alton Water Treatment Plant improvements, Livingston Treatment Facility improvements, freshwater and marine fisheries production and research facilities across the country including the Little Manistee River Weir and Thompson State Fish Hatchery, Michigan; Roxbury State Fish Hatchery, Vermont; and State-Wide Fish Hatchery Facility improvements, Maine. Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail Project, IDOT Long-Range Transportation Plan, city of McHenry Comprehensive Plan, Chicago Metropolitan Planning Agency, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) Advisory Services and Grant Support.	1917
13	<b>Prairie Engineers</b> 2475 W. Monroe St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-605-0403 prairieengineers.com info@prairieengineers.com	4	11	Lisa Kramer Darren Forgy	Lock 33 Hennenpin Canal; HVAC & Temperature Control Systems Milan, IL; LaGrange Lock & Dam Hydrographic Survey; HVAC State Police Training Academy; MoDOT Statewide LiDAR	2010
14	<b>WSP USA, Inc.</b> 3200 Pleasant Run, Suite A Springfield, IL 62711	217-546-7455 wsp.com	3	11	John Trotta Kevin Lentz	Interstate 64 Wabash River Bridge, Mazonia Braidwood mine reclamation, Springfield downtown one-way to two-way street conversion analysis, Logan county bridge, Springfield Airport complex improvements, Illinois State Police Memorial Park, Sinnissippi Dam redesign.	1959
14	<b>ReStl Engineers</b> 975 S. Durkin Dr., Suite 205 Springfield, IL 62704	217-725-6262 trcww.com restltx.com	3	2	Robert Boellner	University of Illinois in Springfield – various projects including the new student union, student housing renovations, cooling towers replacement, Sangamon Auditorium lighting controls; University of Chicago – various housing, HVAC and research laboratory projects; Illinois State University Capen Auditorium.	1985
15	<b>Fehr Graham</b> 2160 S. Sixth St., Suite D1 Springfield, IL 62703	217-544-8477 fehrgraham.com marketing@fehrgraham.com	2	1	Kyle Saunders	Moving Pillsbury Forward, Lincoln Correctional Center; U.S. 34 over 162 bridge replacements, Warren County; I-74 over French Creek bridge replacements, Knox County; Dixon ITEP bike pathy boardwalks/retaining walls; Mill Creek Estates, Phase II; Kreston Place Subdivision; YMCA of Springfield-Downtown site development; Meadowbrook Road extension; Structural design: Lincoln Tomb Receiving Vault rehabilitation; IDOT Hanley Building Plaza waterproofing; Springfield Housing Authority Office addition.	1973

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(L to R): **Nancy Klay** - Senior Registered Associate, **Chad Golembeck** - Vice President, Financial Advisor,  
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# Regulations change for disadvantaged businesses

Owners must recertify and reveal personal net worth, feds remove DBE project goals

By Ed Wojcicki

Federal regulations changed in October for all businesses seeking contracts as a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise funded by the Illinois Department of Transportation. Those businesses now need to provide additional documentation – including personal financial information – and must be recertified due to an “interim rule” from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The changes directly affect all 20 DBEs in Sangamon County that were previously certified, according to IDOT. Those 20 were among the 2,530 Illinois-based registered DBEs, which include businesses owned by women, Blacks and other minorities. The new federal guidelines eliminate the longstanding presumption that women and members of certain racial and ethnic groups are automatically disadvantaged.

To get recertified, a business must verify in new ways that it is at least 51% owned by “socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.” Those owners must write a personal narrative and complete a federal personal net worth statement providing detailed information about their personal finances, investments and assets such as property.

“It is important that your narrative describe specific situations you have experienced that have caused hardship and held you back from succeeding in education, employment or business,” IDOT explains in a FAQ for vendors, but none of the social or economic disadvantages can be based on race or sex.

IDOT and Gov. JB Pritzker have been critical of the new guidelines, citing the success of the DBE program since it launched in 1983.

“The public benefits from a strong, robust DBE program,” an IDOT spokesperson said. “We see more competition on our projects, which drives down costs in the long run. You

also grow local businesses, help people build careers, lift up communities and improve quality of life for the entire state.”

A specific timeline for DBE recertification is uncertain. IDOT has been encouraging businesses to complete the paperwork and says it will take two to three weeks to “reevaluate” the applications for recertification. IDOT then determines whether the owners are socially and economically disadvantaged. If not, the business is decertified, but can appeal.

IDOT is asking all firms that choose not to seek recertification to send a written withdrawal notice stating the firm wants to leave the DBE program.

Once a business is recertified, it will be eligible for IDOT contracts under a revised DBE program. IDOT is touting the governor’s Rebuild Illinois capital program and the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which it claims are investing in the state’s infrastructure at historic levels. “This fall, the governor released a six-year construction program in excess of \$50 billion, the largest in state history, opening the door for small and homegrown Illinois businesses to participate on more projects than ever,” an IDOT spokesperson said.

Among DBE firms listed by IDOT as contracting in recent years on Sangamon County projects are Done Rite Construction

for bridge painting on Interstate 72 over the Sangamon River; and Jacksonville-based Western Asphalt for 12 projects, including pavement reconstruction, ADA improvements and traffic signal upgrades on Fifth and Sixth streets in Springfield.

Besides recertification, another procedural change required by the U.S. Department of Transportation is that goals for the utilization of DBEs on federally funded projects for roads and airports must be set at 0%, at least for now. That percentage typically had

been at levels that actively promoted DBE participation. However, IDOT is encouraging companies to continue to consider meaningful opportunities for DBEs.

At the Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport, executive director Mark Hanna said no projects have been delayed due to the new guidelines, but it is still too early to determine how the federal rule will affect the Springfield airport in the future. **SBJ**

*Ed Wojcicki has a degree in journalism, worked in print journalism for 26 years and now freelances from Springfield.*



Melissa Hamilton, left, and Lashonda Fitch at a vendor summit to help businesses navigate the process of becoming a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise through the Illinois Department of Transportation.  
PHOTO COURTESY SYNERGETIC SOLUTIONS

To get assistance with DBE certification, contact IDOT’s Office of Business and Workforce Diversity’s Bureau of Small Business Enterprises at DOT. SupportiveServices@illinois.gov or 217-782-5490.

A Springfield resource recommended by IDOT is Synergetic Solutions, 2070 W. Monroe St. President Melissa Hamilton can be reached at 217-679-4653.

“The majority of the IDOT DBE firms that I have interacted with are interested in participating in the reevaluation process,” Hamilton said.





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# A long time coming

## Final phase of Springfield Rail Improvement Project to begin in January

By Carey Smith

Construction for Springfield's Rail Improvement Project began in 2014 with construction of an underpass at Carpenter and 10th streets and the final phase will begin next month.

Over the last decade-plus, new railroad bridges have been constructed at Fifth, Sixth, Ash, Laurel and Cook streets and South Grand Avenue with underpasses constructed at Madison and Jefferson streets.

The Springfield Sangamon County Transportation Hub, known as The Hub, is centered between Washington and Monroe streets downtown. Construction of the Springfield Mass Transit District Transfer Center, situated along the east side of the tracks, was completed in 2025.

Construction is ongoing for a new Amtrak station and parking garage, which will be on the west side of the tracks. A pedestrian bridge will connect the two. This project has a completion date of 2027.

