



SPRINGFIELD
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2026 Women of Influence

Barbara Malany

Helen Moose

Dr. Richa Pandey-Kochar

Jennifer Gill (alumna)

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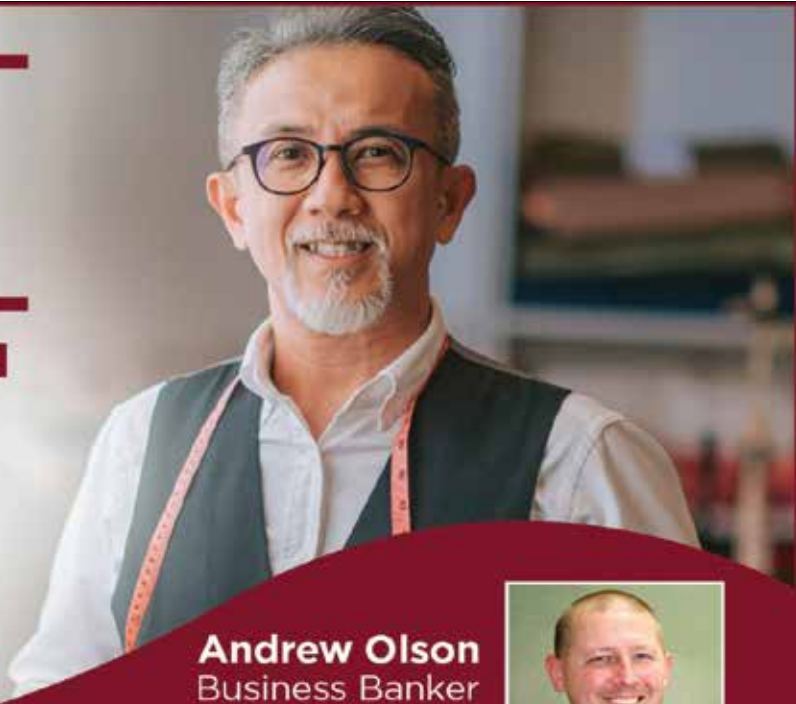
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Helping future generations

This year's Women of Influence recipients have all made considerable efforts to improve the lives of young people, although they have focused on different areas.

Helen Moose began her career as an oncology nurse, but later became the first certified nurse midwife to obtain privileges at both hospitals in Springfield. She realized it was difficult for uninsured women to get prenatal care and helped establish a clinic in Girard that served hundreds of women. Helen's trailblazing efforts have impacted the well-being of thousands of women and their children over the years.

Dr. Richa Pandey, a nephrologist at Springfield Clinic, works with adults in her medical practice but devotes much of her free time to addressing child poverty and food insecurity for families. She not only helps raise money for Compass for Kids but teaches Indian folk dance to the students, along with collecting coats, toys and books for groups such as Contact Ministries and Sojourn Shelter.

Barbara Malany has focused her efforts on teenagers. She and her husband became foster parents for the first time in 1963 after one of her high school students who was picked up by a police officer said he didn't have a home to go to and asked the officer to call his English teacher. That would be the first of 16 foster youth to come through their home, along with 25 exchange students from various countries and 44 students participating in a state government internship program. Even now, well into retirement, Barb is hosting a Rotary youth exchange student from Taiwan.

This is the 23rd year for Women of Influence, and for the first time there is an alumna category. Jennifer Gill was first recognized 10 years ago for her work with students in District 186, just two years after being named superintendent. As she prepares to retire from that position, it seems appropriate to once again acknowledge her leadership, particularly in light of guiding the district through the pandemic and the many facility improvements that have occurred since the Our Schools Our Future sales tax initiative was approved by Sangamon County voters in 2017.

Thanks to Security Bank, the founder and ongoing sponsor of Women of Influence, for making it possible to recognize these and many other outstanding women in our community over the years.



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Q & A

with

Gordon Gates

By David Blanchette

Gordon Gates is the managing partner of Springfield law firm Gates, Wise, Schlosser & Goebel and plans to retire at the end of May.

He has a degree in business from University of Iowa and a juris doctorate from Northern Illinois University College of Law. Gates moved to Springfield following his law school graduation in 1986, initially working for Londrigan, Potter and Randle P.C. After 12 years, Gates left to start his own firm with Peter Wise and Fred Schlosser.

Gates serves on the board of trustees for Lincoln Land Community College, a position he was first elected to in 2017. He has also been active in various community organizations, including serving as board president of Mini O'Beirne Crisis Nursery.

Gates and his wife, Kristine, have three adult children – son Max and daughters Ellyn and Anna.

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

I was born in Chicago Heights, but we quickly moved to Champaign where we spent three years, then three years in Albany, Illinois. Then we moved to Sterling when I was in third grade, and that's where I was raised.

I apparently had a gift for janitorial work. My first job was working in my parents' laundromat, mopping the floors and cleaning out the washing machines. Then I went to work for J.C. Penney as a janitor, then I worked the night shift at Sterling Clinic doing janitorial work during college.

What first drew you to the legal profession?

I have an aversion to unfairness and angry conflict, and, as a college student, I kept seeing situations where lawyers could be agents of justice and fairness and be peacemakers. I was looking for an honorable profession where I could do a bit of good while earning a living, and I love to write. Plus, I'm not necessarily very good at being an employee, so I needed something where I could be self-employed.

How has the legal profession changed during your career?

In the courthouse, negotiations and in the actual work, not much has changed in my view. You're dealing with human clients and human judges; it's still a human event.

Research and drafting has changed dramatically with computerized legal research like Westlaw and computerized forms. When we first opened the office in 1997, we spent a lot of money to build a library and to buy Yellow Page ads. Those things are now gone. In a matter of 30 years this office no longer has books, all of the statutes and case law are online, and obviously, no one has Yellow Pages.

How did you decide to focus on business law and zoning issues in your practice?

My father was a small business management professor at our local community college, and my parents were small business owners, so I was leaning that way. But once I got into law school, I quickly learned that people in business make rational decisions, not emotional ones. The disputes are resolved logically, and the laws of business and land use are designed to resolve

disputes efficiently.

Zoning is particularly fun for me, because I like the people who are involved in zoning issues. Everybody is trying to do the best thing for their neighborhood and community.

What are the biggest opportunities and risks in your profession today?

There is a great shortage of lawyers in rural areas, and I would include Springfield, Jacksonville and Petersburg as being rural communities. That's where the greatest opportunity is, and it's a great way to make a living.

Regarding risks, I'm seeing clients attempting to use online legal documents and online legal services, and they don't understand what they've done. These technological advances are lovely, but if clients don't understand what they are doing, then lawyers are stuck trying to unwind it.



Will AI ever be able to replace the human mind where legal cases are concerned?

I don't think AI will fundamentally change what lawyers do, at least at the higher level. Sure, it can write a brief, although not well, and it can organize thoughts, write a letter or help with research. But judgment, sorting out what a client needs, what is

good for a client, what a judge may or may not do – I don't see AI ever being able to do that.

What gives you the greatest satisfaction in your work?

I'm naturally nosy, so getting to know the client, their business, what they really need and want and then solving the problem that stands in the way of getting what they need. Then going home at the end of the day and feeling like I actually solved a problem for someone – that gives me the greatest satisfaction.

Of what value is continuing education?

The law evolves as society evolves. Statutes are changing and courts constantly reinterpret common law, so continuing legal education is essential. Lawyers are collaborative. If something worked for somebody in a deal or a case, and they're willing to teach somebody else how it worked, that is probably the most valuable part of continuing legal education for me.

What advice would you give to young people who are entering today's career field?

I would say get a pragmatic undergraduate degree such as business, STEM or finance, as well as some history and philosophy. Then pick your classes in law school that have a practical application. It's fun to take theoretical classes, but also take the practical applications.

Consider working in a small or medium-sized community where you can make a life for yourself and can actually affect people's lives and feel like you've made a difference. And, every once in a while, you get to go home.

What may people be surprised to learn about you?

I have a million hobbies, and I'm not very good at any of them. I bike, hike, hunt pheasant and quail, train my bird dogs, do woodworking and play pickleball, and I still have my pilot's license.

My secretary has always found it bizarre that I have my ski boat parked in the records-storage garage behind my office, and in the summertime, I sometimes sneak out at lunch, water ski a slalom course at Lake Springfield, then come back to work.

BARBARA MALANY

By Tamara Browning

Barbara “Barb” Malany is an ambassador of goodwill in all she does. She is a businesswoman, teacher, civic leader, mother and humanitarian.

Barb was one of the first women in the Rotary Club of Springfield, and gives of herself in her role as a Rotarian. Rotary is a service club that provides humanitarian service, encourages high ethical standards in all vocations and helps build goodwill and peace in the world. Rotary’s motto is: “Service Above Self.” Those who have crossed paths with Barb know that she lives this wholeheartedly.

In 1963, Barb and her husband, Lee, became foster parents on a moment’s notice. She was an English teacher in the vocational program at Urbana High School when a student was picked up by the police. The officer wanted to call the boy’s parents or take the teen home. The young man didn’t have either, so he asked, “Can you call my teacher, Barb?” Barb says, “We took him in, and got licensed to be foster parents the next day.”

She learned that the young man had never had anyone take an interest in him and his life. With Barb and her husband’s nurturing guidance, he grew up to become a U.S. Marine and is now a successful adult. Barb says that she had never known of a child who didn’t have anyone care about him. She vowed to be the “person who listens and cares, and pays attention” to the lives of others. She has the opportunity to practice this daily as her family’s home has been home to a total of 16 foster youth over the years.

Barb’s family also hosts exchange students. They have opened their home to 25 exchange students from various countries over the years, and 44 students have come to them through an Illinois state government internship program.

One such student was Dr. Chad Anderson, who is currently the public health administrator for the Christian County Health Department in Taylorville. He stayed with Barb’s family and four other teen boys who were there at the time. Anderson was in the last semester of his senior year of high school when he was chosen to be an intern with a senator. He enjoyed his time with the Malanys and has kept in touch with them ever since; he says he wouldn’t be where he is today without Barb and Lee.

The Malanys are currently hosting a female Rotary youth exchange student from Taiwan, who is a senior at Springfield High School.

Barb says that being a Rotarian has helped her to continue hosting students and understand what they need while living in a foreign country.

“Being part of Rotary has helped me with hosting my exchange students and paying attention to what they go through,” Barb says.

In 2023, Barb was awarded Rotary International’s Service Above Self Award. This is described as the highest honor bestowed upon individual Rotary members recognizing those who demonstrate exemplary humanitarian services and live the motto. Only 150 Rotarians worldwide receive this selective award each year. Barb was recognized for her continuous love and support to the youth in Rotary District 6460.



photo by Zach Adams

In addition to the many other young people living in the Malanys’ home, they also raised three biological children.

Barb’s husband and Romina Trujillo Agostini, a former Rotary youth exchange student from Venezuela, nominated her to be recognized as a one of this year’s Women of Influence. Agostini wrote that Barb’s “incredible service to the community and developing youth” qualifies her to be a Women of Influence. “She has shaped countless young lives for the better.” On Barb’s Facebook page Agostini responded to a shoutout Barb made by posting, “I love being your kid.”

Springfield has been home to Barb for 50 years. At this time of life, she still keeps her schedule filled with any number of activities. She still loves teaching and is a substitute teacher at Southeast High School. She practices yoga, lifts weights, plays the piano and goes through the ACT study guide.

Barb emphasizes that sincerely paying attention to people is an invaluable act of kindness and connection. She says that women are nurturers who listen and love and sometimes have to push and pull “someone to bring them back up with you.”

