

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a green and white striped long-sleeved shirt and a gold necklace, stands in front of a desk. Behind her is a large, illuminated sign that reads 'BWBB'. The background is a light pink wall.

SPRINGFIELD Business JOURNAL

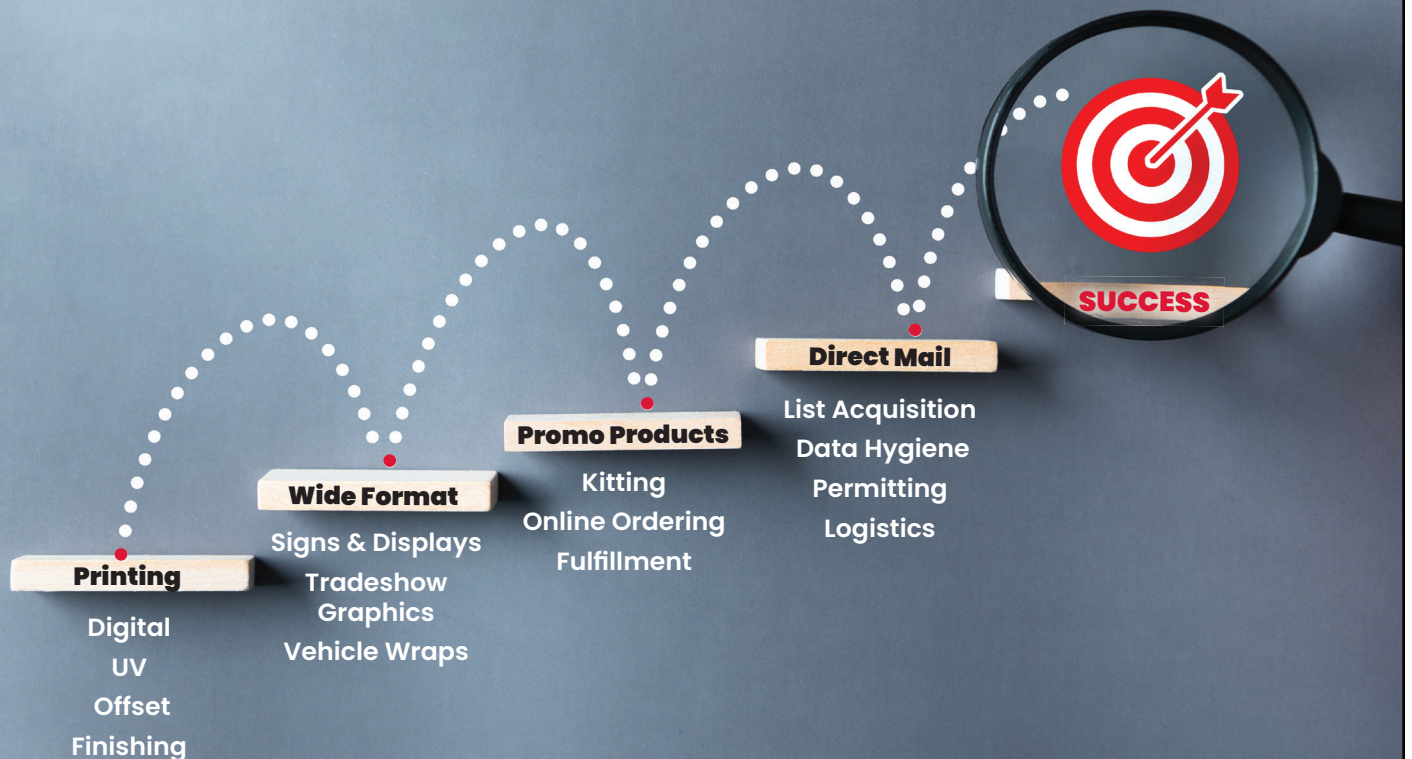
October 2026

15 Under Fifteen

Small business awards

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In this issue:

SBJ articles



A Q&A With Carolyn Austin
By David Blanchette



**Springfield researcher awarded SIU's 2026
Inventor of the Year**
by Dilpreet Raju



Providing Daily Bread
by Janet Seitz

20 RETIREMENT AND CARE COMMUNITIES LIST • 30 HOME HEALTH CARE LIST



Cover

15 Under Fifteen

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Columns

32 Medical news

34 Professional development

By Kelly Gust

36 Restaurant Review

By Thomas C. Pavlik Jr.

38 Philanthropy

By Janet Seitz

40 Ask an attorney

By Sarah Delano Pavlik

42 New businesses

6

Creating your own opportunities

Luck is sometimes described as what happens when preparation meets opportunity, and owning a small business falls into the same category. While many people dream of becoming their own boss or bringing an idea to fruition, only a small percentage are willing to put forth the effort to make it happen. Being in charge of your own destiny sounds attractive until you realize that there's no paid time off, built-in health benefits or automatic paycheck every two weeks – it all depends on you.

Several of this year's 15 Under Fifteen small business award recipients told SBJ they started their business because the opportunity they wanted didn't exist, so they had to create their own. Kevin Cline graduated from gunsmithing school but then couldn't find a job or apprenticeship due to a lack of gunsmithing shops. Randi Pecka was commuting from Chatham to Normal and decided to leave a job with Illinois State University to put down roots in Springfield, but in 2020, retail opportunities were limited so she launched her own boutique. Jessica Lance, a busy mom of five, wanted self-care and home products made with natural ingredients that she could feel good about while finding a way to support her family. The nonprofit Clean Slate Advocates was started to provide free laundry services to those experiencing financial hardship, an offshoot of the for-profit laundromat that Robert Frazier and his wife, Pamela, operate at Eighth Street and South Grand Avenue.