In January, the last of the railroad track improvements will begin where it started, on Springfield's north side, with Usable Segment 6a and 6b. However, the section of North Grand Avenue between Sixth and 11th streets has already been an active construction zone for several months. Utility work in the form of water main reconstruction is set to conclude at the end of 2025, weather permitting.

Mike Mendenhall, senior structural engineer at Hanson Professional Services, said that underpass construction at North Grand Avenue from Ninth to 11th streets is scheduled to begin in early January. This construction phase for Usable Segment 6b will take approximately one year.

A section of the 10th Street railroad tracks that swings east and then north of Carpenter Street before meeting up with the 19th Street tracks will soon be rerouted directly north, passing through the bisected Illinois Environmental Protection Agency building. The tracks will continue between Caritas Bingo Hall and Computer Banc, joining with the current Third Street tracks at Converse. Once this underpass is completed, contractors will construct an at-grade crossing at Converse Street.

Usable Segment 6a will begin construction about the same time and is expected to be completed by fall of 2027. The major focus of Usable Segment 6a is to build a new overpass



Jamie Toole and Melissa Gaynor, co-owners of the Lucky Horseshoes, are pictured in front of Robin Roberts Stadium on North Grand Avenue. In January, construction will begin on a new overpass and roadway that will be constructed just south of the current North Grand Avenue over the 19th Street tracks. A portion of North Grand Avenue will be converted into an access road for the baseball stadium. PHOTO COURTESY JAMIE TOOLE

and roadway that will be constructed just south of the current North Grand Avenue over the 19th Street tracks. The roadway will tie back into the existing North Grand Avenue between 11th and 19th streets.

"There will be a portion of the old North Grand Avenue that will remain," Mendenhall said. "It will be an access road to Memorial Stadium and Robin Roberts Stadium and will be renamed Robin Roberts Road."

The road will provide one lane of traffic in each direction with parking on each side of the roadway. Construction with parking has already been completed along Michigan Avenue.

Jamie Toole, co-owner and manager of the Springfield Lucky Horseshoes, said he knows there are going to be growing pains throughout the two-year construction but is confident that it will be worth it.

"From our perspective, it's great for our community and great for the north end," said Toole. He noted the sweeping changes on Springfield's north side, which includes not just the railroad construction along North Grand Avenue, but the renovations at Lanphier High School and the demolition of the former Pillsbury Mills complex.

The Lucky Horseshoes have their own changes in the works, with the transfer of

ownership of Robin Roberts Stadium from the Springfield Park District to Friends of Robin Roberts Stadium, a nonprofit dedicated to the revitalization and sustainability of the facility. Last year, the group unveiled architectural plans prepared by Springfield firm J.H. Petty and Associates that outlined significant proposed improvements and renovations.

"We're going to get creative for parking and other challenges over the next couple of seasons," said Toole. "This is good for our community and good for us."

Toole is glad that cars on the overpass will be able to look down and see what's happening in Robin Roberts Stadium. "The onus is on us to make sure this facility looks as good as the overpass when it's completed," he said.

Mendenhall remarked that he, a lifetime resident of Springfield, and the staff at Hanson Professional Services are excited about the project. "The whole project will transform the whole city," he said.

Mendenhall said that ballast – the large rocks under the concrete or wooden ties for the tracks – has been brought in by the contractor over the last couple of months to begin track construction, which is also expected to be wrapped up by fall 2027. Mendenhall said he hopes drivers will "use extreme caution in work zones as there will be a lot of construction in the North Grand Avenue area as well as the at-grade crossings in 2026 and 2027."

Once work is completed in 2027 and the tracks shift, the current Third Street tracks will be decommissioned with plans to transform the former railway into The Linc, a shared-use pedestrian and bike trail that connects the city from north to south. It will connect the Illinois State Fairgrounds to Junction Circle near the intersection of MacArthur Boulevard and Wabash Avenue.

The city of Springfield is working on plans for a feasibility study for the current 19th Street rail corridor with hopes that future improvements will mimic the proposed infrastructure and quality of life improvements of the Third Street corridor. **SBJ**

*Carey Smith is a northend resident who is over the moon to see how the north end is transformed in the coming years.*





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# MAJOR ARCHITECTURAL FIRMS

Sources: The architectural firms.  
Ranked by number of local registered architects.