HELEN LEA MOOSE

By Holly A. Whisler

Helen Lea Moose began taking dance lessons at the age of 4, and her passion for dance was ignited. As a teenager, she knew wholeheartedly she wanted to be a professional dancer, but when it came time to prepare for college her father wanted her to “have a real job.” Being the middle daughter of five girls and having an older sister who was an art major, she understood, and did as her father wished.

As she contemplated her future career, she visited a fellow dancer who was going through cancer treatment. This experience gave her a behind-the-scenes glimpse of medicine. Her curiosity was piqued, and she entered college as a pre-med major. Things were humming along until organic chemistry, which prompted her to table medical school and seek a different path.

Helen hadn't planned to be a nurse, but she applied to University of Illinois Chicago's nursing program with a desire to work in oncology and was accepted. But she graduated at a time when securing a nursing job was practically impossible. Medicare changes implemented in 1983 drastically reduced hospital reimbursements, causing dire financial constraints that led to hiring freezes, layoffs and the restructuring of nursing staff.

Helen was not deterred, so she and a girlfriend moved to New York where they were both hired at Colombia Presbyterian Hospital. She gained valuable nursing experience while continuing to fuel her passion by taking ballet classes.

Eventually, Helen returned to Springfield. The employment environment had recovered, and she gained experience in intensive care nursing, home health and labor and delivery, which would usher her into a whole new world. She also met her husband, David, during that time and describes him as “a farmer who took the city girl to the country.”

While raising two young children and working two 12-hour night shifts each week, Helen applied to UIC's women's health nurse practitioner program in Peoria. It would be there that she met Bonnie Cox, a pioneering midwife who fought to become one of the first certified nurse-midwives in the Peoria area. She asked Helen if she had considered midwifery as it would only be a few extra courses and 20 deliveries prior to sitting for board exams. Helen's concern was that nobody in Springfield was offering midwifery. That would soon change.

Helen began her midwifery practice in 1999, at a time when it was difficult for uninsured women to get prenatal care. She worked with the Macoupin County Health Department to establish Central Counties Health Center, a grant-funded prenatal clinic located in Girard – the only clinic to provide vital prenatal care between Springfield and Carlinville. Helen said the clinic served more than 300 pregnant women in the first year. The area saw a significant decrease in pre-term deliveries due to women receiving high-quality prenatal care. While the Girard clinic is no longer open, Southern Illinois University's Center for Family Medicine later established a prenatal clinic at Central Counties Health Center in Springfield, which is still open today.

Helen pioneered the availability of midwifery in Springfield when she became the first certified nurse midwife to obtain privileges at both Memorial Medical Center and St. John's Hospital. Memorial required 50 deliveries, so she went to Chicago for three weeks where she could deliver that many babies in a short time. Earning privileges was not easy – nor should it be, she said – but meeting the requirements and completing that paperwork took another five years. She persevered, due to her strong desire



photo by Zach Adams

to provide women and their unborn children prenatal care that had never been available to them in Springfield. Helen said this is the most rewarding aspect of being a nurse midwife.

June Wood Agamah, logistics coordinator of International Health & Development Network and a former Women of Influence recipient herself, nominated Helen for this award. She spoke of Helen's ability to be a trailblazer.

“Helen embodies the definition of influence. She has been a catalyst for change in whatever situation she finds herself. Her empathy, determination and grit have allowed her to chart a course for change locally and internationally - whether its creating access to care for underserved and uninsured women in Sangamon County or traveling on mission trips to Ghana and Moshie, Tanzania. It's a joy to observe her interact, teach and influence the OBGYN nurses and midwives there,” June said.

“Helen's leadership has impacted the birth and wellbeing of many women and children. Helen does not know a stranger. She is an incredible person to get to know. Her beautiful smile and kind, engaging behavior speaks volumes to strangers and those who know her. She will forever be appreciated,” she said.

Helen's professional career began with working closely with patients and grew into being a nurse educator and professor. She has held positions on countless boards, including those at the state level, that guide credentialing of midwife programs.

Through it all, she and her husband raised three children and learned that each day is precious and to live it to the fullest – and they do. Helen says they begin their days in the hot tub, sipping hot tea and catching up with each other.

Helen may not have become a professional dancer, but she is currently enjoying an adult ballet class. And her father's guidance led her to a “real job” that has been more impactful than she could have imagined. Helen recalled the wise words of her mother: “Things have a way of working out. You have to be open to opportunity.”

DR. RICHA PANDEY-KOCHAR

By Cinda Ackerman Klickna

Dr. Richa Pandey-Kochar-Kochar sees approximately 30 patients a day as a nephrologist at Springfield Clinic, yet she still finds time to give back to the community she now calls home. Pandey-Kochar grew up in Mumbai, India, and describes Springfield as a “welcoming” community that gives her every opportunity to express her “whole self.”

Pandey-Kochar says her upbringing was “atypical of an Indian family. Both of my parents worked; my mother, who was a teacher, left by 6 a.m. each day. My father packed our lunches and took us to school. I saw that my mother was allowed to thrive as she wanted. Her father had seen her potential and encouraged her to get an education, which she did. She earned a doctorate degree. I feel blessed to have been given the same chances.”

Pandey-Kochar was raised as a Hindu, which promotes service, and her parents believed in helping others. Her father told her it was one’s “duty to give people a portion of what you make in money, skills, ability and time.”

She takes her duty seriously by filling food pantries, organizing others to raise money for charitable causes, collecting coats, toys, books and care baskets for Contact Ministries and Sojourn Shelter, teaching Indian folk dance (Bhangra) to students in Compass for Kids, choreographing the Levitt AMP Springfield Music Series, serving in leadership roles for several organizations, leading a fitness group and taking her two daughters, ages 7 and 10, on trips to visit national parks. And that’s the short list.

Pandey-Kochar honors her Indian roots and is active in the Asian Indian Women’s Organization. During her term as president in 2025, India Night raised more than \$283,000 for Compass for Kids. The organization’s Pantry of Hope also raised \$8,000 for micropantries. Pandey-Kochar personally delivered over 200 pounds of food to the Central Illinois Food Bank.

Being a doctor was not what Pandey-Kochar always dreamed of doing. While taking five years of classical dance training, she dreamed of becoming an actor and dancer.

“My mother told me that I should have a career and steered me away from going to acting school,” she said. “She saved me. I probably would have just been a side actor.”

Instead, Pandey-Kochar earned her bachelor’s degree in Mumbai and transferred to University of Arkansas for her residency. She met her husband, Rajan Kuchar, now a gastroenterologist, who is from New Delhi. It was in Little Rock that she chose nephrology as her specialty. She then went to Washington University in St. Louis while her husband finished his training at Stanford University. When he was offered a position at Springfield Clinic, he traveled daily between Springfield and St. Louis so she could finish her training.

Pandey-Kochar has been a physician at Springfield Clinic for 11 years. She recognizes that her patients often have to wait.

“I know I am famous for being late, but I want to take time with my patients and learn about them. I ask myself, what would I do for my father?”

Pandey-Kochar sees many needs of people. Benefits such as SNAP being cut means more people need food; thus, she helps fill the pantries.

She is concerned about the increasing mistrust and anti-vaccine view and has seen more people refuse vaccines. She says, “In my field, patients are on dialysis; they sit for several hours three times a week in close proximity so they need to be protected by the vaccines. Misinformation does



photo by Zach Adams

harm.”

Pandey-Kochar and her husband have two daughters, and their parents have often visited for several months at a time to help.

“I have had a huge support system around me,” she said.

The couple are both lifestyle and health coaches. Pandey-Kochar leads an all-women’s group focusing on weightlifting and fitness and acknowledges one of her strengths is bringing people together.

She says, “If I believe in a cause, I put my energy into it and organize people. Sometimes,” she admits, “I come up with things on a whim.”

A few days before Easter one year, she found out Contact Ministries had 23 kids who would have nothing for Easter. She called and organized people to make baskets; she made 10 herself. Her daughters help with many activities as she believes they, too, need to embrace the spirit of service.

Nominator Vinod Gupta writes, “As a nephrologist, Richa protects the physical health of our citizens. As a fitness mentor for women, she advocates for proactive wellness. As a philanthropist, she addresses food insecurity and childhood poverty. She has been instrumental in integrating the Asian Indian community into the broader civic fabric of Springfield.”

Pandey-Kochar is honored to be a Women of Influence recipient, but says, “This isn’t my award. My bio is due to a team effort and the support and love I have around me.”

JENNIFER GILL (ALUMNA)

By Karen Ackerman Witter

Jennifer Gill is a champion for Springfield School District 186 – its students, staff, teachers, administrators and families, but her influence extends far beyond the district. She is a collaborator and deeply engaged in the community. Gill is retiring as District 186 superintendent on June 30 after 12 years of outstanding leadership. A product of Springfield public schools, she has given back to the same community that shaped her – as a teacher, principal, administrator and superintendent.

Gill was raised in a family of educators. She graduated from Springfield High School and earned a bachelor's degree in education from Eastern Illinois University and a master's degree in educational administration from University of Illinois Springfield. Gill began her teaching career in Jacksonville, then was a District 186 teacher, principal at both Vachel Lindsay Elementary and McClernand Elementary and district office administrator.

Gill is highly visible in the district, celebrating student and staff achievements and uplifting all who make learning possible. "Her approach is rooted in building trust through relationships, staying connected to the people she serves and ensuring our community knows its voice matters in shaping our schools and our future," wrote her nominator.

Gill has witnessed many changes and enormous challenges during her career. At a time when it was unheard of to walk through metal detectors, she visited a school in Chicago to gain insights to build a security plan that also makes people feel welcome. She implemented school safety measures as the nation experienced the horrors of school shootings. Gill said she is proud of the positive relationship developed with local law enforcement.

Gill is most proud of providing new and upgraded facilities for students, made possible by passing a one-cent sales tax in Sangamon County in 2017 for the Our Schools Our Future initiative. Facility improvements are now evident in schools throughout the city. Projects completed or planned total more than \$230 million.

The 10-year plan was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The day after the market reopened, Gill was on a market call selling alternate revenue bonds, which she described as an awe-inspiring experience. She saw firsthand how there is a global element to what happens here.

Gill also led the district through the unprecedented COVID-19 shutdown. A top priority was that no student had a barrier to access. Gill says there were many lessons learned throughout the pandemic, including the importance of everyone having access to a device and thinking about how students learn. She said there is no replacement for one-to-one student interaction with a teacher, but there were also opportunities to effectively use online learning, which are continuing today.

Gill said she is "in awe of the resiliency, creativeness and willingness of teachers to learn differently" and is impressed with what they were able to accomplish.

Current challenges are how to manage the use of cellphones and how to use AI in the right way. Her focus is to constantly try to keep a great education in ever-changing circumstances.

Under Gill's leadership, the district developed partnerships with organizations such as Compass for Kids, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Springfield Urban League, YMCA and Kidzeum. Through a partnership with Compass for Kids, summer school was expanded to full day with field trips and enrichment activities.

Ensuring students are college and career-ready is also a priority for Gill. Through a collaboration with Memorial Health System, students are learn-



photo by Zach Adams

ing about the vast career opportunities in health care. Gill is also passionate about how the district serves students with special needs through age 22.

Gill is president of the board of directors of the Large Unit District Association, advocating for public education and collaboration among school leaders across Illinois. She serves on the boards of the Springfield Sangamon Growth Alliance, Memorial Health System and YMCA of Springfield. She was board chair of the Greater Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce and campaign co-chair for the United Way of Central Illinois. Gill participates in the Faith Coalition for the Common Good, helping build bridges among schools and families.