Flexibility and adaptation is key. Greenie's Grill started as a food trailer before later opening a brick-and-mortar location, and several of this year's recipients were home-based or online businesses before expanding to physical locations. Another nonprofit recognized this year, Downtown Springfield Inc., has been around since 1961 but recently transitioned from a member-based 501(c)6 to a community-focused 501(c)3 to better address the challenges of an ever-changing downtown. Executive Director Jay Shanle noted the importance of looking "forward toward solutions, not backwards," which is good advice for all of us.

I hope you'll take a few minutes to peruse the 15 Under Fifteen profiles in this issue and learn more about the remarkable small businesses and nonprofits being recognized. Then mark your calendar for the reception and awards ceremony taking place from 5-7 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 22, and plan to stop by UCB, 1900 W. Iles Ave., to celebrate with them.



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24th ANNUAL 15 UNDER FIFTEEN

**AlignLife Chiropractic &
Natural Health Center**

Better With Bubbli Boutique

Bewitching Botanicals

Blue Coat Arms Company

Clean Slate Advocates

Downtown Springfield, Inc.

Fed Kitchen

Floral Expressions

Greenie's Grill

**Krekel's Custard &
Hamburgers**

**Luminary Counseling and
Solutions**

Paul's Paradise

Recon Techs Springfield

Scoop Du Jour

Star Graphics & Media



15
UCB
under
FIFTEEN

RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE IN SMALL BUSINESS

This is the 24th year that *Springfield Business Journal* has partnered with United Community Bank to recognize 15 outstanding small businesses in the local area. To qualify, a business must be located in Sangamon or Morgan county, have been open for at least two years and have 15 or fewer full-time employees. The recipients represent a wide variety of industries, and some have been in business for decades, while others are much newer. What they have in common is that each of these business owners is passionate about their company and providing a service to the Springfield area.

If reading these profiles makes you think of another small business that deserves recognition, you don't have to wait to make a nomination for next year's 15 Under Fifteen. To submit a nomination and view a list of previous selectees, visit www.springfieldbusinessjournal.com and click on the awards program tab.

SNAPSHOT

Established: 2013
Owners: Dr. Bryne Willey
Employees: 8
Services: Chiropractic care

2931 Montvale Dr, Springfield
217-860-0360

PROFILE

Dr. Bryne Willey had a vision to help build a stronger, healthier community – naturally. So, in 2013, he began AlignLife Chiropractic & Natural Health Center. “We are mission driven, and we lead with heart,” said Staci Serena, chief operating officer and practice manager. “Every day, our team comes to work knowing we have the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in someone’s life.”

The mission at AlignLife is to help people live healthier, happier, more positive lives naturally. “That mission guides everything we do, from the way we care for our patients to the way we support our team and serve our community,” Serena said. “We lead with integrity, compassion and a genuine desire to help people. We believe healthcare should be about more than addressing symptoms. It should be about educating and

empowering people to better understand their bodies, take ownership of their health and create lasting change for themselves and their families.”

AlignLife has made a tremendous impact throughout Springfield and Sangamon County, building a culture where people matter. The company also strives to be an active part of the community. “Our team understands that every interaction is an opportunity to positively impact someone’s day,” Serena said. “Whether we’re educating local businesses about health, supporting community initiatives, giving back to local families or simply showing up when there’s a need, we want Springfield to be better because our business is here. For us, success is measured not only by the growth of our business but by the number of lives we have the privilege to positively impact.”



AlignLife Chiropractic & Natural Health Center

LEFT TO RIGHT: OWNER DR. BRYNE WILLEY, GRACE BUTCHER, BAILEE HONOLD, DR. BRIAN MCGREGOR (BACK), MADELYNN BARRETT, GRACIE CORSO (BACK), HANNAH HUGHES, STACI SERENA AND DR. JASON GOLDSTEIN. NOT PICTURED: JESSICA KISSEL AND EMILY HASARA

PHOTO COURTESY ZACH ADAMS

15
15

SNAPSHOT

Established: 2020
Owner: Randi Pecka
Employees: 4
Services: Women's clothing boutique

3852 Wabash Ave, Springfield
217-679-1776

PROFILE

Established in July 2020, Better With Bubbli Boutique is a women's clothing boutique curated for the girl-on-the-go. Owner Randi Pecka launched the company initially as an online boutique geared toward young, contemporary women. "I'd recently left my position at Illinois State University working as an assistant director of athletics communications," she said. "This role required a lot of travel, and I was commuting from Chatham to Normal every day. I'd wanted to put roots down in Springfield after getting married and find a position closer to home. Unfortunately, COVID-19 happened, which meant little opportunities available. So I created one for myself."

Pecka had always loved working in retail, specifically helping women get styled for an event or feel more confident in themselves. "I decided to

take a little from savings and invest in inventory and started small online," she said. "We practically sold out of our entire collection the launch night, and we continued to add on and grow from there, evolving to a brick-and-mortar store on the west side of Springfield."

The name Better With Bubbli came from not only Pecka's love of champagne but her belief in celebrating every one of life's moments. Their motto is: "Life is better with a glass of champagne and a new outfit!"