	NAME / ADDRESS	PHONE WEBSITE / EMAIL	NUMBER OF LOCAL REGISTERED ARCHITECTS	NUMBER OF LOCAL FULL TIME EMPLOYEES	PRINCIPALS	NOTABLE PROJECTS	YEAR EST'D
1	<b>Graham &amp; Hyde Architects</b> 1010 Clocktower Drive Springfield, IL 62704	217-787-9380 grahamandhyde.com info@grahamandhyde.com	5	15	Jamie Cosgriff Kevin Handy David Leggans Ben Dockter	Sandburg Elementary School addition, Black Hawk Elementary School addition, Fairview Elementary School addition, Southeast High School Auditorium, Ball-Chatham schools, North Mac athletic facilities and high school addition, Mount Pulaski High School, Sullivan High School, South Jacksonville, Jacksonville Eisenhower and Jacksonville Washington elementary schools, Lutheran High School, Vachel Lindsay and Ridgely elementary schools, Canton High School Culinary Arts & Science Lab, Farmington K-12 School Building, Beardstown Water Park, Cherry Hills Church, St. Agnes Church, First United Methodist Church, Christ the King Parish Center, Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, United Methodist Center, Carrollton Bank, Memorial Department of Human Resources, Memorial Medical Center Oncology Unit renovation, Hoogland Center for the Arts, Lincoln Trail College Technology Center.	1968
1	<b>Farnsworth Group</b> 3201 W. White Oaks Dr. Suite 100 D Springfield, IL 62704	217-528-3661 f-w.com ebroche@f-w.com	5	20	Paul Wheeler	Illinois State University School of Nursing, Illinois Treasurer - Chase Bank Renovation, Medics First, Memorial Daycare, Springfield District 186 school additions, Sangamon County Complex addition and renovation, Springfield Clinic Lab Facility, Springfield Clinic main campus renovation and addition, UIS Brookens Library renovation, YMCA Downtown Springfield.	1976
2	<b>Crawford, Murphy &amp; Tilly</b> 2750 W. Washington St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-787-8050 cmtengr.com questions@cmtengr.com	4	132	Bill Bailey Adam Burns Chris Stritzel George Cain Todd Young Jeff Large Kristy Allen Ali Williams	New Public Works facility in Springfield, UIS Performing Arts Center entrance, Springfield; Plummer Sports Park Complex, Edwardsville; Executive Aircraft Hangar Complex, Bloomington; Pace Pedestrian overpass bridge/access buildings, Illinois I-90 Tollway, Hoffman Estates; Central Illinois Utility Operations Facilities, Peoria and Decatur; SMTD Bus Storage Renovation; Sangamon County Water Reclamation District, Sugar and Spring Creek Wastewater Plants; airport vehicle/equipment storage buildings, Peoria and Bloomington; CWLP new filter building addition; MidAmerica St. Louis Airport terminal expansion; Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer Solids Management Facilities; Indy World Sports Park Pavilion, Indy Parks, IN.	1946
2	<b>Evan Lloyd Associates</b> 1630 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-789-7011 evanlloydarchitects.com tsmith@evanlloyd.com	4	12	Timothy B. Smith	BOS Center renovation and expansion, Centre @ 501 (Chamber office and apartments), Porsche Facility (Isringhausen); Altorfer Catepillar facility, Illinois State Police Credit Union, Waterways Building renovation, Engrained Brewery, Obed & Isaacs and Wm. Van's Coffee Shop, Prairie State Bank, Friar Tuck, Connor Co. Distribution/Sales Facility, Horace Mann renovations, Springfield. New park and amphitheater, Sherman. St. Mary School addition. Taylorville. Legence Bank corporate headquarters, Eldorado. National Bank and public library, Litchfield. Springfield Plastics expansion, Auburn. Blackburn College Practice Facilities, Carlinville. Several building renovations on the square in Jacksonville. Eck, Schafer & Punke renovation, Evergreen Wealth renovation.	1969
3	<b>Berners Schober Associates, Inc.</b> 1 N. Old State Capitol Plaza #310 Springfield, IL 62701	217-528-6030 bernerschober.com info@bsagb.com	3	10	Ian Griffiths Darren Johnson John Miller Matthew Veriha Joseph Dettlaff Jim Hine Steve Srubas	HSHS St. John's Hospital: Fourth Floor Renovation, Prairie Heart Electrophysiology Cath Lab Expansion, WCC Recladding + Remodel, Exterior Lighting, Madison Street Parking Ramp, Infusion Center & Medical Oncology Clinic, New Intensive Care Unit; HSHS Medical Group; Litchfield Primary Care MOB, Edwardsville Clinic Imaging, Springfield MOB; HSHS St. Mary's Hospital: Cath Lab Replacement, Intensive Care Unit Remodel, MOB Remodel; HSHS Holy Family Hospital: Infrastructure Improvements, Chapel Renovation; HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital: Interventional Radiology Suite, Fifth Floor Patient Rooms, Emergency Department Remodel; HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital: Sleep Lab and Diagnostics Relocation, Lab Equipment Replacement, Orthopedic Inpatient Remodeling, Cath Lab Addition; Springfield Plastics, Westar Hangars, Auburn; Blackburn College practice facilities, Carlinville.	1898
3	<b>J.H. Petty and Associates,</b> 3220 Executive Park Drive Springfield, IL 62703	217-787-2844 jhp@jhpa.biz	3	6	Joseph H. Petty	Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport terminal expansion, LLCC Aviation Center classroom addition at ALCA. OSF clinics in Peoria, Urbana, Danville, Pekin, Rantoul, Morton Office building for Psychological Center. Elevate trampoline parks in Champaign, Milan and East Peoria. Pittsfield. New gymnasium and classroom addition for Villa Grove CUSD #302. Lake Land College president's office, conference center, new Alumni Center and new Work Force Building. New security entrance addition for Harmony-Emge School District 75, Helping Hands Homeless Shelter, new Sangamon County coroner's office and autopsy suite, new secured entrance for Auburn High School and Middle School, numerous projects for Belleville School District, and master plan for Robin Roberts Stadium.	1991
3	<b>Steckel-Parker Architects</b> 2941 Happy Landing Drive Springfield, IL 62711	217-793-6444 steckelparker.com dave@steckelparker.com	3	5	David E. Steckel	Levi Ray & Shoup office complex, Brandt Consolidated, Taylorville school district gymnasium, Dick Van Dyke Appliance World, Prairie Eye Lasik building, Pepsi distribution center and office, United Community Bank, La-Z-Boy Furniture Galleries, D'Arcy's Pint, Springfield District 186 projects, Jennings Auto Sales. Country Lane Memory Care, Riverton. Prairie Power, Jacksonville.	1964
3	<b>John Shafer &amp; Associates</b> 1230 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-744-9036 shafer-arch.com john@shafer-arch.com	3	4	John Shafer	NECA Office Building, Springfield and Central Illinois African American History Museum, Henderson Eye Center, Anderson Electric, ISD Jacksonville, Heartland Credit Union, Bunn Corporate Office, Illinois Education Assn., Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, Illinois Baptist State Assn., Shelter Insurance, Novanis Building, Illinois Assn. of School Administrators, Illinois Times, Midwest Technical Institute - various locations, LLCC Taylorville, Tri-City Public Library, Springfield Priority Care, LLCC Montgomery Hall, AGCO-GSI Corporate HQ expansion, New Salem restoration, Jefferson Terrace renovation, LLCC Medical Center renovation, 629 E. Adams St.; LLCC Construction Training Lab.	1992
4	<b>Cowdrey and German</b> <b>DESIGNED ARCHITECTURE</b> 1305 Wabash Ave. Springfield, IL 62704	217-546-5730 designed-architecture.com cg@designed-architecture.com	2	3	Scott Cowdrey	Rolling Meadows Brewery, Nipper Wildlife Sanctuary, Nehemiah expansion. Downtown streetscape enhancement, Litchfield, Rexx Battery in Springfield and Jacksonville, Macoupin County Animal Shelter, Carlinville, Nature's Grace and Wellness Center, Vermont.	2007
4	<b>Melotte Morse Leonatti Parker</b> 213 1/2 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62701	217-789-9515 mmpltd.com architect@mmpltd.com	2	7	David J. Leonatti T. David Parker	Legends Entertainment Center, Scheels Sports Park, Springfield, new elementary school in Springfield; multiple municipal projects, Carlinville; Addition and renovation of Illinois Board of Admissions to the Bar, Springfield; Housing Authority upgrade and renovation projects in Springfield, Benld, Petersburg, Carlinville, Jacksonville, Decatur and others; New public works complexes in Fulton and Marshall counties; Mount Pulaski Courthouse Historic Site; Permanent Supportive Housing for Veterans, Springfield and Rock Island; Lincoln-Hendron office building renovation, Springfield; Renovate school and police buildings, Carrollton; 28 new housing units, Virden; Children's Garden Lincoln Memorial Garden, Springfield.	1978





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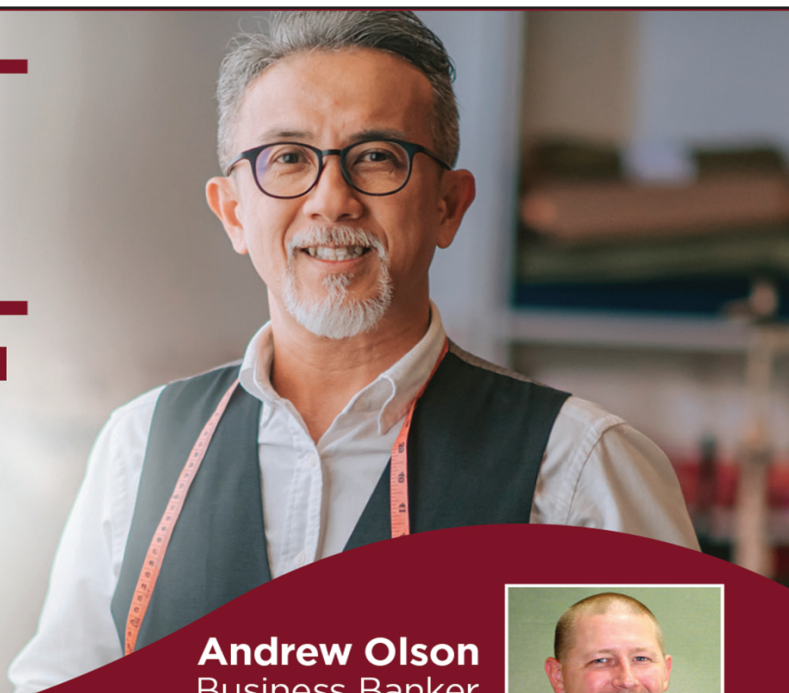
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# From planning to implementation

How the town of Normal revitalized its downtown and is building on success

By Leah Wilson

Imagine a vibrant town center that serves as a hub of cultural and social activity. There's a beautiful, tree-lined roundabout and plaza in the middle of it all, with a water feature that serves as a splash pad for children on a summer day, and a nice spot to read a book or to catch up with friends. All the while, it dutifully purifies the town's stormwater. A multimodal transportation hub makes getting to the heart of downtown convenient and safe. Attractive storefronts with a variety of retail options invite eager shoppers. Wide sidewalks fringed with unique plantings invite pedestrians to explore. A full-service convention center is only steps away.