"Superintendent Jennifer Gill built strong partnerships with local businesses, creating benefits for both the school district and the broader economy," said Mike Murphy, president and CEO of The Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce. "She was intentional about engaging with employers to understand their expectations for graduating students. She also recognized the important role a high-quality school system plays in attracting and retaining businesses within the community."

Terrance Jordan will follow Gill as superintendent, and their relationship goes back two decades.

"I wouldn't be in this position without her mentorship," Jordan said.

He first met Gill when he was a parent educator while she was a principal. They worked together to change what family engagement looks like, and they've worked side-by-side on many issues since. Jordan says Gill puts kids first and keeps the community at the forefront.

Gill is very proud of District 186. "There are great things going on in our schools," Gill said. "I hold my teachers above any." She invites anyone to visit a school and see. She cites the importance of being future-focused, working together and engaging her cabinet and also union leaders.

Gill says she hopes to be remembered as a superintendent who supported her teachers and administrators and gave people the tools they need.

"I tried my best to be collaborative with my schools and my communities."

Congratulations to the 2026 WOMEN OF INFLUENCE

Barbara Malany

Helen Moose

Dr. Richa Pandey-Kochar

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Security Bank is the founding sponsor of the Women of Influence, which allows us to recognize local women for their outstanding contributions to our community. As a local bank with several female officers and directors, we are incredibly proud to recognize these women for their leadership both in their professional and personal lives.



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A post-pandemic reset in local staffing

Skills mismatch, talent shortages are still challenges

By Lynn Whalen

Express Employment Professionals' Kayla Edwards, the managing partner overseeing the Springfield, Jacksonville and Bloomington locations, sees a post-pandemic reset in staffing.

"After a period of elevated demand and fluctuation coming out of the pandemic, the staffing industry is seeing a more balanced and sustainable phase," she said. "Employers are once again able to focus on building a high-performing, skilled workforce to drive revenue and improve efficiencies."

Vikki Whitefoot, director of recruiting and consulting services for Levi, Ray and Shoup, Inc., has hired thousands of IT consultants over her nearly 20 years in the position. She agrees that hiring has stabilized.

"I'd say we're in a better place than we were a year ago. Job orders from clients are up, placements are up, conversations with clients are more grounded, with more intention behind their hiring. Staffing has always been cyclical; that's the nature of the business."

However, talent shortages are no longer cyclical – they're long-term, according to Edwards. "Demographics are working against supply as a large portion of the workforce is aging out. Retirements in skilled trades and industrial roles are outpacing new entrants. Fewer younger workers are entering trades, as they've been enticed to pursue four-year degrees. Finding an electrician, plumber or carpenter to come to your home will be increasingly difficult."

Also, skills mismatch is widening. "Advanced manufacturing now requires technical aptitude, certifications and problem-solving. Accounting and administrative roles increasingly require new software and AI proficiency," Edwards said. "Jobs are evolving faster than the talent pipeline."

Whitefoot said talent shortages in three IT areas – security, data and AI – are most acute. But she added if you're an IT professional who can solve real business problems, clients will bring you on board.

Talent drift, with high school graduates choosing to attend college out of state, is a continuing problem, according to Edwards.

"Illinois is losing many of our college-bound students to other states, and too many don't come back. That puts more pressure on

employers to find and develop talent locally. What we're seeing really isn't a temporary shortage – it's structural. Across skilled trades, accounting, administrative and legal roles, there are simply fewer people entering the workforce with the right skills, while experienced workers are retiring. At the same time, jobs are becoming more technical and specialized. That combination is creating a long-term imbalance that employers can't solve with traditional hiring alone."

Shannon Heisler, director of marketing and corporate communications at Levi, Ray & Shoup, Inc., said LRS is working to combat that talent drift. "At the corporate level, where we hire people to work in headquarters for our different divisions, we're seeing that drift. We try to combat it with a robust internship program where we make connections early with students to try and keep them in central Illinois."

Workers today are looking for flexibility, career growth and support for their well-being, and increasingly prefer control of their work schedule. Also, there is an increase in flexible and contract work.

"Employers are prioritizing flexibility to manage costs and uncertainty," Edwards said. "They're using staffing firms to scale workforce up or down quickly. There's shift in the industry from transactional recruiting to true workforce partnerships. Employers aren't just looking to fill roles – they need flexible, strategic solutions to navigate ongoing labor shortages and changing workforce expectations."

Whitefoot said hiring evolves with each generation. Companies must adapt, figure out what's important to their workforce and build a culture where employees feel supported.

How is AI reshaping recruiting and staffing? Edwards said AI has moved from experimental to operational in the staffing industry.

"AI is improving efficiencies across multiple functions such as sourcing, screening and scheduling. Recruiters are shifting toward relationship-building and advisory roles. Express Employment Professionals is adopting new systems including an AI assessment tool providing more accurate and meaningful insights into candidates' proficiencies."

Whitefoot pointed out that AI can also create challenges in hiring. "Companies are seeing that AI is creating great resumes for every position, so while you used to be able to look at a resume and determine if it was a good fit, now you have to use something to combat the use of AI in resumes and interviews."

There is concern among IT workers, and others, that AI might replace them. However, Whitefoot believes that while AI is a powerful tool in the IT industry, humans are still needed to design systems and evaluate what works for individual companies.

"If anything, the demand for people who can think critically and solve problems has gone up, not down," she said. "The work is evolving, but that's always been true in tech. If anything, AI has made the need for STEM education even more important. We need to continue to build the pipeline for tech talent."

To that end, LRS is reaching out to students as young as junior high. "The sooner we can get them excited about STEM and tech, the better," said Heisler. LRS recently participated in a central Illinois STEM event in Rochester and an event targeting eighth graders sponsored by the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology, stressing to students the importance of logic, problem-solving and critical thinking as they prepare for their careers.

Last year, it was predicted that more employers would require employees to work onsite, rather than remotely. That trend is continuing.

"As more people are available for positions, companies are finding it is better to have them on site, at least at a hybrid level, for collaboration and cost-effectiveness," Whitefoot said. "We prefer a hybrid environment here at LRS."

In central Illinois, the workforce challenges are real, especially in skilled roles, concluded Edwards. "What's changed is that companies are no longer asking if they should partner with staffing firms – they're asking how to use them more strategically to stay competitive."

Lynn Whalen has a background in broadcast journalism and higher education public relations, most recently as Chief Communications Officer at Lincoln Land Community College.

STAFFING FIRMS

Sources: The Staffing Firms.
Ranked by number of full-time in-office employees.

	NAME/ADDRESS	PHONE/WEBSITE/EMAIL	FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES	PART-TIME EMPLOYEES	LOCAL EXECUTIVE(S)	AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION	YEAR EST'D
1	Express Employment Professionals 3000 Professional Drive Springfield, IL 62703	217-528-3000 expresspros.com/springfieldil jobs.springfieldil@expresspros.com	24	0	Kayla Edwards, managing partner J.T. Britton, franchise partner Zachery Britton, director of skilled trades	Accounting, administrative, customer service, skilled trades, engineering and industrial positions. Workforce strategies including temporary, contract and direct placement.	1980
2	Manpower 2719 W. Monroe St., Suite A Springfield, IL 62704	217-528-2323 manpowerillinois.com springfield.il@manpower.com	11	2	Ginette Comstock, director of operations Angela Rhode, regional manager	Temporary, temp to hire, permanent placement staffing, professional, administrative, industrial, accounting, customer service, HR services, direct-hire, on-site services	1948
3	LRS Consulting Services 2401 W. Monroe St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-793-3800 LRSConsultingServices.com Email through website contact page	5	0	Dick Levi, chairman Ryan Levi, CEO Greg Matthews, COO	IT engineering staffing.	1979
4	StaffQuick 460 N. Main St. Chatham, IL 62629	217-787-9400 staffquickjobs.com chatham@staffquickjobs.com	3	0	Morgan Edmiston, vice president Julie Scheller branch manager	Full-service staffing agency including temp and direct-hire, clerical, light industrial, professional and executive HR consulting and outplacement services.	2002
4	Innovative Staff Solutions 1425 Stevenson Drive Springfield, IL 62703	217-585-1620 www.staffsolutions.com	3	0	Derek Meinhart, owner Allison Kersey, branch manager	Workforce management company offering staffing solutions for temporary, temp-to-hire, direct-hire and on-site management. We place candidates for professional, administrative and light industrial positions.	1994

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Sources: The individual companies.
Ranked by number of local full-time employees.

	NAME/ADDRESS	PHONE WEBSITE/EMAIL	# OF LOCAL EMPLOYEES	OWNER/MANAGER	PRIMARY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES OFFERED	MAJOR BRANDS	YEAR EST'D
1	CDS Office Technologies 612 S. Dirksen Parkway Springfield, IL 62703	217-528-8936 cdsot.com info@cdsot.com sales@cdsot.com	128	Mark Watson, president	Managed IT services, managed print solutions, copiers/printers, office supplies and business furniture.	Konica-Minolta, Lexmark, Sharp, HP, Panasonic Toughbooks, Cisco Meraki, Fortinet, Ubiquiti, Microsoft Gold Partner, Office 365, CDS cloud-based phone systems, HP Enterprise, 3CX Phone Systems and more.	1971
2	Watts Copy Systems, Inc. 2860 Stanton Ave. Springfield, IL 62703	217-529-6697 wattscopy.com watts@wattscopy.com	81	Carol Watts, president	Copiers /multifunctional devices (MFD), desktop multifunction printers (MFP), desktop printers, managed print services (MPS), interactive display systems/digital signage, software solutions, water filtration systems, scanners, Wellsys Water and Ice Systems.	Authorized Sharp Dealer, Authorized Kyocera Dealer, HP	1981
3	Office Depot 3129 S. Veterans Parkway Springfield, IL 62704	217-698-4825 officedepot.com ods00323@officedepot.com kevin.pologruto@officedepot.com	28	Kevin Pologruto	Office supplies, office furniture, office equipment, copy and print services, marketing services, tech services, IT services, shipping services and shredding services.	HP, Lenovo, Avery, Epson, Canon, Uni-ball, Dell, Brother, Serta, Swingline	1995
4	Wiley Interiors 301 E. Laurel St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-544-2766 wileyinteriors.com springfield@wileyinteriors.com	18	Zachary Hoffman and Diane Beauchamp	A full-service contract furniture company, providing interior design, sales, project management and installation services.	Herman Miller, Knoll, Design Within Reach, Geiger, Nemschoff, Kimball International, National, Lacasse, Via Seating, ESI	1958
5	Resource One 321 E. Adams St. Springfield, IL 62701	217-753-5742 resourceoneoffice.com cdavis2@resourceone.com info@resourceoneoffice.com	20	Cindy Davis, Lauren Nevius	Contract/commercial furniture for office, health care, education and hospitality spaces, project management, delivery and installation, design and space planning services, modular interior construction solutions, solar shades, acoustical solutions, pre-owned furniture, custom millwork.	Preferred Haworth dealer, AIS, OFS, Kimball, JSI, HON, SitOnIt, Quality Cabinets, Hunter-Douglas	1987
5	GFI Digital, Inc. 1846 W. Jefferson St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-303-6776 gfidigital.com areiss@gfidigital.com	16	Bruce Gibbs	Managed IT services and hardware, managed print solutions, copiers, printers, document management, scanning, data backup and security, SIEM solutions, VOIP, camera systems, PCs, laptops, business telephony/VOIP phone systems, servers and data centers.	Ricoh, Sharp, HP, Barracuda, Cisco, VMware, EMC, HP Enterprises, Datto, Meraki, Dell, Verkada	1999
6	Tom Day Business Machines 3308 Cockrell Lane Springfield, IL 62711	217-529-8282 tomdaybusinessmachines.com	14	Dale Smith president	Manage Print Service. Copiers/printers/multifunctional devices, paper shredders, reverse osmosis water coolers.	Ricoh, Toshiba, HP, MBM and Wellsys	1981
7	CORInstallation Furniture & Supply LLC 500 North St., Suite 19 Springfield, IL 62704 (by appointment)	217-210-8808 corinstallation.com info@corinstallation.com	8	Corina "Cori" J. Williams-Blair	Office furniture, K-12 and higher education furniture, interior design and space planning, installation and reconfiguration, flooring and window treatments.	Sunline, Indiana Furniture, AIS, VIA Seating, Groupe Lacasse, OFS, Carolina, Pallas Textiles	2018
8	Richards and Stehman 317 E. Monroe St. Springfield, IL 62701	217-522-6801 rscustomproducts.com sales@rscustomproducts.com	3	Katherine Dobron	Rubber stamps, small engraved signs, name badges, plaques, awards, embossing seals, stamp inks and solvents, notary supplies, notary service	Shiny, Colop, Trodat, JP Plus	1954

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U of I law students turn AI into a legal-tech startup

By Annie Fulgenzi

The rapid rise of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT has forced educators into a difficult position: How should students be using this technology?