"I wanted to build a store that people wanted to visit for fun but also when they needed something unique for a concert, vacation or their engagement photos," she said. "Our team is so kind and warm and welcoming, and I hear all the time from our shoppers that we offer customer service they may not get at big box stores."



Better With Bubbli Boutique

OWNER RANDI PECKA

PHOTO COURTESY ZACH ADAMS



Bewitching Botanicals

OWNER JESSICA LANCE

PHOTO COURTESY FACEBOOK

SNAPSHOT

Established: 2019
Owner: Jessica Lance
Employees: 5
Services: bath, body and home products

415 W. Madison St., Auburn
217-705-4578

PROFILE

Jessica Lance founded Bewitching Botanicals in October 2019, starting with handmade products assembled on a folding table in her home. Today, the company has grown into a brick-and-mortar retail store, production space and online business. "I started the company to create thoughtfully made self-care and home products while building something that could support my family that also reflected the values most important to me: quality ingredients, honesty, accessibility and community," Lance said. "We are a family operated company with my parents, Jennifer and Ryan, Granny Barb and our two part-time employees Tori and Christine"

Bewitching Botanicals specializes in handmade bath and body products, candles, botanical goods and thoughtfully curated gifts. The company prioritizes organic,

naturally derived, fair-trade and locally sourced ingredients whenever possible. "We work hard to create an approachable, inclusive space where people feel welcome and cared for," Lance said. "We listen to our customers, support other small makers and local causes and remain genuinely involved in the community that has helped us grow."

Lance believes their story also represents what small business ownership truly looks like. "Bewitching Botanicals was built through creativity, resilience and an enormous amount of hands-on work," she said. "I am a mother of five, a medical caregiver and a disability advocate. Those experiences influence how I lead the business and care for our customers and employees, and I'm deeply grateful for the community that continues to support us."



Blue Coat Arms Co.

KEVIN AND LYDIA CLINE WITH SON CULLEN, 3, AND DAUGHTER AYDEN, 2.

PHOTO COURTESY ZACH ADAMS

SNAPSHOT

Established: 2017
Owners: Kevin and Lydia Cline
Employees: 2
Services: Gunsmithing

10001 Curran Rd, Chatham
217-416-5962

PROFILE

Blue Coat Arms Co. is a two-person enterprise run by Kevin and Lydia Cline. "My wife Lydia is basically the CEO of the business and manages a bulk of the operations while I take care of project development and fulfillment," Cline said. BCAC is a full-service gunsmithing shop that handles repairs, service/maintenance, restorations and customizations for all firearms for civilian, law enforcement and military applications. Their motto is: "No matter your era, we got your six!"

BCAC was founded in May 2017 as a sole-proprietorship and became Blue Coat Arms Co. LLC this year. Cline started BCAC after graduating from gunsmithing school. "There weren't many places to get a job or further my apprenticeship," he said. "There are very few full-service gunsmithing shops around."

Besides being one of a few full-service gunsmithing shops in the area, what has allowed BCAC to stand out is how they lean into making individual pieces authentic to the person using them. And, firearm education is not optional. "We are big proponents of education. It is one of the core tenets of our business," Cline said. They will provide education workshops with community organizations such as Operation Blazing Sword, a grass-roots organization dedicated to helping LGBTQ people become responsible firearm owners, and Pink Pistols, a shooting group that honors diversity.

"Whether it is a purchase, repair, custom build, safety workshop or someone just picking up the phone wanting to learn more, we try to make the information accessible to everyone so they can make the most informed decision for their unique situation," Cline said.

SNAPSHOT

Established: 2023
Director: Robert Frazier
Employees: 1
Services: Nonprofit providing laundry services

2105 E Cook St, Unit 21131,
Springfield
217-610-5844

PROFILE

Clean Slate Advocates was established in 2023 by executive director Robert Frazier. The goal was to provide free laundry services to individuals and families facing homelessness or financial hardship in Springfield.

With a motto of "Empowering lives, one load at a time," Clean Slate Advocates recognizes that something as fundamental as clean clothes and linens can profoundly impact lives. Through its From Soap To Hope Challenge, the organization is able to provide access to laundry services to those in

need. "We stand firmly on the belief that everyone, irrespective of their circumstances, deserves to feel clean, confident and cared for," Frazier said. "This challenge is our commitment to not just clean clothes but to the well-being of every individual we serve."

Sponsorship opportunities are available for both individuals and businesses to help support Clean Slate's mission. The organization also facilitates donation drives to collect essential items such as laundry supplies, clothing and linens.



Clean Slate Advocates

DIRECTOR ROBERT FRAZIER

PHOTO COURTESY ZACH ADAMS



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SNAPSHOT

Established: 1961
Director: Jay Shanle
Employees: 3
Services: nonprofit focused on downtown revitalization

**3 W. Old Capitol Plaza, Suite 15
 Springfield
 217-544-1723**

PROFILE

Downtown Springfield Inc. began in 1961 with the mission to preserve, promote and enhance Springfield's historic central-business district and support a vibrant city center. The nonprofit association currently is led by executive director Jay Shanle, associate director Cassie Grey, and Molly Harms, program director and manager of the Old Capitol Farmers Market. David Lee of Stryker serves as the volunteer board president. DSI is a nationally accredited Main Street organization dedicated to creating and supporting a vibrant neighborhood through collaboration, creativity and leadership.