In 2000, the town of Normal dreamed it. Then they did it.

## A downtown going downhill

In 1999, downtown Normal was like a lot of other downtowns across the country. It had lost its shine. Historic buildings were showing their years. Many were in a state of disrepair, having lacked investment for a decade or more. Some suffered in the hands of absentee owners.

Marginal retail uses predominated. Smoke shops, tattoo parlors, piercing salons and a few restaurants primarily served the student population at Illinois State University, which is embedded in downtown.

There was a lot of turnover. Long-established retailers were leaving for the east side, where new commercial development was enlarging Normal's footprint with a combination of big box retailers and strip malls. Most non-student residents weren't venturing downtown.

"It was generally shabby," said Mark Peterson, who served as Normal's city manager for 30 years.

## The turnaround plan

The city council identified that the downtown needed an intervention and hired Farr Associates Architecture & Urban Design to codesign the downtown with the community. There were more than 60 public meetings – a herculean task in itself, but key to community buy-in, which was, at times, hard-fought. Farr Associates provided several options, ranging from modest in scope to ambitious.

The council aligned on the need to be bold, approving an ambitious project, said Peterson,

knowing that "the clean-up, paint-up, patch-up, fix-up was a short-term solution that would just delay the decline."

The Downtown Renewal Plan was adopted in July 2000. The town had no debt, which put it in a great financial position for a major undertaking.

The town implemented a tax increment financing (TIF) district in 2003 to spur reinvestment, ultimately acquiring \$297 million in funding from a mix of federal, state and local sources. The financing included nearly \$85 million in bonded debt.

Peterson recalls a conversation with Mayor Gary Funk, who said he'd staked his political career on a pay-as-you-go philosophy. The planning consultant in the room said, "No developer is going to come in with a hope and a prayer that this kind of development is going to take place. You've got to do that up front." So, they did.

## Getting it done

Prioritizing projects was key, Peterson noted. "We completely removed almost all the streets and replaced all the underground utilities. Most of them were 50 to 100 years old. You know, it doesn't make sense to build new stuff on top of a public infrastructure that's falling apart. So, we bit that bullet, because we knew it would have to be done at some point."

Things got worse before they got better. "You couldn't use the front door of a business," Peterson said.

He described an intensive effort for the city's public relations director to visit businesses daily to check in and share updates. It was a strain, and a few businesses closed.

The Children's Discovery Museum, which Normal owns and the museum operates in partnership with the town, was an early win that set the bar for development. The Marriott Convention Center was another milestone.

Engineer Wayne Aldrich was the downtown development director. He said that a plan is only as good as its implementation. "You have to have the vision, the leadership, and the fortitude to get things done," he said.

Aldrich emphasized the role of city staff and professional consultants in the implementation process. "Politicians can come and go, but staff stick it out," he said.

Virtually every significant project involved

a public-private partnership. There were inducements for developers including TIF, façade grants, discounted parking and cash for operating.

"The numbers have to work," Peterson said. "That's the bottom line. The cost of construction is much more in an urban area than in a cornfield."

## The impact

Mercy Davison was the city planner hired to undertake the project. She is currently Normal's director of planning and zoning.

"There are more people in Uptown than there have been in many, many decades. Property values are way up. Tax revenue is way up. It's where people take visitors. Uptown is basically 'the place to be' – just as we had hoped," she said.

Mayor Chris Koos, now serving his sixth term, said: "The initial plan led to many businesses locating in Uptown Normal and the construction of two hotels and a multimodal transportation center. The Amtrak station in Uptown Normal is one of the busiest stations in Illinois, second only to the station in Chicago. In 2025, Uptown Normal is the most visited area of the community, and the central business district continues to grow."

## Building on success

A quote on Normal's website reads: "At the Town, we have long held to the tenet of 'planning our work and working our plan.' It's the foundation of all we do."

It is clear that is true, and that Normal continues to take action. Mayor Koos highlighted the construction of an underpass, which will provide a safer connection to both sides of the railroad tracks for pedestrians, bicyclists and Amtrak passengers. Connecting the north and south plazas is expected to further enhance economic development, giving residents and visitors alike more reasons to head Uptown. **SBJ**

*Leah Wilson is the executive director of Kidzeum in downtown Springfield. She holds bachelor's and master's degrees in geography, with undergrad emphasis on Geographic Information Systems (GIS). She became interested in Normal's revitalization after a visit to the Children's Discovery Museum in Uptown.*



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# Springfield gets a city planner, again

New hire is an architect with urban planning experience

By Scott Reeder

The city of Springfield has hired Suraksha Bhandari as its new professional planner, bringing a blend of international experience, architectural training and research-driven urban planning to city hall.

Bhandari comes to Springfield from Salt Lake City, where she completed a master's degree in city and metropolitan planning at the University of Utah and worked in both academic and professional planning roles. Before moving to the U.S., she worked for five years as an architect and planner in Nepal and earned a master's degree in disaster risk management – experience she says drives her interest in building resilient cities.

In an interview with Illinois Times, Bhandari said Springfield's blend of history and opportunity drew her to the job.

"Springfield is a city with historical and cultural background," she said. "I want to bring my educational and professional expertise to work with the mayor's vision and find opportunities for growth citywide. I'm honored to join the city of Springfield and excited to work with the community to help build a vibrant and resilient city for today and for the future."

Bhandari said she had been familiarizing herself with the city for several months before applying and has now been in Springfield for about three weeks. She said her background in architecture helps her approach planning holistically, from understanding the city's history to communicating ideas through maps, sketches and visual tools.

"When we talk about planning, there are different phases – from envisioning to plan-making to implementation," she said. "Architecture has helped me respect the city's character and prioritize work that honors history while planning for the future."

Amy Rasing, director of the city's Office of Planning and Economic Development, said Bhandari stood out among a strong field of candidates.

"You're not just talking about someone who has a degree – you're talking about someone who has been working in the field across the United States as well as her home country," Rasing said. "She brings insight, experience and a completely fresh set of eyes. Many of us who have lived here a long time forget what we have to offer. She sees those strengths and brings ideas informed by places



The city of Springfield has hired Sean Pritchard as a professional planner, working in the Office of Planning and Economic Development.

PHOTO COURTESY CITY OF SPRINGFIELD

she's worked before."

Rasing noted that Bhandari had already spent time in Springfield prior to applying and arrived with a working familiarity with its neighborhoods, downtown and local culture – something the interview team said set her apart.