Some institutions have moved to restrict it, while others are experimenting with ways to integrate it into the classroom. At the University of Illinois College of Law, a group of entrepreneurs are seizing the moment and turning AI into the foundation for a new startup.

On any given day, the law school looks much as it always has. Students sift through dense casebooks, compile outlines and prepare for final exams that often determine their entire grade. The structure of legal education hasn't changed. But the tools students use to navigate it are beginning to.

Enter NomosLearning – an AI-powered platform created by Illinois law students who saw an opportunity not only to improve how they learn, but to step into the startup arena themselves.

Co-founder Bobby Mannis, a 2025 College of Law graduate, said the idea for NomosLearning didn't originally start as a business plan. In 2023, Mannis began using ChatGPT to study for his classes, spending hours learning how to prompt the technology effectively. That semester, he received three awards for earning the highest grade in his classes.

"I had learned how to use AI for my studying really successfully, but I had spent hours and hours and hours trying to figure out how to ask AI the right questions and how to get it to give me the right feedback," Mannis said. "And I thought, I wish that other students could have easy access to the hard work that I put in to figure out how to get AI to work for me."

Mannis took his idea to Harrison Grias, a software engineer and fiancé of a fellow classmate, and asked if they could build something that would work for other students: "That was the genesis of NomosLearning," Mannis said.

NomosLearning was built to address a gap in how law students prepare for exams, said Mannis. Specifically, the platform addresses the lack of realistic practice problems.

"The way law students are tested is unusual," he said. "You're given a hypothetical



Jeff Wright, a second-year law student, uses the NomosLearning platform in a study area on the University of Illinois College of Law campus. PHOTO BY ANNIE FULGENZI

scenario and have to break down the law into its elements, then apply the facts to determine whether those elements are met."

While some professors may provide a limited number of those hypotheticals, Mannis said students often need far more repetition to be fully prepared. NomosLearning uses artificial intelligence to generate those practice scenarios on demand, giving students what he described as "more at-bats" ahead of exams. Then, it provides tailored feedback on student responses to help refine their legal analysis and writing skills.

Mannis said feedback from students has been overwhelmingly positive, both at U of I's campus and beyond. "We have hundreds of users at the University of Illinois, where we have an institutional partnership, and also students at schools like Loyola, Harvard, Stanford and UC Berkeley," he said.

But the response hasn't been limited to students. Mannis said meetings with U of I's law professors – initially ranging from skeptical to curious – have also played a key role in shaping the platform.

While developing NomosLearning, the student co-founders worked with roughly a dozen professors at Illinois' College of Law to refine its content and functionality. Faculty provided detailed feedback on both legal accuracy and writing structure, helping ensure the platform teaches not only correct analysis but also how to communicate it effectively.

That collaboration has since expanded into classroom use.

Through a feature called "NomosProfessor," instructors piloting the program at U of I create customized hypotheticals, model answers and grading rubrics, allowing

students to practice with materials tailored directly to their course.

The tool also gives professors new visibility into student performance. A built-in dashboard highlights trends in student responses, showing which legal issues students consistently understand and where they struggle, allowing instructors to adjust their teaching in real time.

"It's been exciting to see that what we're building isn't just helpful for students," Mannis said, "but can actually change how classes are taught."

Gabriela De La Llana, a third-year law student at U of I and the company's founding growth manager, joined the team after initially using NomosLearning during its early pilot phase in fall 2024. After seeing its potential, she wanted to help bring it to a broader audience.

Unlike general AI tools, De La Llana said NomosLearning is designed to guide students through the reasoning process rather than simply provide answers.

"It's not going to do the thinking for you," she said. "But it can help you develop your own thinking if it's used the right way."

De La Llana said having current students and recent graduates leading the startup gives NomosLearning a unique advantage as students prepare for a profession where AI literacy is increasingly expected.

"The world that's preparing legal professionals today is not the same as it was 10 or 20 years ago," De La Llana said. "Students and recent graduates are often closest to the changing expectations of the profession. We're hearing directly from employers in job interviews what they want to see. Some expect AI literacy, some don't, but it's clearly becoming part of the reality."

Still, Mannis said one of the biggest challenges has been overcoming skepticism around AI's role in the education landscape: "A lot of people are nervous about it," he said. "But when they actually see what we're doing, they realize it's not replacing learning. It's helping students learn better." SBJ

Annie Fulgenzi is a law student at University of Illinois. She previously interned at Springfield Business Journal and Illinois Times while studying journalism at SIUE.



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2	Sorling, Northrup, Hanna, Cullen & Cochran 1 N. Old State Capitol Plaza, Suite 200 Springfield, IL 62701	217-544-1144 sorlinglaw.com	25	13	John A. Kauerauf Michelle L. Blackburn Brian D. Jones Lisa A. Petrilli Joshua J. Watson	General business law, estate planning, litigation, health care, governmental relations, insurance, banking, utility regulation, environmental, family, employment	1945
3	Giffin, Winning, Cohen & Bodewes PC 900 Community Drive Springfield, IL 62703 102 N. Westgate Ave., Suite B Jacksonville, IL 62650 108 E. Wood St., Hillsboro	217-525-1571 gwcbllaw.com aknowski@giffinwinning.com	11	6	Creighton Castle	Litigation practice, legislative/governmental affairs, real estate development, business, commercial, banking, estate planning, probate, family law, election law	1911
3	Kanoski Bresney 2730 S. MacArthur Blvd. Springfield, IL 62704	217-523-7742 KBinjurylaw.com info@kanoski.com	11	1	Todd Bresney	Individual serious personal injury, truck collisions, motorcycle collisions, workers' compensation, wrongful death, product liability, nursing home negligence	1979
4	Rammelkamp Bradney PC 232 W. State St. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-6177 rblawyers.net info@rblawyers.net	10	6	Amy L. Jackson	Business and corporate, real estate, estate planning, probate, general litigation, insurance, employment, municipal, utilities, education	1895
5	HeplerBroom LLC 4340 Acer Grove Drive Springfield, IL 62711	217-528-3674 heplerbroom.com tbozarth@heplerbroom.com	8	4	Troy Bozarth	Insurance defense, personal injury, corporate and business law, probate, utilities, banking, medical malpractice defense, employment, commercial litigation, environmental and legislative/governmental affairs.	1894
5	Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP 400 S. Ninth St., Suite 200 Springfield, IL 62701	217-528-7375 hinshawlaw.com	8	3	Charles Schmadeke	Business and corporate practice, governmental affairs, insurance litigation, real estate, business formation, financing and other transactions	1934
6	FeldmanWasser 1307 S. Seventh St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-544-3403 feldman-wasser.com info@feldman-wasser.com	6	5	Howard Feldman	Civil litigation, construction law, divorce, related family law, wills, employment law	1987
6	Barber, Segatto, Hoffee, Wilke & Cate LLP 831 E. Monroe St. Springfield, IL 62701	217-544-4868 barberlaw.com	6	5	Matthew J. Cate	General civil litigation and appellate practice, estate planning, probate, banking, corporate, business and family law, real estate, media, tax.	1897
6	Sgro, Hanrahan, Durr, Rabin & Reinbold LLP 1119 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-789-1200 casevista.com greg@casevista.com alex@casevista.com	6	5	Gregory P. Sgro	A general practice law firm representing individuals and businesses	1999
7	Heyl Royster 4205 Wabash Ave. Springfield, IL 62711	217-522-8822 firm@heyloyroyster.com	5	3	Theresa M. Powell	Personal injury defense litigation, workers' compensation, employment law, medical and professional liability defense, insurance litigation, appellate practice, business and transactional law, civil rights	1910
8	Delano Law Offices LLC 1 SE Old State Capitol Plaza Springfield, IL 62701	217-544-2703 delanolaw.com	4	n/a	Sarah Delano Pavlik	Personal injury, workers' compensation, medical malpractice, estate planning and probate, business planning and transactions, real estate, family law	1967



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8	Graham & Graham Ltd. 1201 S. Eighth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-523-4569 rjwilderson@ggtdlaw.com	4	4	Richard Wilderson Bradley Huff Nancy Eckert-Martin Nathan Wetzel	General trial practice, medical-related litigation, business transactions, real estate, health law, probate	1897
8	Bellatti, Fay, Bellatti & Beard LLP 816 W. State St. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-7111 bellattilaw.com	4	3	Daniel J. Beard Thomas L. Veith Jeffrey L. Soltermann	Business and commercial, estate planning, probate, real estate, banking, municipal	1876
8	Hart, Southworth & Witsman 1 N. Old State Capitol Plaza, Suite 501 Springfield, IL 62701	217-753-0055	4	3	Mike Southworth Samuel J. Witsman Timothy J. Rigby	Business law, real estate, banking, corporate, probate, estate planning, special needs estate planning, municipal tax-exempt financing	1985
8	Stratton, Moran, Reichert and Sronce 725 S. Fourth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-528-2183	4	4	Bruce Stratton, Ret. William F. Moran III Justin Reichert Greg Sronce Andrew Affrunti	Family law, estate planning, criminal law, traffic, real estate, health care, appeals, corporate and business law, labor law, elder law, personal injury, municipal law, workers' compensation, DUI	1980
8	Scott & Scott PC 611 E. Monroe St., Suite 200 Springfield, IL 62701	217-753-8200 scottandscottlaw.com	4	4	R. Stephen Scott Gregory A. Scott Jared M. Scott Pamela Hart	Family, tax, commercial, bankruptcy, real estate, personal injury, estate planning, probate, corporate, general litigation, elder law	1947
8	Drake, Narup & Mead PC 107 E. Allen St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-528-9776 dnmpc.com	4	3	Christian D. Biswell	Trial attorneys, personal injury, insurance defense, general practice, medical malpractice	1989
8	The Law Offices of Frederick W. Nessler & Associates Ltd. 536 N. Bruns Lane, Suite 1 Springfield, IL 62702	217-698-0202 nesslerlaw.com	4	3	Frederick W. Nessler	Personal injury, workers' compensation, medical malpractice, wrongful death, clergy misconduct, nursing home abuse, social security	1977
8	Bellatti, Barton, Cochran & White LLC 944 Clocktower Drive, Suite A Springfield, IL 62s704	217-793-9300 bellatti-barton.com lawyers@bellatti-barton.com	4	3	Michael G. Barton	Estate planning, probate, trust, real estate, business planning and income tax for farmers and landowners.	1987
8	Frazier, Sabin & Schlosser LLP 1231 S. Eighth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-753-4242 217-522-9010 linkprotect.cudasvc.com/ info@springfieldlaw.com	4	3	N/A	Commercial and real estate transactions, commercial litigation, criminal state and federal defense, personal injury, workers' compensation, malpractice, DUI and traffic, divorce and family law, federal and state appeals	2026
9	Cassiday Schade LLP 2040 W. Iles Ave., Suite B Springfield, IL 62704	217-572-1714 cassiday.com jrupcich@cassiday.com	3	2	Joseph Rupcich Joy Syrcle	Personal injury defense litigation, transportation, premises, medical and professional liability defense, insurance defense litigation, appellate practice, civil rights, veterinary medicine	2014
9	Wolter, Beeman, Lynch & Dennis LLP 1001 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-753-4220 wblawyers.com wbl@wblawyers.com	3	3	Francis J. Lynch Brent A. Beeman Suzanne L. Dennis	Personal injury, professional malpractice, workers' compensation	1997
9	Livingstone, Mueller, Bima & Murphy PC 620 E. Edwards St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-525-1070 livingstonelaw.com	3	3	L. Robert Mueller Ken Bima Scott Murphy	Workers' compensation law	1953