According to Shanle, DSI's

strongest assets are its ability to communicate, convene and connect the larger community to affect positive change in downtown. "In early 2026, DSI transitioned from a member-based 501(c)(6) to a community focused 501(c)(3) to address challenges of an ever-changing downtown through a strategy focused on arts, culture and entertainment and a resident-first approach," he said. "DSI will continue its work in economic vitality and supporting residential and mixed-use development while diving deeper into creative place-making to create a true identity for downtown that looks forward toward solutions, not backwards."



Downtown Springfield Inc.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JAY SHANLE

PHOTO COURTESY ZACH ADAMS



Fed Kitchen

OWNERS WILL HOECKER, BRENNAN AND CELESTE MALHAM (NOT PICTURED: OMAR ROMERO, ANNA DENT)

PHOTO COURTESY ZACH ADAMS

SNAPSHOT

Established: 2019
Owners: Celeste Malham Brennan Malham, Will Hoecker, Omar Romero, Anna Dent
Employees: 5
Services: restaurant and meal prep

**3290 W Iles Ave, Springfield
 217-679-6044**

PROFILE

Celeste Malham founded Fed Kitchen in 2019 with a mission to make healthy eating more convenient for the Springfield community.

Malham brings more than 15 years of experience in both the food and wellness industries to the endeavor. She and Fed Kitchen's other owners – Brennan Malham, Will Hoecker, Omar Romero and Anna Dent, the company's general manager – saw an opportunity to bring fresh, prepared meals to busy people while proving that healthy food doesn't have to be boring. "It can be flavorful, satisfying and something you actually look forward to

eating," Malham said.

The Fed Kitchen meal-prep company now has five full-time employees. "What started as a small idea has grown into a trusted local brand with pickup locations, retail partnerships and wholesale growth throughout the area," Malham said. "What sets us apart is our commitment to great food, strong branding, consistency and community. We're proud to have built a business in Springfield that creates jobs, supports other local businesses and helps make healthier choices easier for the people we serve."



Floral Expressions

OWNER MARLO MOHLER

PHOTO COURTESY ZACH ADAMS

SNAPSHOT

Established: 1990
Owner: Marlo Mohler
Services: floral shop

630 E. Jackson St., Auburn
217-438-3408

PROFILE

Marlo Mohler opened Floral Expressions in June of 1990, shortly after graduating from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a bachelor's degree in ornamental horticulture. "I had the opportunity to move back to my hometown and open a flower shop, which was always my plan since childhood," she said. Now, more than 35 years later, the company serves as a premier florist in and around Auburn.

"We provide great designs, precise attention to detail and wonderfully fresh flowers," Mohler said. "All of our florists take great pleasure in making arrangements that are as unique and beautiful as possible. So

much love goes into every piece we design, and we make each one with a personal touch and friendly service, which is why the arrangements we make here are always high-quality." Floral Expressions crafts both traditional and contemporary bouquets, with plenty of room for customization. The florists can design bouquets for any occasion and holiday.

"I have been blessed to serve my community for over 36 years, and I am truly honored to be able to use the talents that God has given to me to bring joy and comfort to people through the beauty of flowers," Mohler said.

SNAPSHOT

Established: 2024
Director: Kayla Webster, Adam Greenfield 217-498-1038
Employees: 8
Services: Restaurant and food trailer

PROFILE

Greenie's Grill began in July 2023 as a food trailer. The business is owned by Adam Greenfield, who serves as the owner-operator and chef, and Kayla Webster, who works behind the scenes overseeing the business side of the operation. Their first event was serving the volunteers shucking corn for the Chatham Sweet Corn Festival.

Greenie's is a veteran- and woman-owned burger joint built around a simple idea: food that is fast, fresh and delicious. "We aren't trying to be a big chain, and we don't want to operate like one," Greenfield said. "Our burgers are made with fresh, never-frozen beef that we hand-patty daily. We have built our reputation around big, messy smashburgers, Philly cheesesteaks, horseshoes and

creative weekly specialty burgers that give our customers something new to look forward to."

Greenie's started small but soon built a following. In January 2025, they opened the brick-and-mortar Greenie's Grill in Rochester. Today, they operate both the restaurant and the food trailer that travels throughout the community.

"We're still learning, growing, working long days and dreaming about what's next," Greenfield said. "But the heart of the business hasn't changed from that first day in the food trailer: serve really good food, take care of people and give our community a place they're excited to come back to."



Greenie's Grill

LEFT TO RIGHT: MATT HINKLE, THERAMOND LEMOUX, DAVE NEAL, PAT KELLY, KATLIN DOUGLAS, STEVE ANDERS, CASEY FINLEY

PHOTO COURTESY GREENIE'S GRILL

SNAPSHOT

Established: 1949
Owner: Suzie Wichmann
Employees: 15
Services: Restaurant

2121 N. Grand Avenue E.
Springfield
217-525-4952

PROFILE

William Krekel founded the Krekel's brand back in 1949 on Eldorado Street in Decatur. His mission was simple – to provide delicious hamburgers and pair them with handmade milkshakes and French fries at family friendly prices. Krekel's has now grown to seven locations throughout central Illinois. The current owner, Suzie Wichmann, is William Krekel's granddaughter.

The Springfield Krekel's location at 2121 N. Grand

Avenue E. opened in 1993. Krekel burgers are made to order with fresh ground beef, seared thin and served on a toasted bun. The fries are always served hot and crispy, and the many flavors of frozen custard can be ordered as milkshakes, sundaes, concretes, specialty desserts and simple cones or cups.