Bhandari's appointment comes less than a year after the city created the professional planner position – an effort that initially drew public scrutiny when Mayor Misty Buscher appointed Sean Pritchard as Springfield's first city planner.

Pritchard was named to the role despite not having a college degree. His background included work in insurance, finance and business development, as well as a position at the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, where he helped manage statewide business incentive programs.

While Pritchard emphasized his various professional certifications and career experience, his appointment raised concerns within the planning field. Urban planning experts noted that mid-sized cities typically hire planners with formal training, often including master's degrees and professional certifications.

The situation also highlighted Springfield's unusual history of operating without a city planner on staff. For decades, the capital city has outsourced planning work to the

Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission. The closest equivalent to a municipal planner had been architect Paul O'Shea, who advised the city on planning and design until 2015 but intentionally declined the title of "city planner."

City officials defended Pritchard's selection at the time, emphasizing his economic development background and "outside-the-box" thinking. Pritchard identified the city's east side and downtown as priorities for revitalization. But he left the position this year after serving about six months on the job.

Ward 3 Ald. Roy Williams expressed frustration with how the city has handled its urban planning, adding he has yet to meet Bhandari.

"I thought the last guy was going to try to do good, but I don't know what happened because we just came one day and then boom, he's gone. We heard nothing official, just through word of mouth, 'He's no longer with us.'"

Williams said for too long the city has ignored the needs of Springfield's east side.

"When are we going to start working on (implementing) a plan for the east side?" he said. "They keep coming up with every other plan. ... How long have we got to wait? I found a plan that's dated 1992. There are like three or four east-side plans on the books in (the Office of Planning and) Economic Development, but they're just paper. We never take action and actually start implementing a plan."

Ryan McCrady, president and CEO at Springfield Sangamon Growth Alliance, called Bhandari's hiring a positive step for the city.

"I think she will do a great job for the citizens of Springfield. People don't always realize the benefits of good planning until they see it done well. ... Her architecture background will not only be good for planning development but also its underlying infrastructure."

Bhandari says she's eager to listen, collaborate and begin the work of shaping Springfield's future.

"This is my home now," she said. "I'm excited to get to work." **SBJ**



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# Best practices for performance reviews

By Kelly Gust

Ah, the performance review... the human resources tool that everyone loves to hate. Managers and employees alike struggle to find value in reviews, but when done right, they guide career development and keep the organization moving forward.

With turnover still high in many organizations, and with so many workers still in a remote or hybrid environment, I'd argue that goal setting, performance check-ins, feedback and performance reviews are more important than ever. The tips below will work well virtually or in-person.

**Goal setting:** Start with the big picture. What are the company's goals? How does each employee contribute to the bottom line? Once employees understand the big picture, they can draft their own goals. How will they personally move the needle? When employees pen their own goals, they have more ownership, commitment and a stronger likelihood that the work gets done even when the manager is not around.

- Take your time: Sharing company vision and generating employee goals doesn't need to happen in the same conversation. It's OK to let employees sleep on it and come back with their ideas in a few days.

- Ask questions: How can you contribute? What can you do that would move us forward? How could you help solve this problem? How would you go about that? When do you think you could do that? What support would you need?

**Check-ins and status reviews:** Goals are great, but not if they are written in disappearing ink (or buried in your Human Resources Information System). How do you keep them top of mind and drive continual progress?

- First, establish a consistent meeting time. Even if it occasionally gets rescheduled, a standing meeting ensures a time, a safe space and a pattern of dialogue that builds trust and



drives performance. When you meet with your employee regularly, most of what you'll talk about is positive. You get the chance to say things like, "yes, good job, thank you and keep going." You can be the hero. Without a regular one-on-one schedule, managers tend to only come around when something's broken or off track. When you've taken the time to establish trust and a safe venue, employees will tell you about which goals are at risk before you must be the villain.

- Second, use Google Sheets, OneNote, Predictive Index Perform, your HRIS or some other shared, real-time means of visualizing the goal, the status, notes and next steps. The power of seeing an action item and a deadline written on the screen creates clarity and a sense of urgency. When chatting with your employee, watch for non-verbal attitude indicators such as shoulder shrugs, slouching, sighs, foot-tapping and nail-biting, which might be signs the employee has not bought into their goals. Open-ended questions are your friend here, too. A few of my favorites are: "What would you change about this plan? What's getting in your way? What's going well? Can you give me an example? How are you feeling about this?"

**The actual performance review:** The key to performance reviews is remembering that most of your team members are average performers or better. (Poor performers tend not to hang around too long in most organizations). Your team members who show

up and meet or even exceed their goals every day should leave their review feeling encouraged, appreciated and empowered. The true crime of reviews is when the rock stars of your team leave their review feeling beaten up and frustrated, like they'll never please you. Don't let this happen.

First, embrace the weird. "I know these conversations are awkward anyways, but I don't want to the weirdness to distract from the fact that this is an important conversation. So let's make the most of

it." Second, say thank you. "I probably don't say it enough, but thanks for everything you do." Give specifics. Third, let them talk. "How do you think the year (or quarter) went? What were your highlights? Challenges?" Finally, remember to focus on the positives. For someone meeting expectations, it's fine to provide constructive feedback, but phrase it in the context of "to take it even further next time" or "to continue development in this area" or "to really knock it out of the park" rather than "you shoulda or coulda."

If you are dealing with a poor performer, just cut to the chase. "Your performance is not where it needs to be. There are a few areas where you are not on track. I believe you can turn it around, if you're ready to commit." Share examples and use your tracking tool to gain written commitment and keep progress on track.

Sure, performance reviews might not be your favorite managerial task, but reviews are a great opportunity to build trust, deepen the relationship and move the organization towards its goals. As a manager, it's a great time to hone your leadership skills. Demonstrating leadership in this area will benefit your career as well as that of the people on your team. SBJ



Kelly Gust is the CEO of HR Full Circle, a Springfield-based consulting firm that provides talent management and human resources consulting to organizations of all sizes and stages.

# Big dilemmas for tiny houses

By Thomas C. Pavlik Jr.

The recent passage of a moratorium on tiny houses in Ward 2 comes with some conditions, namely, that the city engage in a review of zoning and housing policies, hold at least two community engagement sessions, assess economic, environmental and social impacts of tiny homes in Ward 2, and make recommendations to the city council for a framework to address future consideration of tiny home developments.

In light of this charge to the city, I thought it would be helpful to consider some of the issues that are unique to tiny homes that will be considered in this process.

What are tiny homes? The city has adopted the definition used in the 2018 International Residential Code. It defines tiny homes as a dwelling that is 400-square feet or less in floor area, excluding lofts.

Unfortunately, most of the current zoning ordinances and building codes were passed before tiny homes became common. With no consideration given to these unique structures, it's hard to find a consistent or universal approach within Illinois law.

There are two initial frameworks that must be considered: state law building codes (think plumbing, utilities and safety standards) and local zoning codes that reflect long-standing expectations of what homes should look like.

As an initial matter, the city will have to address possible classification issues: Is the tiny home to be located on a permanent foundation or will it be on wheels?

Tiny homes on wheels are generally not treated as permanent structures. As such, they are likely to be classified as a recreation vehicle. Outside of RV parks, it is generally prohibited to place one on a residential lot for full-time living.