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9	Edwards Group LLC 3223 S. Meadowbrook, Suite A Springfield, IL 62711	217-726-9200 edwardsgroupllc.com david@edwardsgroupllc.com	3	1	David Edwards	Estate planning and elder law	2008
9	Sheehan & Sheehan, Lawyers PC 1215 S. Fourth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-544-0701 sheehanlaw.net jr@sheehanlaw.net pat@sheehanlaw.net wps@sheehanlaw.net	3	3	Patrick J. Sheehan Patrick J. Sheehan III William P. Sheehan	Adoption, agricultural law, business/commercial law, estate planning and administration, probate, real estate, traffic offenses, personal injury	1960
9	Shay & Associates Law Firm LLC 1030 S. Durkin Drive Springfield, IL 62704	217-523-5900 www.shayandassociates.com shayandassociates@comcast.net	3	1	Timothy Shay	Civil litigation involving personal injury, medical malpractice and workers' compensation	1992
9	Edwards Group LLC 3223 S. Meadowbrook, Suite A Springfield, IL 62711	217-726-9200 edwardsgroupllc.com david@edwardsgroupllc.com	3	1	David Edwards	Estate planning and elder law	2008
10	Zack Stamp, Ltd. 225 S. College St., Suite 100 Springfield, IL 62704	217-525-0700 zackstamp.net kmcfadden@601w.com	2	2	Kevin J. McFadden	Insurance and financial institution regulatory law, business law, military law, construction law	1997
10	Young Law Partners, P.C. 1300 S. Eighth St. Springfield IL 62703	217-544-8500 younglawpartnerspc.com info@lyblaw.com	2	2	Duane D. Young Stephen Iden	Family law, guardianship, adoption, elder law, probate, estates, medicaid planning, wills, trusts, social security, disability	1995
10	Berg & Robeson PC 1217 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-525-1917 bergandrobeson.com sberg@bergrobeson.com	2	1	Steve W. Berg	Petitioner's workers' compensation and plaintiff's personal injury	1988
10	Hennessy & Roach, P.C. 3940 Pintail Drive Springfield, IL 62711	217-726-0037 hennessyroach.com emiller@hennessyroach.com	2	2	Emilie A. Miller Steve Klyczek	Workers' compensation defense, general liability and civil litigation, labor and employment	1993
10	Vig Law 1100 S. Fifth St. Springfield IL 62703	217-241-5628 vig-law.com staff@vig-law.com	2	2	Sara Vig	DUI defense, state and federal criminal defense, traffic offenses, civil rights	2017
10	Kopec, White & Spooner 225 S. College St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-726-7540 springfield-law.com mkopec@kws-law.com dwhite@kws-law.com	2	2	A. Michael Kopec David V. White	Business planning, formation and transactions, contracts and franchise law, estate planning, wills, trusts and probate, civil litigation and trials, divorce and family law, and real estate	2008

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Women Entrepreneurs Central Illinois's May luncheon, May 13, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. at Illinois Educators Credit Union, 3101 Montvale Dr. Featured speaker will be Deb Sarsany of The Real Estate Group will discuss recent updates in the local real estate market. Lunch for non-members is \$30. To register for this event go to



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Matthew J. Cate	Barber Segatto Hoffee Wilke & Cate LLP	Springfield	217.544.4868	Commercial Lit; Creditor Rights/Comm Collect; RE: Comm; RE: Resident
Randy S. Paswater	Barber Segatto Hoffee Wilke & Cate LLP	Springfield	217.544.4868	Creditor Rights/Commercial Collections; Elder; Family; Trust/Will/Estate
Bernard G. Segatto III	Barber Segatto Hoffee Wilke & Cate LLP	Springfield	217.544.4868	Close/Private Held Business; Comm Lit; Land Use/Zoning; RE: Comm
Randall W. Segatto	Barber Segatto Hoffee Wilke & Cate LLP	Springfield	217.544.4868	Close/Private Held Business; Elder; Real Estate: Commercial
Brittany Kink Toigo	Barber Segatto Hoffee Wilke & Cate LLP	Springfield	217.544.4868	Family; Tax: Individual; Trust/Will/Estate
Barry Hines	Barry Hines - Attorney at Law	Springfield	217.953.4051	Agriculture; Real Estate: Commercial; Trust/Will/Estate
Michael Glenn Barton	Bellatti Barton Cochran & White LLC	Springfield	217.793.9300	Agriculture; Close/Priv Held; RE: Commercial; Tax: Indvd; Trust/Will/Estate
Mark S. Cochran	Bellatti Barton Cochran & White LLC	Springfield	217.793.9300	Agriculture; Environmental; Public Utilities; RE: Comm; Trust/Will/Estate
Andrew G. White	Bellatti Barton Cochran & White LLC	Springfield	217.793.9300	Agriculture; Energy; RE: Commercial; RE: Residential; Trust/Will/Estate
Robert A. Stuart Jr.	Brown Hay & Stephens LLP	Springfield	217.544.8491	Association/Non-Profit; Trust/Will/Estate
Joseph N. Rucpich	Cassiday Schade LLP	Springfield	217.993.5644	Civil Rights/Constitutional; Medical Malpractice Defense; PI Def: General
Joy C. Syrcle	Cassiday Schade LLP	Springfield	217.993.5643	Civil Rights/Constitutional; Med Mal Def; PI Def: General; Transport Def
Sarah Delano Pavlik	Delano Law Offices LLC	Springfield	217.544.2703	Close/Private Held Business; Trust/Will/Estate
Thomas Chester Pavlik Jr.	Delano Law Offices LLC	Springfield	217.544.2703	Close/Priv Held; Comm Lit; Creditor Rights; RE: Comm; Secured Transact
Betsy A. Blakeman	FeldmanWasser	Springfield	217.544.3403	Family
Ashley D. Davis	FeldmanWasser	Springfield	217.544.3403	Civil Rights/Constitutional; Family
Carl R. Draper	FeldmanWasser	Springfield	217.544.3403	Civil Rights/Constitution; Emp: Employee; False Claim Act/Whistle Blower
Howard W. Feldman	FeldmanWasser	Springfield	217.544.3403	Construction; Family; ADR: Family
Kelli Ellen Gordon	FeldmanWasser	Springfield	217.544.3403	Family
Stuart H. Shiffman	FeldmanWasser	Springfield	217.544.3403	Civil Appellate; Criminal Appellate; Criminal Def: Felonies/Misdemeanors
Stanley N. Wasser	FeldmanWasser	Springfield	217.544.3403	Construction
James R. Enlow	Gates Wise Schlosser & Goebel	Springfield	217.522.9010	Brnkpt: Individual; Brnkpt/Workout: Comm; Comm Lit; Land Use/Zoning
Gordon W. Gates	Gates Wise Schlosser & Goebel	Springfield	217.522.9010	Brnkpt/Wrkt:Comm; Close/Priv Held; Comm Lit; Land Use/Zone; RE: Comm
Todd M. Goebel	Gates Wise Schlosser & Goebel	Springfield	217.522.9010	Criminal Defense: DUI; Criminal Def: Felonies/Misd; Crim Def: White Collar
Frederick J. Schlosser	Gates Wise Schlosser & Goebel	Springfield	217.522.9010	Criminal Defense: DUI; Criminal Defense: Felonies/Misdemeanors
Bradley B. Wilson	Gates Wise Schlosser & Goebel	Springfield	217.522.9010	Civil Rights/Constitutional; Employment: Employee
Jason E. Brokaw	Giffin Winning Cohen & Bodewes PC	Springfield	217.525.1571	Civil Appellate; Employment: Management; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin
Creighton R. Castle	Giffin Winning Cohen & Bodewes PC	Springfield	217.525.1571	Association/Non-Profit; Close/Private Held; M&A; RE: Comm; Tax: Bus
David A. Herman	Giffin Winning Cohen & Bodewes PC	Springfield	217.525.1571	Comm Lit; Election; Gov't/Muni/Lobby/Admin; Insurance; Trust/Will/Estate
R. Mark Mifflin	Giffin Winning Cohen & Bodewes PC	Springfield	217.525.1571	Commercial Litigation; Government/Municipal/Lobbying/Administration
Christopher E. Sherer	Giffin Winning Cohen & Bodewes PC	Springfield	217.525.1571	Civil Appellate; Election; Family; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; Trust/Will/Estate
Matthew R. Trapp	Giffin Winning Cohen & Bodewes PC	Springfield	217.525.1571	Civil Appellate; Close/Private Held; Comm Lit; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin
Jason R. Vincent	Giffin Winning Cohen & Bodewes PC	Springfield	217.525.1571	Criminal Defense: DUI; Criminal Def: Felonies/Misdemeanors; Family
Thomas G. Hamill	Harrison LLP	Springfield	217.546.6940	Trust/Will/Estate
Todd A. Bresney	Kanoski Bresney	Springfield/Quincy	217.523.7742	Personal Injury: General
William J. Harrington	Kanoski Bresney	Springfield/Quincy	217.523.7742	Personal Injury: General
Robert M. Javoronok Jr.	Kanoski Bresney	Springfield/Quincy	217.523.7742	Personal Injury: General; Workers' Compensation
Kathy A. Olivero	Kanoski Bresney	Springfield/Quincy	217.523.7742	Workers' Compensation
John J. Waldman	Kanoski Bresney	Springfield/Quincy	217.523.7742	Personal Injury: General; Workers' Compensation
Jonathan T. Nessler	Law Offices of Frederick W Nessler & Assoc	Springfield	217.698.0202	Nursing Home Negligence; Personal Injury: General
Stephen Scott Morrill	Morrill & Fiedler LLC	Springfield	217.789.5411	Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin
James E. Neville	Neville Richards Zittel & Siegel LLC	Springfield	618.277.0900	Med Mal Def; PI Def: General; Prod Liab Def; Transprt Def; Toxic Torts Def
Timothy S. Richards	Neville Richards Zittel & Siegel LLC	Springfield	618.277.0900	Medical Mal Def; PI Def: General; Products Liability Def; Toxic Torts Def
Cheryl S. Neal	PNC Private Bank	Springfield	217.753.7130	Trust/Will/Estate