The Springfield location is open Monday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.



Krekel's Custard & Hamburgers

PARKER KELSEY, REBECCA O'NEILL, ABBY CLANTON, OWNER SUZIE WICHMANN.

PHOTO COURTESY ZACH ADAMS



Luminary Counseling and Solutions

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: COURTNEY LOVETTA, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT; JAYCEE GROVES, THERAPIST; KATIE ROMANG, OWNER/THERAPIST; LAUREN HENTON, OWNER/THERAPIST; JESSICA VIOLA, THERAPIST; PAIGE DALY, THERAPIST; JULIA HANNAH, THERAPIST. NOT PICTURED: FELICIA PETERS, THERAPIST.

PHOTO COURTESY LUMINARY COUNSELING SOLUTIONS

SNAPSHOT

Established: 2020
Owners: Lauren Henton and Katie Romang
Employees: 6
Services: counseling

3695 S. Sixth St. Frontage Road, Suite A
Springfield
217-679-6344

PROFILE

Lauren Henton and Katie Romang, co-owners and practicing therapists, began Luminary Counseling and Solutions after seeing an opportunity to create something different. "We created Luminary as a modern, warm, feminine space that reflects a new approach to emotional wellness and self-care in our area without the institutional feel of a traditional medical environment," Henton said. "We wanted therapy to feel welcoming and restorative, while helping shift the perception of mental healthcare from something sought only in crisis to something women can intentionally invest in as part of their overall well-being."

Luminary combines specialized expertise in women's mental health with genuine human

connection. It is the result of two working moms dreaming up the ideal platform to bring their experience, passions and vision for mental health care to life. "What began as our own small practice has grown into a group practice serving women and families in our community and throughout Illinois," Henton said.

"We understand the invisible load women carry and create a space where clients can pause, reconnect with themselves to feel supported and empowered to move forward. At Luminary, we welcome you as a person and invite you to care for your mental health as often or as periodically as you need and want – à la carte for your heart."



Paul's Paradise

SHERRI AND DANNY PAUL

PHOTO COURTESY ZACH ADAMS

SNAPSHOT

Established: 2021

Owner: Sherri Paul

Employees: 3

Services: Wedding and event venue

2430 State Route 125, Pleasant Plains
217-891-8516

PROFILE

Paul's Paradise is a family operated wedding and event venue located about 10 miles west of Springfield.

Paul's Paradise began as an extension of the Paul Tree Farms family business. "After years of growing trees and creating beautiful outdoor spaces, we saw an opportunity to create something completely different on the property – a place where couples and families could come together and celebrate some of the most important moments of their lives," owner Sherri Paul said. "We offer couples the opportunity to have their ceremony and reception in one location with both indoor and outdoor spaces and many of the details they would otherwise have to

rent or coordinate separately already included."

The wedding and event venue has continued to evolve based on what couples need and what can be done to make their wedding experience easier and more memorable. "We've now had more than 150 successful, beautiful weddings," Paul said. "What we believe makes Paul's Paradise stand out is how much we include and how personally involved we are with our couples. From tables, chairs, linens, décor, ceremony spaces, lighting and sound to our bridal suite, groom's room, photo booth and on-site assistance, we try to make wedding planning as simple and stress-free as possible."

SNAPSHOT

Established: 2012

Owners: Derek and Melissa Roberts

Employees: 5

Services: detailing, painting and repairs

820 E. Black Ave. Springfield
217-670-1132

PROFILE

Recon Techs Springfield opened its doors in 2012 under the name Luxury Detail. In July 2017, the company, which offers detailing on cars, boats, RVs and even aircrafts to customers throughout central Illinois, changed its name to Recon Techs. "Recon handles all automotive, marine and aircraft needs, from detailing services to repair, paint, window tinting and interior repairs," said Derek Roberts, who owns the company along with his wife, Melissa. "We also offer customers a rental car free of charge with all major services."

As Springfield's only one-stop detail and conditioning shop, Recon Techs produces their own

detail chemicals and ceramic coatings in order to cut out the middle man and give customers a better price point. "We are a family owned and run business and believe in bringing family values to our customers," Roberts said. "We provide quality work, community involvement and a commitment to customer satisfaction."

Recon Techs gives back to the community by offering charitable car wash events benefitting veterans and supporting the American Cancer Society, as just a couple examples. "We are big supporters of breast cancer research and have a breast cancer bike we travel the state with," Roberts said.



Recon Techs Springfield

OWNER DEREK ROBERTS, MIKE, KENDRA, MATT AND JOE.

PHOTO COURTESY ZACH ADAMS

SNAPSHOT

Established: 2015
Owners: Shannon McAuley and Fran Abbott
Employees: 14
Services: restaurant

95 Plummer Boulevard, Chatham
 217-697-8327

PROFILE

Scoop Du Jour was founded in 2015 by Shannon McAuley and Fran Abbott after realizing Chatham needed an ice cream parlor. Both wanted to see the old-fashioned, hand-scooped ice cream shop make a comeback. The two had more than 50 years of combined experience in retail, so they decided to go for it. The parlor has been a staple in Chatham now for more than a decade.

"We worked together for County Market and realized we could use an ice cream shop," Abbott said. "So, we pooled our resources and opened a shop in the same plaza. We eventually moved across the street so that we could do coffee. Then we opened the bar next door so we could do pizza and boozy shakes."