Toward that end, recent legislation was introduced that sets forth a framework for the minimum requirements necessary to operate and maintain a tiny-home park. It being Illinois, of course, the Tiny Homes Act also comes with detailed record-keeping requirements and licensing fees. However, if passed, that act at least offers a statewide "safe harbor" for those looking to place their tiny homes that are on wheels. Further, it sets forth clear guidance for developers who want to profit from the growing movement in favor of tiny homes

by developing parks dedicated solely to tiny homes. If passed, it's a win-win for developers (except for the fees and record-keeping) and tiny house owners.

For tiny homes located on a permanent foundation, all provisions of the relevant building codes must be followed. All provisions regarding egress (generally requiring more than one point of ingress and egress), plumbing, sewer and water hookups, sanitation, electrical, ceiling requirements and the like must be followed. As mentioned previously, many of these requirements were not written with tiny homes in mind and may be difficult to satisfy.

Tiny homes that are permanent structures are further classified as either accessory structures or as residences.

If treated as residences (that is, where the tiny home is the only structure on a lot), there are generally going to be requirements that the lot contain a minimum amount of square feet. Also, certain setbacks must be maintained that dictate how close to the various property lines a home may be located. As a practical matter, tiny homeowners should expect difficulties in placing their structures on tiny lots. Being forced to obtain a lot designed for a traditional single-family residence may defeat the entire purpose of constructing a tiny home in the first place.

More commonly, tiny homes are placed on a parcel on which there is an existing structure. These are referred to as accessory structures. In many instances, this is a practical barrier as accessory structures must generally be owner-occupied.

But there are other barriers, or requirements, specific to Springfield. For example, an accessory structure must be located more than six feet away from the principal structure and the front and side yard.

Also, it's important to keep in mind that no matter if a tiny home is an accessory structure or not, owners may struggle to gain legal hookups to sewer, water and electricity.

Recognizing that there are a multitude of approaches to tiny homes across the state, which in many instances may effectively outlaw tiny homes in their entirety, another piece of legislation was recently introduced called the

Local Accessory Dwelling Unit Act. In practice, it takes a local zoning matter out of the hands of local government.

In general, it provides that a unit of local government must provide reasonable regulations relating to the size and location of tiny homes similar to other accessory structures unless a regulation would have the effect of prohibiting accessory dwelling units.

It further provides that a regulation is considered to have the effect of prohibiting an accessory dwelling unit if it: explicitly disallows the construction of accessory dwelling units; imposes fees other than building permit review; applies standards that would render such units inconsistent with other local land use laws; imposes design, bulk and density standards that would physically preclude the project; requires off-street parking spaces, or requires corrections of nonconformities of the principal-dwelling unit.

If passed, any future outright prohibition on tiny homes would be a thing of the past. However, as with the Tiny Home Act, both bills are currently sitting in the rules committee, which is where bills often go to die.

The fact that these two bills were introduced at all reflects a growing momentum in Illinois to make tiny homes viable. Many, but not all of the barriers discussed above will go away if they are passed. However, local governments would still be able to enact reasonable regulations regarding size, setbacks and health and safety standards.

In any event, tiny homes occupy a complicated and evolving legal space with much depending on what locality is involved. If interested, consult your local zoning office and seek the advice of legal counsel with knowledge of the various frameworks that are involved. **SBJ**



Thomas C. Pavlik is an attorney with Delano Law Offices in Springfield.



# Mylas Copeland on the importance of giving back

UIS Chancellor's Thinkers Series events highlight community conversations

By Janet Seitz

University of Illinois Springfield Chancellor Janet Gooch and vice chancellor for student affairs Jamarco Clark put their heads together to create the UIS Chancellor's Thinkers Series. Clark said this initiative "grew out of conversations between the chancellor and me about creating opportunities for people to engage constructively, even when perspectives differ. Too often, society struggles to embrace differing viewpoints. Through this series, we aim to encourage understanding by listening to others' experiences and insights."

The series is designed to foster diverse perspectives and spark intentional, thought-provoking conversations within the community. Each event features local or even nationally recognized guests. Clark said, "The series serves as a platform for students, faculty and the broader community to deepen civic knowledge and participate in timely, impactful discussions."

A December Thinkers Series event with a leadership theme featured Mylas Copeland, general manager and managing partner for Green Family Stores, whose motto is: "We're all in this together." Copeland shared the meaning behind that motto and how it applies not only to providing customers with vehicles but also many aspects of community involvement and engagement. "I want to see people thrive," he said during the discussion.

Gooch asked Copeland to share a poignant service experience, and Copeland recalled that a group motorcycle ride 20-plus years ago turned into a nonprofit that he started. "Every single year we hand out scholarships to dependents of law-enforcement military families. We also provide assistance directly to the Illinois Military Family Relief Fund," Copeland said. "So, the organization that I founded, the Peacekeepers, is the largest civilian contributor of any single year to that organization."

Copeland said the inspiration for charitable giving began at home. "I was raised by parents who consistently emphasized the importance of helping others, no matter our own circumstances. As I grew older and became



University of Illinois Chancellor Janet Gooch interviews Mylas Copeland, general manager of Green Family Stores, during a Dec. 3 UIS Chancellor's Thinkers Series event.  
PHOTO COURTESY UIS

more involved in the community, I realized that I could have a real impact – not only financially, but through service, mentorship and presence. The true reward has always been knowing that I've made a difference in someone's life, even in small ways."

"I actively support organizations that directly improve the well-being of local families and individuals," Copeland said, "particularly in the areas of public safety, health, education and community resilience."

The vast majority of Copeland's charitable involvement is centered in Springfield and central Illinois communities. "I deliberately choose to invest my time and resources locally because this is where I live, work and raise my family. I serve on several boards, each of which plays a role in strengthening our region – organizations such as the United Way of Central Illinois, the Smith Alzheimer's Center, CAST (Community Action Support Team), and, of course, my own foundation, the Peacekeepers, Inc. All of these groups share a focus on improving the lives of local residents through collaboration, support and meaningful community impact."

Copeland supports these groups not just financially but also through volunteer leadership, strategic involvement, community outreach and by encouraging employee engagement.

"In my experience," he said, "both time and talent can be just as impactful as monetary support."

Copeland said one of the greatest challenges in philanthropic work is navigating the understanding that there are only so many

resources to go around. "I never want to burden people, even though I know that collective giving is essential to a strong community. The greatest reward, without question, is seeing others benefit. Whether it's a family receiving support during a difficult time or a young person gaining an opportunity they never imagined, those moments reaffirm why this work matters."

Some of Copeland's most memorable experiences have come from holiday giving campaigns at Green Toyota Volkswagen Audi. Over the years, the business has asked the community to nominate families in need during the Christmas season.

Being able to show up at their homes with gifts – ranging from basic essentials to clothes, small electronics or toys – and witnessing the smiles, tears and relief on their faces has been profoundly moving. Those moments stay with me," he said.

While many of Copeland's contributions have gone into larger organizations that distribute resources broadly, he has seen how someone's life was changed because they had an opportunity they otherwise might not have received.

"For example, throughout my career I've hired and mentored individuals when others may not have given them a chance – some with difficult pasts, some with little experience, but all with the willingness to learn and grow. A number of those individuals are now running large dealerships across the country. They still reach out with a text or call to say 'thank you,' and knowing that a moment of trust and guidance helped redirect the course of their lives is one of the most meaningful outcomes of my work."