James A. Borland	Quinn Johnston	Springfield	217.753.1133	Personal Injury Defense: General; Products Liability Defense
James A. Hansen	Schmiedeskamp Robertson Neu & Mitchell	Quincy	217.223.3030	Commercial Lit; Med Male Def; PI Def: General; Products Liability Def
Harold Baker Oakley	Schmiedeskamp Robertson Neu & Mitchell	Quincy	217.223.3030	Close/Private Held; Health; Mergers/Acquisitions; Trust/Will/Estate
Michael M. Durr	Sgro Hanrahan Durr Rabin & Reinbold LLP	Springfield	217.789.1200	Close/Private Held; Comm Lit; RE: Assoc/Condo; RE: Comm; RE: Resident
Alex B. Rabin	Sgro Hanrahan Durr Rabin & Reinbold LLP	Springfield	217.789.1200	Close/Private Held; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; PI: General; Workers' Comp
Jeana Kim Reinbold	Sgro Hanrahan Durr Rabin & Reinbold LLP	Springfield	217.789.1200	Bnkprt: Individual; Bankruptcy/Workout: Comm; Cred Rts/Comm Collect
Gregory P. Sgro	Sgro Hanrahan Durr Rabin & Reinbold LLP	Springfield	217.789.1200	Land Use/Zoning; Pt: General; RE: Comm; RE: Finance; Trust/Will/Estate
Timothy M. Shay	Shay & Associates Law Firm LLC	Springfield	217.523.5900	Personal Injury: General; Personal Injury: Prof'l Malpractice; Work Comp
Nicholas T. Williams	Shay & Associates Law Firm LLC	Springfield	217.523.5900	Personal Injury: General
Michelle L. Blackburn	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Family; Trust/Will/Estate
James G. Fahey	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Civil Appellate; Employment: Management; Personal Injury Def: General
C. Clark Germann	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Close/Priv Held; Comm Lit; Gov/Muni/Lob/Admin; Min/Nat Rsrc; RE: Comm
Stephen F. Hedinger	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Animal; Environmental; Mineral/Natural Resource
Michael G. Horstman Jr.	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Assoc/Non-Profit; Close/Priv Held; RE: Comm; Tax: Ind; Trust/Will/Estate
Brian D. Jones	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Bank/Financial Instit; Close/Private Held; Employee Benefits; RE: Comm
John A. Kauerauf	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Association/Non-Profit; Close/Private Held; Employment: Management
Kirk W. Laudeman	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Medical Malpractice Def; PI Def: General; Prof'l Male Def; Transport Def
Brian D. Lee	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Civil Appellate; Commercial Lit; Employment: Mngmnt; PI Def: General
James M. Morpheu	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Election/Political/Campaign; Governmental/Municipal/Lobbying/Admin
Lisa A. Petrilli	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Commercial Lit; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; Land Use/Zoning; RE: Comm
David A. Rolf	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Agriculture; Comm Lit; Land Use/Zoning; PI Def: General; RE: Comm
Roger L. Rutherford	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Governmental/Municipal/Lobbying/Adminstration; Trust/Will/Estate
Peggy J. Ryan	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Family
John R. Simpson	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Tax: Individual; Trust/Will/Estate
Stephen A. Tagge	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Banking; Close/Priv Held; Comm Lit; Cred Rts/Comm Collect; RE: Comm
Joshua J. Watson	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Family
Matthew A. Brewer	Stephen P Kelly Attorney at Law	Springfield	217.544.8000	Workers' Compensation

These EMERGING LAWYERS have been identified by their peers to be among the TOP LAWYERS in Illinois who are age 40 or younger OR who have been admitted to the practice of law for 10 or fewer years.

Samantha A. Bobor	Giffin Winning Cohen & Bodewes PC	Springfield	217.525.1571	Employment: Mngmnt; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; Labor: Mngmnt; School
Jackson B. Fredman	Giffin Winning Cohen & Bodewes PC	Springfield	217.525.1571	Civil Appell; Comm Lit; Family Appellate; Family; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin
Benjamin M. Sgro	Sgro Hanrahan Durr Rabin & Reinbold LLP	Springfield	217.789.1200	Personal Injury: General; RE: Commercial; RE: Residential; Workers' Comp
Stephanie I. Shay-Williams	Shay & Associates Law Firm LLC	Springfield	217.523.5900	Personal Injury: General; Workers' Compensation
Aaron D. Evans	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Close/Priv Held; RE: Comm; RE: Resident; RE: Finance; Trust/Will/Estate
Laken Smaha	Sorling Northrup	Springfield	217.544.1144	Family

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Two law firms to merge

By Angela Mueller



Left to right: Attorneys Scott Sabin, Riley Hamilton, Rick Frazier and Fred Schlosser in front of the law office at 1231 S. Eighth St., which will become known as Frazier, Sabin and Schlosser as of June 1. PHOTO BY ZACH ADAMS

As Gordon Gates, managing partner at Gates, Wise and Schlosser, is preparing for retirement, the law firm bearing his name is finalizing the details of a merger with another local firm.

Gates, Wise and Schlosser PC and Frazier and Sabin LLP are merging to become Frazier, Sabin and Schlosser. The merger should be complete by June 1, the same day Gates plans to retire from the day-to-day practice of law.

The many already existing connections and relationships between the two firms made the merger a natural move, Scott Sabin said. Sabin and his partner, Rick Frazier, as well as Fred Schlosser, of Gates, Wise and Schlosser, worked together with longtime Springfield criminal defense lawyer Michael Metnick early in their careers and continued to be familiar with each other's work as they went on to different firms.

"We continued to be friends and have worked together at different times over the past 30 years," Sabin said. "We've had complementary practices, and with Gordon retiring, the opportunity to work together again has come full circle."

Retirements in recent years have left both firms with fewer practicing lawyers, which made a merger even more attractive.

"We've shared cases, bounced things off each other for 25, 30 years," Schlosser said. "In light of attrition due to retirement of lawyers, it just made sense from a business standpoint to consolidate the firms."

With the merger, the new firm will be a "full-service shop," Schlosser said, offering legal services ranging from criminal defense, personal injury and civil rights to family law and business transactions.

"It really is a general practice in the grand sense," Sabin said. "We'll be able to meet the needs of a wide audience."

Sabin and his team will be vacating their offices in the Myers Building at 1 W. Old State Capitol Plaza, where they have been located for the past 30 years, to move to Gates, Wise and Schlosser's current offices at 1231 S. Eighth St. Sabin said the firm has maintained the same office space even as attorneys have retired and left the practice, so a move made sense.

"It seemed like an obvious move for us to

come over here," Sabin said.


Sabin, Frazier and two support staff members will be making the transition to the new firm.

In another full-circle connection between the two firms, Riley Hamilton, an associate at Gates, Wise and Schlosser, had been wooed by both Gates, Wise and Schlosser and Frazier and Sabin when he returned to the Springfield market after practicing law in the St. Louis region.

"We were both vying for his attention," Schlosser said. Hamilton will continue as an associate at the newly merged firm.

Gates also will be staying on as counsel "for a period of time" to ensure a smooth transition, Schlosser said.

Sabin and Schlosser said the merged firm's goal is to continue to serve clients in the same manner that the two firms have for the past three decades.

"Our goal is to have clients from both firms not recognize much of a change other than on the letterhead," Schlosser said. 

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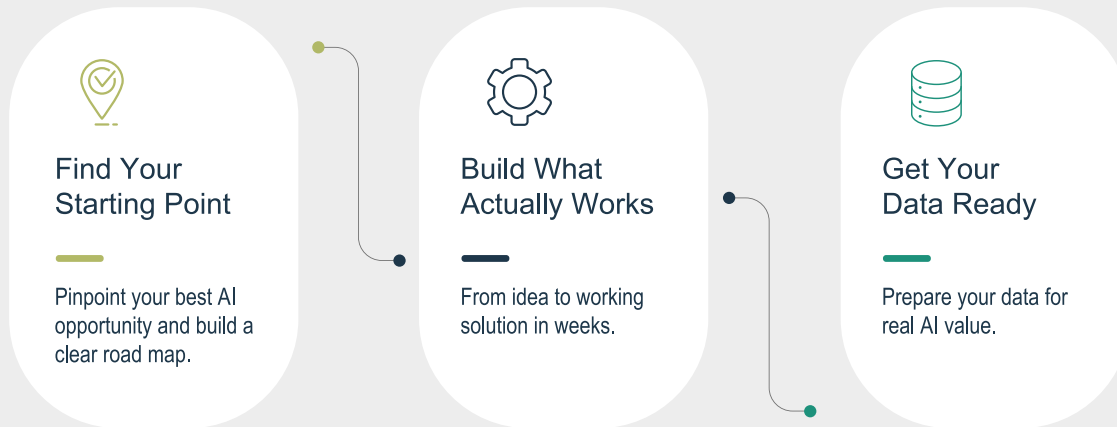
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Practicing law is nothing like it looks on TV

By Thomas C. Pavlik Jr.

Myth versus reality

All too often, people's perceptions and beliefs about lawyers and the practice of law are formed from watching any number of TV shows. Television law emphasizes high-stakes drama, surprise evidence and rapid courtroom victories, while the reality involves months of methodical, behind-the-scenes research, negotiations and settlements. Real lawyers rarely rely on theatrical courtroom speeches, as most cases are resolved through paperwork, procedural rules and strategic planning rather than surprise confessions or shocking testimony.

So, let's take some time to dispel some myths that people might believe and take a look at the reality of practicing law.

The law is not fast-paced

In TV law, most matters are resolved quickly proceeding from initial meeting with the client to trial in a matter of weeks. Reality is quite different, because the law moves about as quickly as my first computer from 1985.

Most lawsuits in Sangamon County take at least a year, typically more, to resolve. Initial pleadings and motions can take months. Then there's discovery, which is the exchange of information between parties, both written and through depositions, that can take even longer.

After that, most cases proceed to summary judgment, which are written motions asking the court to find that, as a matter of law, one party wins because there are no issues of fact to be resolved.

Most cases are resolved by settlement or at the summary judgment stage. Unlike TV, very few cases actually go to trial.

If you do head to trial, then there's a matter of scheduling, which can be difficult because criminal matters take priority due to the guaranty of a speedy trial in criminal cases. Also, keep in mind that a jury trial (as compared to a bench trial where the judge takes on the role of the jury) will be harder to schedule and more complicated to prepare for. Throw in the fact that continuances are routinely granted, and you can see why the process takes so long.

Transactional matters, such as the purchase or sale of real estate, are generally on a more accelerated timetable. But even with non-litigation matters things like due

diligence – surveys, inspections, title work – take longer than most clients expect.

Not everything ends up in court

Our judicial system encourages parties to resolve disputes outside of the courtroom. Sometimes clients are adamant that they want their "day in court" and are upset that their lawyer hasn't yet done so. The reality is that the lawyer is working behind the scenes to try to resolve their matter in the most effective way possible and in a manner most favorable to the client. A high percentage of cases never actually get filed in court, and of those that do, a high percentage get settled before trial.

Trials aren't all that exciting

Few trials result in that Perry Mason moment where the witness, withering under brutal cross examination, recants his testimony in a dramatic fashion with the judge then ruling from the bench with a verdict for one party.

Compared to TV, most trials are snooze-fests. The lawyers for both parties have goals laid out well in advance, with questions carefully planned and worded. In most instances, the significance of those questions and answers won't become evident until closing arguments when everything is tied together.

And speaking of closing arguments, they're rarely just five minutes long. They can be long – sometimes hours. A closing argument is like watching an attorney put together a puzzle - you'll see the big picture by the end, but until then it's just a lot of little pieces that only slowly start to fit together.