Scoop Du Jour has become a great place for those interested in part-time work. "Most of our staff either go to school part time or have families," Abbott said. "And our night-time staff consists of mostly students and people that may have a full-time day job. During the summer, our college kids come back to work part time as well."

Scoop Du Jour offers ice cream, coffee, donuts, pastries and now pizza. "We believe that supporting the community is a big reason that we have received so much support and loyalty from our customers," Abbott said. "This has made us the place for gatherings, meetings, date nights, studying and family night as well as many other fun events."



Scoop Du Jour

LEFT TO RIGHT: AVA SPEARS, MEGAN EMRICK, NICOLE KELLY, FRAN ABBOTT (CO-OWNER), SHANNON MCAULEY (CO-OWNER), LILLY SEARL, ISAAC EDWARDS AND RILEY FLEMMING.

PHOTO COURTESY SCOOP DU JOUR



Star Graphics & Media

OWNER SHERI KOCH

PHOTO COURTESY ZACH ADAMS

SNAPSHOT

Established: 1998
Owners: Robert and Sheri Koch
Employees:
Services: printing, signs, trade show displays

621 E. Monroe St. Springfield
 217-744-7225

PROFILE

Robert and Sheri Koch started Star Graphics & Media in 1998 as a home-based business. They quickly discovered they needed more space and moved the company to 1801 Laurel St., where they lasted for a decade before also outgrowing that building and moving downtown to 621 E. Monroe St., in 2011. "We love being downtown, and we love our customers," Sheri Koch said. "Over the years, we keep adding services. We strive to be a one-stop shop."

Star Graphics offers everything from printing to vinyl lettering, signs, engravings, screen printing, embroidery and trade show displays. "We can design, print and deliver your entire project without

you even coming through our doors," Sheri said.

The company has grown and taken advantage of new technology and innovations, all while building long-lasting relationships with their customers. "Our job is to make you, your company or your organization look its very best, and we do that by consistently reinvesting in our company to ensure we use the latest digital technology for extraordinary results," Sheri said. "All of this, combined with our experience in the industry and commitment to providing you with super-friendly service and on-time delivery, makes Star Graphics & Media your first choice for all of your print marketing needs."

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2025

Absolut Aesthetics & Wellness Spa
Clover Solutions LLC
Complete Computer Solutions, Inc.
Crawford Family Dental
Dance Arts Studio

Floyd Imports
Hands of God Hospice
Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach
M & M Pools & Spas
Mockingbird Bakery

Pendulum PR
Rettberg's on the Square
Sangamon Tree Service
Wellthy Juice Co.
Whimsy Tea Company

2024

Ben Ladage Auctions
Bramley Funeral Home
Café Moxo
Chatham Seamless Gutters
Compass for Kids

Phoenix Collision
Pilates Studios of Springfield
RE/MAX Professionals
Rose Aesthetics & Wellness Clinic
Solid Rock Youth Transitional Services

Springfield Art Association
Storyteller Studios
The Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce
Three Twigs Bakery
Up and Running Services

2023

ACE Mechanical
ACTS, Inc.
CheckPoint Tire & Service
DeHeve's Tavern
Garvey Tubman Cultural Arts Center

Harry's Pharmacy
Height Media
Mini O'Beirne Crisis Nursery
Northern Lights Lounge
Nothing Bundt Cakes

Missy Grady Home Team-
The Real Estate Group, Inc.
The Village Tea Room and Gift Shoppes
TNS Detailing and Restoration
Tom Day Business Machines
Wooden It Be lovely

2022

Absolute Concrete
All in One Laundry Center & Services
Capital Elite Athletics
Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln
District 23 Boutique

Emerson Press
First Electric Motor Shop
Indigo Restaurant
Intertwine Loc Design
Just The Basics Mobile Bar

MBK Construction
Midwest Mission Distribution Center
Music Therapy Connections
Pure Performance Fitness Center
Street Art Customs

2021

The Alamo
Ashley's at Home Grooming
Axis Accounting Tax Service
Bailey Family Insurance
Bobby Shaw Building and Remodeling

Credit Pro Autos
Duct Dusters
East Side Marine Inc.
Pier 55 Lounge
Hellowater

Illinois Trucking Association
Jerk Shop Go
Keefner's
True Colors Floral
Who Does Your Hair?

2020

Ayers Trucking
AZ-T-CA Mexican Grill
Bless'it Beauty Salon
By-Pass Auto Body
Chadito's Mexican American Grill

Element Services
Kennedy Sue
Lake Springfield Tavern
Law Automotive
Sam's Best Brands

Springfield Dance
Springfield Monument
Springfield Select Auto Inc.
Troxell Financial
UNDERDOG Sports, Memorabilia & Games

2019

Dr. Lance Taylor D.M.D.
Eye Candy Boutique
Eye Candy Salon & Spa
Frisina Family Wellness
Johnson & Johnson Auto Services

ML Refrigeration
Prairie Wholesale Supply Co.
Propel Sliding Door Automation
Quiznos
Rambach Insurance Agency

Recon Techs Springfield
The Roost
Scoop Du Jour Ice Cream & Coffee Parlor
Serious Lip Balm
Wild Time Exotics

2018

Airsmen-Hires Funeral Home
Apple Barn
BSafe Home Inspections of Illinois, Inc.
Cleaning General Janitorial Services, Inc.
GoWeb1

Henry's Service Center, Inc.
Hilda's Antique Mall
Legacy Theatre
Maddy's Tavern
Mosquito Joe of Springfield

Nelson Resource Center
Rotherham & Rotherham & Company
Tacology 101
The Book Rack
The Rage Hair Studio & Spa

2017

All in One On-Site Wash & Detail
The Deb Sarsany Team
Monty's Submarines
Bailey Hardwoods & Woodworking, Inc.
Fire and Ale

Rogers HR Consulting
Best Expo, Inc.
Gypsy Dreamer, Gypsy Tribe & Gypsy Soul
Springfield Jr. Blues
Central States Fireworks, Inc.