For Copeland, philanthropy is not just about giving. "It's about community partnership. It's about showing up, investing in people and believing that together we can build something better. I consider it both a responsibility and a privilege to give back to the place that has given so much to me and my family." SBJ

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

## WOMEN'S EVENT CALENDAR

Illinois Women in Leadership will hold a luncheon from 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. on Jan. 22 at Mariah's Steakhouse & Pasta, 3317 Robbins Road. It will feature John Baranzelli, owner of John Baranzelli Enterprises, who will present "Strategies for Building Influence and Trust."

Baranzelli, who has extensive experience in state government, will explore the journey from technical expertise to leadership acumen illustrated with interesting anecdotes and stories. Attendees will learn how to translate their analytical strengths into compelling communication, strategic vision and impactful team leadership, ultimately accelerating their journey to executive roles.

Luncheons are open to all IWIL members and their guests. Registration is \$25 for members and guests through Jan. 16; \$30 on or after Jan. 17. Registration will close on Jan. 19. To register, visit [iwil.biz](http://iwil.biz).

For more information, or to register, visit [wecispringfield.org](http://wecispringfield.org).

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## Pritzker signs 'medical aid in dying' bill amid religious opposition

Gov. JB Pritzker signed a law Dec. 12 that will allow terminally ill adults in Illinois to take life-ending medication prescribed by physicians.

The controversial bill overcame strong opposition from religious groups and some disability rights advocates who feared it could endanger Illinoisians with disabilities.

Critics call the practice "assisted suicide," while those who support the law say it is not suicide, but rather an option that can bring comfort and dignity to already dying people.

"I have been deeply impacted by the stories of Illinoisans or their loved ones that have suffered from a devastating terminal illness, and I have been moved by their dedication to standing up for freedom and choice at the end of life in the midst of personal heartbreak," Pritzker said in a news release announcing his decision to sign the bill.

The Illinois law will take effect beginning in

September of 2026.

Groups like the Catholic Conference of Illinois called on the governor to veto the bill and, as an alternative, "expand and improve on palliative care programs that offer expert assessment and management of pain and other symptoms."

"Many lawmakers chose to ignore the real advances in palliative medical care as an alternative to assisted suicide," the Catholic Conference of Illinois said in a statement when the bill passed in October. "These programs support caregivers and help ensure patient care is coordinated with other services. And they represent a compassionate and morally acceptable alternative to assisted suicide."

Illinois becomes the 13th U.S. jurisdiction to authorize the end-of-life option, joining Oregon, Montana, Vermont, California, the District of Columbia and others. Delaware passed a bill authorizing medical aid in dying earlier this year.

State legislators in New York passed a similar bill this June, which requires a signature from Gov. Kathy Hochul by the end of the year before it can become law.

If New York's bill is passed, over 85 million adults representing approximately 25% of the U.S. population will live in states that have authorized medical aid in dying.

Compassion & Choices, an organization dedicated to expanding options for end-of-life care, said they plan to push for medical aid in dying legislation next year in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Maryland, Virginia and Florida, most of which introduced the legislation this year.

The organization's goal is for 50% of all Americans to live in states where medical aid in dying is authorized by 2028, according to its website.

## Eligibility and limitations

The Illinois law, Senate Bill 1950, applies to terminally ill Illinois adults with a prognosis of less than six months to live, as confirmed by two independent physicians. Major depressive disorder is not alone a qualifying condition for receiving end-of-life medication, and patients must be physically able to self-administer the medication.

A patient requesting the medication must pass a mental evaluation by a physician to confirm that they are mentally capable of making the decision and not facing undue influence. Patients must make requests both verbally and in writing, and physicians are required to inform them of alternate hospice care and pain control options.

The bill includes protections for physicians such that they cannot be found civilly or criminally liable or face professional discipline for prescribing or refusing to prescribe the medication.

Disability rights, religious concerns

Disability rights groups like the Chicago-based Access Living oppose medical aid in dying, which they fear could worsen already existing disparities in medical treatment for those with disabilities.

They worry that physician bias in perceived quality of life may make physicians more inclined to encourage life-ending treatment over other options for people with disabilities.

"You can't know for sure if your doctor is going to give you the best possible recommendation, because maybe your doctor actually has a disability problem," Access Living Advocacy Director Amber Smock recently told Chicago Tonight. "How can you count on

that really being health care?"

The evidence from other states where the treatment is legal has not demonstrated that, according to researchers and disability advocates in those states. Oregon was the first U.S. state to legalize medical aid in dying, and its law has been continuously in effect since 1994.

In 2019, Bob Joondeph, then-executive director of Disability Rights Oregon, penned a letter stating that in the 25 years of Oregon's history with the legislation, the disability advocacy organization had not received a single complaint about a person with disabilities being coerced to utilize end-of-life medication.

Rather, he said that the complaints received centered on a lack of access to the treatment for those with disabilities.

"All of the complaints we have received have focused on the concern that the Act might discriminate against persons with disabilities who would seek to make use of the Act but have disabilities that would prevent self-administration, thereby denying these persons the ability to use the Act," Joondeph wrote.

Elissa Kozlov, an assistant professor at the Rutgers School of Public Health, studies medical aid in dying legislation and trends.

"People always raise concerns about coercion or abuse, but we just aren't seeing that in the data," Kozlov recently told Chicago Magazine. "No horror stories have emerged."

Karen Retzer comes from a family line of medical aid in dying advocacy; both her parents were supporters of the option in Michigan since the 1990s.

Retzer, a resident of Champaign, began organizing around the issue in 2016 with other members of her Unitarian Universalist church. That group was later folded into Compassion & Choices.

Retzer became a stronger advocate after her mother died in 2012 from pulmonary fibrosis, a progressive lung disease where lung tissue becomes scarred and causes difficulty breathing.

In response to opposition on religious grounds, Retzer said she thinks medical aid in dying should be a personal choice. Those who don't want the option can simply opt not to take it, she said.

"When I saw my mother really suffering at the end, I thought, 'Wow, you know, this could have been easier. We all knew she was dying, right?'" Retzer said in an interview. "Providing comfort to somebody, if they want to, seems to me to be the moral thing to do."

Just having the option makes a difference, Retzer added, even if people don't use it.

"When you're terminally ill, retaining some autonomy at the end of life can bring peace and forgo a lot of extra suffering," Retzer said. "Thinking back to my mother, it would have been a very compassionate thing to do."

*Capitol News Illinois is a nonprofit, nonpartisan news service that distributes state government coverage to hundreds of news outlets statewide. It is funded primarily by the Illinois Press Foundation and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.*

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# GABATONI'S Italian Restaurant

By Thomas C. Pavlik Jr.



I've been going to Gabatoni's since I arrived in Springfield in 1999 and maybe even in 1992 while I was here for a judicial clerkship. I was saddened when the pandemic led the prior owners to shift to takeout only, which lasted even after the COVID-19 restrictions eased. But, with new ownership and a re-do of the interior, Gabatoni's opened for dine-in and takeout about a year ago.

I never considered Gabatoni's as a lunch spot, but it is, and it has a dedicated lunch section built into the menu.

First, let's talk about the interior. Yes, the painting of dogs playing poker is still on the wall, as is the portrait of Ronald Reagan. The elevated section has been removed, and the main dining room looks pretty much the same as it was pre-pandemic, just much cleaner. And so are the bathrooms.