Lawyers are not experts in everything

It seems like TV lawyers are able to handle death penalty criminal trials one week, complex commercial litigation the next and then merger and acquisition work involving two publicly traded companies in the third week. I think that's a recipe for disaster in the real world.

First, clients need to understand that there's more to the law than the litigation that's typically seen on TV. There are all sorts of other areas of law such as tax, real estate, labor law, estate planning and appeals. But who would want to watch a one-hour

show about the trials and tribulations of a wealthy couple's estate-planning decisions? There's little drama in much of the law.

I generally tell clients that a lawyer who professes to be able to handle every area of the law won't be able to do so in a manner that will best serve the client. The reality is that the law is becoming increasingly complex and there's simply too much to be able to keep up with.

Even if your lawyer can take the time to become well-versed in a particular area of law, that doesn't mean it will be cost-effective for you. I tell my clients that if I don't feel I, or other members of my firm, have a particular familiarity with an area of law that I will refer them to someone who does. Sometimes, with niche areas of the law, that means reaching out to an attorney in Chicago or St. Louis where lawyers have more freedom to concentrate in discrete areas of law thanks to a larger pool of clients.

What do you call the doctor who graduated last in medical school?

Why, you call him or her doctor. My point is that there's a wide spectrum of lawyers out there, and not all lawyers are as skilled and accomplished as others.

Don't hesitate to ask your lawyer about his or her education and experience, and if they've ever handled a case like yours. Ask for referrals. Go to the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission (www.iardc.org) and see if your lawyer has ever been disciplined. Be an informed consumer of legal services and don't assume that all lawyers are equally competent.

Lawyers in Illinois are held to a strict code of ethical conduct. Lawyers who violate that code can be disciplined by the Illinois Supreme Court and can be suspended from the practice or even barred from practicing law again. Some of the dodgier things lawyers do on TV would almost certainly draw the ire of our higher court. Just know that there's a system in place in Illinois to regulate and monitor lawyer misconduct.

SBJ



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



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Springfield slated to lose ambulance provider

By Dean Olsen

LifeStar Ambulance Service Inc., one of three ambulance providers responding to 911 calls in Springfield and transporting patients to local hospitals, is slated to be barred from operating in Sangamon County after May 25 because of health care deficiencies cited by Springfield Memorial Hospital.

"We're working with our attorneys to try and come up with a solution where we can continue to stay with Springfield," John Wright, chief executive officer of Centralia-based LifeStar, told Illinois Times on April 14.

Springfield has been served by three privately operated ambulance services for at least 30 years. It's unclear whether a reduction to two ambulance services would result in slower ambulance response times in emergencies.

Springfield Fire Department Chief Nicholas Zummo said he was verbally informed by LifeStar about the company's situation. But he said he hasn't received any formal notice that Springfield Memorial Hospital plans to remove LifeStar from its emergency medical services (EMS) network, and so he declined further comment.

Wright said LifeStar responded to 859 emergency calls in the Springfield area in March and transported 696 patients to the hospital. Removing LifeStar from service in Springfield and Sangamon County "would definitely create a backlog for the city" and potentially increase wait times for ambulances, he said.

"You may have a chest pain that may sit for 20-30 minutes while you wait for an ambulance," Wright said.

However, Greg Chance, regional chief executive officer of Medics First, one of the two other ambulance services, said that if LifeStar ambulances were removed from Memorial's EMS system, he is confident Medics First and America Ambulance, the third provider, would be able to supply enough fully staffed ambulances to comply with the city ordinance and avoid any increases in wait times or lapses in service.

America Ambulance officials didn't respond to a request for comment.

LifeStar's reputation took a hit in the wake of



LifeStar Ambulance Service, 404 N. Second St., will be barred from operating in Sangamon County after May 25. PHOTO BY ZACH ADAMS

the December 2022 death of Springfield resident Earl Moore Jr., but Wright said Springfield Memorial officials didn't mention the Moore case in its critique of LifeStar.

Sangamon County Coroner Jim Allmon ruled Moore's death a homicide from "compressional and positional asphyxia" when he was placed on his stomach, rather than on his back, on an ambulance stretcher and then strapped in.

Moore's family filed a wrongful-death lawsuit against LifeStar. The case was settled out of court, and details of the settlement haven't been made public.

A Springfield city ordinance requires each of the three current providers – for-profit LifeStar, for-profit America Ambulance and nonprofit Medics First – to provide three ambulances for 911 calls at all times. If the number drops to two providers, the ordinance says each of those two providers must provide at least five ambulances. The city ordinance, similar to a Sangamon County government requirement for ambulances in other parts of the county, requires ambulances to be part of an EMS network.

LifeStar was cited by the city of Springfield in 2023 for providing an inadequate number of ambulances for emergency calls. The city's final administrative penalty against the company in May 2024 included a fine of \$38,950.

The company paid 10% of the total in May 2024 and is making payments of \$380 per month, Springfield Corporation Counsel Gregory Moredock said. The company still owes the city about

\$27,000, Moredock said.

EMS networks train and supervise paramedics and emergency medical technicians and sets the rules under which those professionals provide care for patients outside hospitals.

Nonprofit Springfield Memorial Hospital, which also supervises America and MedicsFirst through the hospital's EMS network, first took action in December 2025 to remove LifeStar from the network, Wright said.

According to Wright, Springfield Memorial faulted LifeStar for maintaining supplies of expired medicines in 2025 and for errors in documenting patient conditions.

Both situations were remedied, he said, adding that patients never received any expired medicines. A software glitch that caused documentation errors has been fixed, and patient care wasn't affected, he said.

Wright said LifeStar approached HSHS St. John's Hospital, which supervises an EMS network covering other ambulance providers, but was told by St. John's officials that the hospital doesn't have the capacity to consider adding LifeStar.

LifeStar appealed Springfield Memorial's decision to the Illinois Department of Public Health, Wright said. IDPH opted not to overturn Springfield Memorial's ruling but gave LifeStar additional time before the network removal took effect, he said. That's how the May 25 date for LifeStar's potential removal was set.

Springfield Memorial officials declined to comment specifically on the situation.

LifeStar, which operates in Springfield out of a building at 404 N. Second St., employs 65 people – 25 of them in Springfield, Wright said. The company has served Springfield since 1988.

LifeStar also serves the Jacksonville and Centralia areas, but the Springfield area is the busiest of the three in terms of 911 calls for service, and Springfield accounts for the biggest share of the company's business, he said.

"We definitely want to continue providing care to the community," Wright said. **SBJ**

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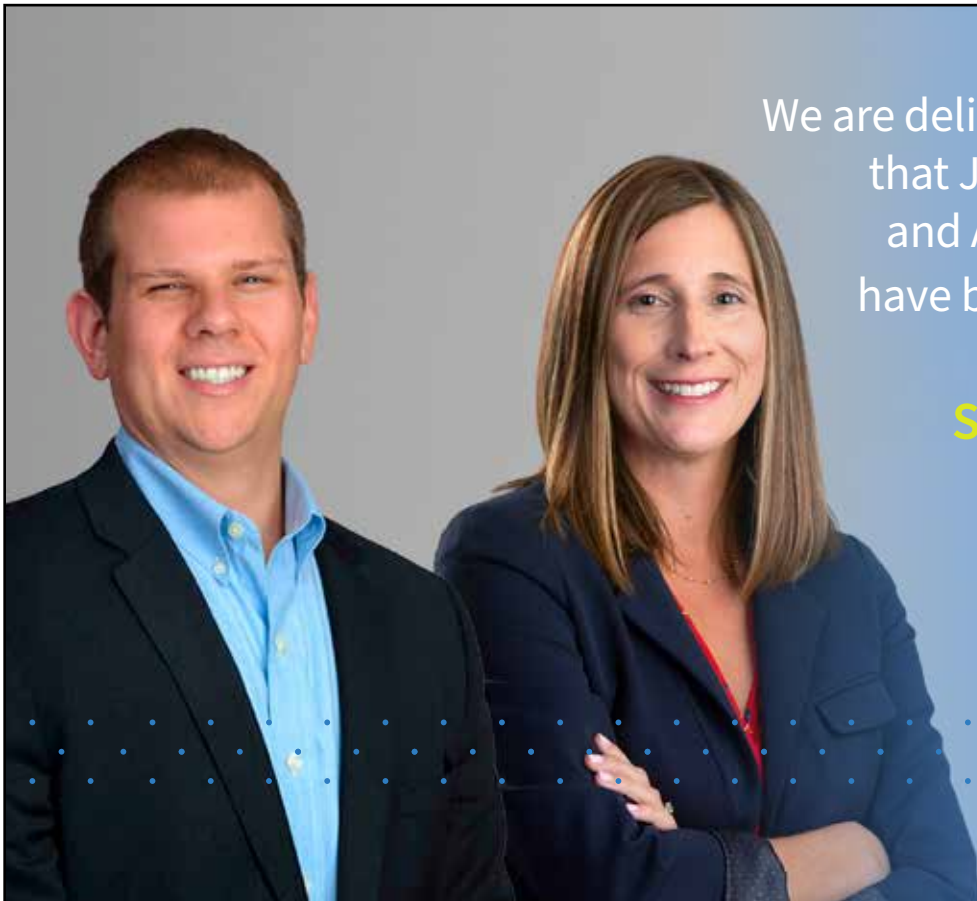
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Conflict resolution handled well leads to positive outcomes

by Kelly Gust

When employees don't click: Curing workplace conflict

Conflict at work is inevitable, and apparently very frequent, as I've been asked to advise on three different situations in the past month. It's surprising how bad chemistry can happen even among experienced professionals. Differences in personality, communication style, values or work pace can collide — sometimes quietly, sometimes loudly. No matter how it presents itself, one of the most common and disruptive challenges managers face is two employees who simply don't click. Left unaddressed, that friction can erode morale, productivity and even cause turnover. Handled well, however, it can become an opportunity for growth, accountability and stronger team dynamics.

Whether you're the employee who's struggling to get along with a peer or the manager supervising staff who are antagonizing each other, everyone will hopefully find tips to improve work relationships below.

Employees: Own your part of the equation

When conflict arises, our instinct is to focus on what the other person is doing wrong. While this reaction is human, it rarely leads to resolution. Effective conflict management starts with self-awareness.

First, reflect on the situation. What honestly is causing the tension? Is it a specific behavior, communication style or perhaps assumptions about intent? Distinguish the facts from how you're interpreting them. Saying "they interrupted me in the meeting" is clearer than "they don't respect me."

Second, take responsibility for your own behavior. Even if you believe the conflict isn't your fault, how you're responding matters. Are you avoiding the person, becoming brisk in emails or venting to co-workers around the water cooler? These behaviors may feel protective, but they only serve to

escalate the issue and drag others into the conflict.

Then, when the time is right, initiate a respectful conversation. This doesn't mean confronting your co-worker emotionally or accusatorially. Instead, frame concerns around impact and outcomes. For example: "When deadlines change without notice, it affects my ability to deliver high-quality work. I'd like us to talk through a better process." This signals professionalism and a shared goal of effectiveness.

Finally, know when to involve a manager. If you've attempted direct communication and the situation remains unresolved, or if the conflict is affecting your well-being or performance, it's appropriate to seek the support of your manager. Raising concerns is part of maintaining a healthy workplace.

For managers: Don't ignore it

No manager wants to be in the middle of employee conflict. The temptation to stay hands-off is strong, especially if the work is getting done. But unresolved conflict rarely stays contained. It shows up in passive resistance, strained team dynamics, declining trust and dysfunction.