Law Automotive, Inc.
Springfield Travel Shoppe, Ltd.
CrossFit XLT
Masco Packaging & Industrial Supply
Your Corner Office, Inc.

2016

Bramley Funeral Home
L.A. Burton & Associates
Cooper's StrEATside Bistro
Dreammaker Bath & Kitchen
Fehring Ornamental Iron Works

Hill Meadow Apartments
Jan's Dance Studio
Nature's Select Pet Store
Kraig D. Osborne, DMD
PhysioTherapy Professionals

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Quality of life is part of good care

by Julio Barrenzuela, *The Salsa Ambassador*

For more than 20 years, I've brought music and movement into senior-living communities, serving people of all ages and abilities. This has taught me that almost everyone can participate. We simply have to give people the opportunity to do it in their own way.

I have watched people dance from their chairs when standing was not possible. Sometimes it begins with someone moving only a hand, a shoulder or a foot. Then the music takes over, and before long, that person is fully involved.

I have witnessed songs familiar to a person bring back memories and emotions. You can see it happen in someone's face.

To me, quality of life is an essential part of our overall health. It comes from experiences that move us physically, mentally and emotionally. Music can do all three. It moves the body, stimulates the mind and brings memories and emotions back to life.

But I do not do this work alone.

In nearly every senior community I visit, an activity director helps make that connection possible. They know who will participate immediately, who needs encouragement and who may be participating quietly, even if no one else notices. They help me understand how to reach the people in front of me.

Their work is more than planning activities and filling a calendar. They are often among the staff members who develop the closest and most consistent relationships with residents. They understand individual personalities, interests and abilities. They recognize when someone needs extra support and when quiet participation is meaningful.

Medical care is essential, but good care involves more than medicine. Sometimes quality of life comes from a conversation, a game, a movie night, an art project, a musical performance or simply sitting beside someone while painting their nails. These moments may appear



Julio Barrenzuela, right, frequently visits senior living communities to show that people of all ages and abilities can participate in and benefit from salsa dancing. PHOTO COURTESY JULIO BARRENZUELA

small from the outside. But to the person living there, that might be the best part of their day.

Think about how much attention we give to the experience our children will have when they leave for college. We ask about experiences beyond the classroom such as recreation, student organizations and social opportunities. Why wouldn't we ask similar questions when choosing a community for an older person we love?

For many residents, particularly those with limited mobility or no transportation, their senior-living community becomes the center of daily life. They cannot always leave to find companionship, entertainment or something meaningful to do which makes the events that happen inside the community even more important.

Someday, it could be my mother or yours living in one of these communities. Someday, it could be me, you or someone else we love. When that day comes, we will want more than good medical care. We will want opportunities to ensure we all remain engaged, experience joy and stay connected to who we are.

When activity professionals gain new skills, exchange ideas and build relationships with colleagues who understand their work, residents

benefit directly. Such an opportunity is right around the corner: The Illinois Activity Professionals Association's 47th annual conference will be held on Oct. 7-9, at the Park Regency Hotel & Conference Center in Bloomington. Activity professionals will receive training, earn continuing-education hours and share practical approaches for serving residents with different needs and abilities.

One person may know how to include someone with limited mobility into an activity that requires movement. Another may have developed a program that reaches residents living with dementia. Someone else may have found a way to connect with a person who rarely

participates. When professionals share activities that have worked well for their residents, that one activity can potentially improve the lives of hundreds more.

This is just one reason why I hope senior-living communities in the Springfield area will support their activity professionals' participation in this conference. It's a practical way to strengthen the quality work already happening inside their communities.

Supporting professional growth of activity directors is an investment in how fully residents continue to live, not simply how long.

Conference details can be found on the Illinois Activity Professionals Association's website, activities4illinois.org, in the drop-down menu under the EDUCATION heading. For more information, contact IAPA president Deb Greiner at 779-272-4943.

Julio Barrenzuela, known as The Salsa Ambassador, has spent more than 20 years using music, movement and culture to connect people of all ages and abilities.

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A portrait of Carolyn Austin, a woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a mustard yellow jacket over a leopard print shirt. She is seated in a wooden chair with a cane back. The background is a solid grey.

a
Q & A
with
Carolyn Austin
By David Blanchette

Carolyn Austin is the CEO of AgeLinc, the Area Agency on Aging for Linconland. Austin, 56, said she does “a little bit of everything” for the agency, handling the grants management, much of the marketing and other high-level duties. She is also the vice president of the Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging.

Austin encourages people to reach out to AgeLinc with any questions about services for senior citizens because the agency has a lot of resources at its fingertips, and if AgeLinc can’t help, the organization probably knows where to direct people for assistance.

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

I was born in Springfield and raised in Palmyra, Illinois, in Macoupin County. My very first job when I was 14 years old was pulling weeds out of the greens at the Terry Park Golf Course in Palmyra, nothing glamorous at all.

How did you become involved in the Area Agency on Aging?