At first blush the bar (one of my favorites in Springfield) looks familiar, except it now sits patrons on three sides, and there are more high-top tables.

Gabatoni's menu is similar to its prior iteration, but with more reasonable prices. Of course, there's the thin-crust pizza that Gabatoni's is so well-known for, and there's also sandwiches, pastas and salads.

While pizza is the star, Gabatoni's menu extends across a full Italian-American spread. You'll find hearty pasta dishes (spaghetti, ravioli, lasagna, tortellini), sandwiches (meatball, Italian sausage, club and a poor boy) and even a horseshoe and pony shoe. Appetizers and sides

range from garlic bread and mozzarella sticks to onion rings and breaded mushrooms.

Three of us (more golf friends) arrived just after noon to find Gabatoni's fairly full considering it was just days before Thanksgiving.

We started with the meat toasted ravioli with meat sauce for dipping. For \$9.99, this was a huge portion. There were eight well-sized ravioli served with a large bowl of meat sauce. Each was a deep-fried, pillowy pocket of pasta with a savory, spiced-beef filling, all tied together by a few shakes of parmesan cheese. We all appreciated how the crispy, golden-brown exterior contrasted with the softness of the ground beef meat filling.

For our entrees, we split a large thin-crust pizza and a meatball sandwich.

The meatball sandwich was served with chips and pepperoncini. The bread was crusty with a soft interior that cushioned three generously sized meatballs. We each took a third of the sandwich. I would have appreciated more sauce but was quite pleased. My guess is that the meatball was made with beef (for the hearty flavor) and pork (for the richness and tenderness). The meatballs could have benefited from a bit more of a browned exterior but overall, this was a very good dish. Given how much food



Gabatoni's has reopened for dine-in, with new ownership and a refreshed interior, although it still retains its previous character. PHOTO BY ZACH ADAMS



we ate, in retrospect we may have been better off just ordering the three meatball side dish that's served with marinara.

Gabatoni's strength lies squarely in its pizza – it's reason enough to come just for that. The signature thin-crust pies have always drawn praise: a crisp, cracker-thin crust that snaps with texture plus generous, well-balanced toppings and a flavorful sauce. Longtime fans will tell you the crust has a light, airy crunch that contrasts nicely with just the right amount of cheese and sauce.

Menu-wise, Gabatoni's doesn't slack; offerings include standard cheese or pepperoni pizzas to more adventurous pies (taco, chicken Alfredo, barbecue, chicken, veggie or meat-lover specialty pizzas). There's variety without complicating what works.

That versatility is a strength: families, couples or groups with mixed tastes can easily find something for everyone. And for those who love a no-frills, traditional pizza that's simple, honest and filling – Gabatoni's hits the spot.

We decided on a large pepperoni and sausage pizza. I usually order mine well-done, as I like a little extra chew on my crust. In deference to my guests, I didn't request it this time (although, as it turns out, they share my views on the matter). Thankfully, the pizza came out just how I like it. In homage to its founders, there was even the telltale cornmeal that dusted the

bottom of the pizza.

The pizza came with generous amounts of toppings and a flavorful (but not overwhelming) sauce. But, more importantly, it was a balanced dish. Because thin crust tends to be delicate, it shouldn't be overwhelmed by too much sauce, cheese or toppings. Balanced proportions let each component shine while keeping the crust from collapsing or getting soggy. It's a message Gabatoni's most certainly has taken to heart.

Thanks to this balance, our pizza delivered a mix of crunch, chew and freshness, nothing doughy or overly heavy here.

Gabatoni's has character baked into every slice of crust. It isn't high end-trattoria dining. But what it does well – classic thin-crust pizza with just-right sauce and toppings – is done confidently.

Unless you're expecting gourmet flair or



The toasted ravioli has a savory, spiced-beef filling in generous portions.

PHOTO BY ZACH ADAMS

modern Italian-fusion, I'd call this a must-try for anyone who values honest, unpretentious food. For a comfortable, familiar and satisfying pizza date, family dinner or business lunch – it's hard to beat.

Address: 300 E. Laurel Street, Springfield  
Phone: 217-522-0371 and 217-528-9629  
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Gabatoni's is best known for its thin-crust pizza with flavorful sauce. PHOTO BY ZACH ADAMS



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Sangamon County new business registrations, Sept. 16 – Oct. 15, 2025

**Pros**, 7598 Walnut St., Salisbury. 636-283-3004. Mary Paula Willett.

**Reject Gaming**, 2600 Sandgate Road. 217-816-0099. Clayton E. Dennis.

**Embellish by Arwa**, 3010 Cameron Drive. 217-891-6303. Arwa Osman Elmubarak.

**NAT 1 Games N More**, 310 ½ Carroll 154, Unit 1, Pawnee. 217-840-8173. Curtis Alan Berrier.

**Fletcher Consulting**, 1333 Wabash Ave., Suite C. 217-741-3465. Jason P. Fletcher.

**Beyond Basics Remodeling**, 1521 North Grand Ave. W. 217-899-2080. Daniel P. Mella.

**Harold's Chick & Uniques Bar and Grill**, 1231 E. Cook St. 217-220-5624. Debra D. Pool and Tierra S. Long.

**Tripp and Timber Skin Co.**, 250 Sunkist Drive, Sherman. 217-416-0924. Tripp Cunningham.

**Turf Pro Junk Removal**, 1611 S. 17th St. 217-767-0757. Ronald E. Blake III.

**Itty Bitty Bears Daycare**, 2165 Yale Blvd. 217-622-9957. Adriene M. Jones.

**Springfield Mow & Snow**, 4412 Turtle Bay. 217-741-4775. Evan Warrington.

**Velvet Star Vintage**, 1612 S. Whittier Ave. 217-503-6575. Melissa Mullinax.

**Business Solutions**, 15501 S. Pawnee Road. 217-625-3981. Jill E. Hamilton.

**Christian Cleaning Services**, 3266 Cantrall Creek Road, Cantrall. 217-971-2191. Breanna Sigretto.

**CW Boutique**, 1426 Taylor Ave. 217-522-0732. Patty Cheneyon.

**Eastview Mini Mart LLC**, 2900 South Grand Ave. E. 917-302-3797. Kamrul Hasan.

**Sideline Engraving & Apparel**, 9 Willimantic Road, Rochester. 319-795-3350. Ashley Turpen.

**Thielemann Laser Cutting & Engraving**, 418 Fourth St., No. 223, Illiopolis. 618-571-0220. Billy Thielemann.

**The Library Pizza and Sports Bar**, 120 Toronto Road. 217-717-1943. Crows Mill LLC.

**Hand Surgery Consultants LLC**, 144 E. Hazel Dell Lane. 217-855-3955. Timothy Daugherty.

**Portrait Perfect By Rob**, 7 Candletree Drive No. 1. 217-502-0968. Robert P. Staff.

**Outpost Landscaping**, 4412 Turtle Bay. 217-741-4775. Evan Warrington.

**Descanso Properties LLC**, 1509 Carolina Ave. 708-723-3281. Rocio Hurtado.

**Wubs**, 300 North Grand Ave. W. 217-414-6683. Donald E. Shimkus and Debra S. Shimkus.

**Parkland Logistics**, 1333 N. Wheeler Ave. 217-525-2935. David Stowers.

**Professional Preference**, 1815 South Grand Ave. E. 217-843-1667. Aeyshia Crockett.

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