Address issues early. Avoid leading with blame or assumptions about who is "right." Instead, focus on observable behaviors and business impact. Listen to each employee's perspective separately before bringing them together. This helps people feel heard and reduces defensiveness.

When facilitating a joint conversation, set clear expectations. The goal is not to rehash every past slight or determine who started it. The objective is to restore the ability for people to work together effectively. Encourage employees to articulate what they need to be successful and what behaviors must change moving forward. A manager's role is to keep the discussion grounded, respectful and solutions-focused.

It's also important to examine whether systems or roles are contributing to the problem. Ambiguous responsibilities, competing priorities or unclear decision authority can inflame personal tensions. Sometimes what looks like a personality clash is actually just a process failure.

Set clear standards... and enforce them

Clarity is your ally. Managers should reinforce expectations around professionalism, collaboration and communication consistently and fairly. Allowing poor behavior from high performers or long-tenured staff sends a powerful message that standards are optional. (Refer to a previous column on talented terrors.)

If conflict persists despite coaching and intervention, managers may need to take stronger action such as formal performance management in order to protect the team and the organization.

Turn conflict into capability

Handled well, conflict can sharpen emotional intelligence, improve communication and strengthen teams. For employees, mastering the technical skill needed in your job is expected, but mastering interpersonal relationships will take your career to the next level. For managers, addressing interpersonal conflict is a core leadership responsibility; not a distraction from "real work," but a driver of it.

The takeaway is simple: conflict ignored is conflict multiplied. But conflict managed with intention, clarity and accountability can become an opportunity for growth. **SBJ**



Kelly Gust is the founder and CEO of HR Full Circle, a Springfield-based consulting firm. She now supports talent development at O'Shea Builders, focusing on coaching, learning and building people programs that help individuals and teams succeed. For the past several years, she has written a monthly professional development column for Springfield Business Journal.



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Military Families Together meets the needs of local veterans

By Janet Seitz



MFT president and Gulf War veteran Connie Preston, left, vice president Mike Pawelczak and volunteer Stacie Cook at a Rumble Around the Lake event.
PHOTO COURTESY MILITARY FAMILIES TOGETHER

“Thank you for your service” is often said when encountering a member of the military or a veteran, given the many sacrifices involved. Military service can bring challenges and financial hardships for military families. When Mike and Shelly Pawelczak attended their son’s graduation from Marine boot camp in August 2022, they were grateful they had the means to travel from central Illinois to California to attend. But they were also saddened to see that many young graduates had no family present to support and celebrate them. It was then they knew something had to be done.

The Pawelczaks began to recognize that many veterans fall through the cracks. The need for support often begins even earlier with new recruits who may not have a strong support system. They were determined to make a difference and began exploring the idea of creating a nonprofit organization. Along the way they met Desert Storm veteran Connie Watson and Amy Watson, a couple who shared the same passion and heart for serving veterans and military families. Together they joined forces and created Military Families Together, a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring no service member or their family feels unsupported or alone.

Mike Pawelczak serves as vice president of the MFT board. “We support veterans and military families in many ways,” he said. “While requests for help with groceries and transportation to appointments are common, the most urgent need we see is assistance with basic living expenses such as rent and utilities, ensuring families remain safe, stable and supported during difficult times.

“One of our greatest challenges,” Mike continued, “is meeting the growing demand for assistance, especially for urgent needs like rent and utilities. The most rewarding part is being able to step in during a difficult time and provide immediate relief knowing we’ve helped keep a roof over a family’s head or food on their table. Some of our most memorable moments come from seeing the direct impact of our work, whether it’s helping a veteran avoid eviction, providing groceries to a struggling family or simply being there when someone feels they have nowhere else to turn.”

Military Families Together primarily serves veterans and military families in Springfield and surrounding areas.

“We hope to have so much growth and success that we can expand someday and possibly be a national organization helping people all over the country,” said Mike, “but we want to take care of those close to home first.”

Families can seek assistance directly through MFT’s website, social media or by referral from someone in the community. Each request is reviewed quickly to provide aid based on the family’s needs and available resources.

Andrea Warden benefited from having her rent paid by MFT in November 2025.

“Thank you so much for your generosity,” she told the organization. “I am truly blessed to be a part of this wonderful community and thankful for this organization and the good that it does. Serving this country and its citizens has brought me great joy. I look forward to continuing to serve and giving back to this group as much as I

can because I have seen the good that it does for veterans and their families.”


Darren Sparks had some health issues but wanted to maintain his independence by getting himself to his doctor appointments with a bicycle. MFT was able to find someone to donate one.

“He was also getting back into the workforce,” said Mike, “and needed a computer for a programming job. He was one of our first recipients back in 2024.”

The organization raises funds through events such as its annual golf outing and designer handbag bingo, as well as through sponsorships, donations and community partnerships.

The third annual golf outing will be held Sept. 26 at Lincoln Greens Golf Course. Participants can sign up a four-person team for \$400 which includes cart fees, lunch and silent auction. Signing up as a participant or sponsor before Aug. 15 earns an opportunity to be entered into a drawing to win a vacation certificate for a seven-night stay in various destinations.

The community can support MFT by attending events, becoming a sponsor, donating, volunteering and spreading awareness about its mission. Said Mike, “We are incredibly grateful for the community that stands behind us and makes this mission possible.”

For more information visit www.militaryfamilies.together.org or www.facebook.com/USmilitaryfamilies.together 

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



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RICHARD'S FAMILY RESTAURANT

By Thomas C. Pavlik Jr.

Richard's Family Restaurant occupies the former Homestyle Café space on Ninth Street near North Grand Avenue. PHOTO BY ZACH ADAMS

Richard's Family Restaurant is the latest diner to open in Springfield and is a most welcome addition to the genre.

Located on Ninth Street, just south of North Grand Avenue, Richard's operates in the space formerly occupied by Homestyle Café. Homestyle had gotten a little long in the tooth, but Richard's started with a deep clean and then completely redid the space. It's bright, well-designed and welcoming and includes double doors that help keep the cold and snow out as patrons come and go.

Speaking of coming and going, Richard's has had a good lunch crowd on each of my visits. Some were obviously regulars, given that the

staff greeted them by name. But even though my guests and I are not we were treated as such by the staff, which gave great overall service.

Richard's menu, as with many in this genre, is quite large but not quite as expansive as some of its other competitors. There are daily specials, including dinner specials (dinner is available Wednesday through Saturday). Specials on our last visit were tacos, the chopped sirloin steak and shrimp salad. Most items are served with a bowl of soup or, for a small up-charge, a green salad.

The tables each have a nice setup of completely full condiment bottles (no near-empty bottles here) that include Richard's private label hot sauce. The hot sauce, while having some heat,

delivered a nice flavor and pleasant consistency (not too runny and not too thick).

After a quick perusal of the menus, we decided to pass on breakfast (served all day) and go straight toward lunch, opting for the club sandwich, cheeseburger and the breaded pork tenderloin sandwich.

Two of us opted for the soup and one (the big spender) went with the green salad. The soup option was chicken noodle, and it was spot on. While the noodles were a little squishy for my taste, the flavor had some depth which suggested some slow simmering and no shortcuts. The broth carried a nice savoriness but came close to being overly salty – so definitely taste before seasoning



The breaded pork tenderloin sandwich stands out in both size and flavor. PHOTO BY ZACH ADAMS

at the table.

The green salad was nothing remarkable and compared favorably with Richard's peers. Both offerings set us up well for the main event.

I've written before that a club sandwich can make or break a diner. Richard's version was a credit to the industry and arrived stacked high, the way it should be. Layers of sliced turkey, crispy bacon, lettuce and tomato were tucked between toasted bread that held its structure without

turning dry. The balance was right – savory, fresh and just indulgent enough. The accompanying massive portion of fries (which nearly dwarfed the plate) leaned toward the traditional diner style: golden, lightly crisp on the outside, soft inside and salted just enough to keep you reaching back for more.

The cheeseburger was straightforward in the best sense. A well-seasoned patty, cooked through with a slight char carried that unmistakable grill

flavor. Melted cheese blanketed the top, binding everything together with a soft bun that didn't overpower the meat. It wasn't trying to be gourmet and that restraint worked in its favor. This is a burger that understands its role: satisfying, predictable and easy to enjoy.

Then there's the breaded pork tenderloin sandwich, arguably the most regionally iconic item on the table. Here, it didn't disappoint. The tenderloin was generously portioned (although not as insanely

large as you sometimes see in a tavern), breaded and fried to a crisp, golden finish. The crunch gave way to tender meat inside, creating that contrast that makes this sandwich a staple across Illinois. Served on a bun that barely contained it, it delivered both in size and flavor, especially with classic toppings (lettuce, onion, tomato and pickles) adding a bit of brightness to cut through the richness.

For those with a sweet tooth there's also a fairly robust dessert menu including homemade pies and cheesecake. But what particularly caught our collective eyes were the homemade cinnamon rolls. We saw some on an adjacent table and they looked delicious, but we just didn't have room for it. Maybe next time.

Portions were overall quite generous and prices were reasonable. And, as mentioned earlier, service stood out.

Richard's is a welcome addition to Springfield's diner scene. With good service, food made with quality ingredients, generous portions and reasonable prices, it's not surprising that my guests and I enjoyed our visits. I wish it much success.

Address: 1144 N. Ninth St., Springfield
 Phone: 217-572-1346
 Website: richardsfamily.kwickmenu.com/
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Breaded chicken sandwich with homemade onion rings. PHOTO COURTESY FACEBOOK

New businesses

Sangamon County new business registrations, March 16, 2026 – April 15, 2026

OnMadelynAvenue, 560 W. North St., Suite 204. 352-232-5103. Lori Ann Tetreault.

Alexander Heartland Moving and Hauling, 924 N. Daniel Ave. 447-226-9444. Cory Jonathan Alexander.

Maid For You, 40 Mueller Court, Riverton. 217-299-6130. Taysia R. Killion.

Custom Forged Concrete Garages, Inc., 9100 Johns Creek Road, Loami, 217-341-5373. James Smith.

Sunshine Posh, 6130 New City Road, Rochester. 217-565-1141. Violeta D. Saldana Veenstra.

Dilley's Construction, 28 Monica Court. 217-899-2416. Wyatt Joseph Dilley.

The Lavender Loaf, 203 Narrow St., Loami. 217-836-2571. Amanda L. Wanless.

How Great Thou Tart, 3500 N. Dirksen Parkway, Lot 204. 217-725-8453. Jason Lee Richardson.

Skippers Grill, 3500 N. Dirksen Parkway, Lot 204. 217-725-8453. Jason Lee Richardson.

The Root Lady Company, 1904 S. Wirt Ave. 217-685-5401. Juanyai S. Moore.

Legacy Hydroseeding, 818 Evergreen Walk, Sherman. 217-761-8449. Tre Fry.

Cliburn and Associates, LLC, 1212 South Grand Ave. W., Apt 212. 505-490-3070. Jill K. Cliburn.

Central Illinois Vending, 15180 Route 54, New Berlin. 217-652-6954. Jason E. Crain.

Outpost Landworx, 4412 Turtle Bay. 217-741-4775. Evan Warrington, Skyler Harmony.

Turner Clubworks, 408 Aintree Chase, Sherman. 217-725-5891. Travis Turner.

Threaded Vision Designs, 1143 S. Spring St. 217-720-6350. Tamiekh Denise Walsh.

Heartland Lawn and Landscaping, 605 W. Washington St., Athens. 217-899-5208. Garrett Davidage.

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