I have worked in the non-profit world for the last 30 years, mostly in nonprofit accounting. I applied for the fiscal manager's position here because the fiscal manager was planning to retire. As I was training with him the executive director was let go by the board, and because of my experience, I was put in as interim executive director in 2018. I was given the job permanently about a month later; then in 2020 we did a rebrand, and my title was changed to CEO.

How is society changing as the percentage of elderly people keeps increasing?

Not only are we having more people live longer, but the money, particularly the grant funding, hasn't kept up with the need. We started doing a gala in 2022 to raise money to help people with emergency needs because we get calls on a daily basis for help with things. There were no grant funds available to really help the majority of people with unforeseen emergency expenses.

What role will our senior citizens have in society in the coming decades?

I think we're going to see people working longer. In the next five to 10 years, one-third of our population will be over 60. With people choosing to have fewer children and more people choosing to work longer, I think that seniors are going to have a lot more impact on government and day-to-day life. One-third of the population is a huge chunk.

What are the newest trends regarding services to seniors?

We're seeing a lot of people looking for jobs over the age of 60. Part of that is because of



Carolyn and husband, Tom, at the CORAL Ritz in 2026.

the new SNAP requirements, but part of it is that people want and need to work longer. So one of the biggest trends will be more older people in the workplace.

Should senior citizens be concerned about the future of Social Security, and if so, what can be done about it?

I think we should all be concerned about the future of Social Security. We all need to make sure our legislators understand that this is our money that we have paid into the system, so it needs to be there when we are ready for it. We need to be good advocates for ourselves, participate in surveys and take any opportunity we can to make sure our legislators know how important Social Security is. Most of us are not independently wealthy, and we aren't going to be able to make it without Social Security when we retire.

What should be society's major concerns regarding our senior citizens?

I'm concerned about housing, the lack of nursing home and assisted living beds and the rising cost of assisted living facilities. It's going to be very hard for people to afford to live in those places even if they can find a bed. We need to build more facilities that are in reach for seniors on a fixed income.

As more people care for their elderly family members at home, how can we support those caregivers?

AgeLinc has some great programs that we do with our partners to support caregivers,

such as case management to help them avoid burn-out and get the resources they need. We also need to increase education about who is a caregiver because a lot of people don't think of themselves as caregivers. They might be sons or daughters who just take care of meals or medications, but that is actually caregiving. So we need to raise that awareness and as a society help to support those caregivers.

There are also going to be more people who need to stay in their own homes longer because of a lack of senior housing, and that might mean living with their kids or having a caregiver live with them. So we really need to raise awareness of those things.

We've heard that wisdom comes with age. What other positive benefits are there to growing older?

There's less stress and less concern about building a career. The kids are out of the house, there is a little more freedom as you age to make choices that make sense for you. So instead of trying to keep up with the Joneses or build a career, you can choose what you really want to do.

What advice would you give to people who want to enter your career field?

Don't expect to get rich doing this work, but I would love to see more people enter the gerontology field, taking college classes and being part of the aging network. There's a vast network throughout the United States and the world, yet many people don't realize we are here. Check out what's available in your area, talk to people who work in this industry, and get an idea of what's involved in this very rewarding field. See what a difference you can make in people's lives.

What may people be surprised to learn about you?

I'm an older learner. I didn't get my master's degree until I was 41. I went back to college when I had a child in middle school. I hope that people can take from my experience that it's never too late to do it.

RETIREMENT AND CARE COMMUNITIES

Sources: The individual facilities.
DND - did not disclose
Ranked by total number of beds.

	NAME STREET ADDRESS CITY/ST/ ZIP	PHONE WEBSITE/EMAIL	TOTAL BEDS	SERVICES OFFERED	FACILITY MANAGER	NUMBER OF FULL TIME EMPLOYEES	AMENITIES	YEAR EST'D
1	EverTrue Concordia Village, a Life Plan Community 4101 W. Iles Ave. Springfield, IL 62711	217-793-9429 EverTrueConcordiaVillage.org Info@EverTrueLiving.org	316	Independent living, assisted living, memory support, long-term care, short-stay rehab	Jacque Bogner executive director	233	Chapel, movie theater, restaurant-style dining, private dining rooms, outdoor courtyard, several libraries, beauty salon, market, activities calendar, wellness clinic, fitness room, indoor pool, game room, juice bar, art studio, transportation, maintenance service, 24/7 nursing care, patient-centered care.	1995
2	Arc at Sangamon Valley 3400 W. Washington St. Springfield, IL 62711	217-787-9600 arcadialtc.com/the-arc-at-sangamon-valley	233	Independent and assisted living, skilled nursing care	Ruth Huber director	240	Arc at Sangamon Valley provides a higher standard of rehabilitation and longterm care.	1974
3	Springfield Supportive Living 2034 E. Clear Lake Ave. Springfield, IL 62703	217-522-8843 springfieldsupportiveliving.com jenniferh@springfieldslf.com	135	Supportive living	Shawn Braley	33	Nurses 10 hours per day, CNAs available 24 hours, assistance with medications, bathing, laundry and housekeeping, three meals daily plus snacks, fenced outdoor patio with walking path, daily activities, weekly trips, all utilities included except phone, free Wi-Fi and Dish Network. Proud to celebrate 20+ years of serving Springfield residents.	2005
4	Hickory Glen 1700 W. Washington St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-793-0431 hickoryglenseniorkiving.com hickoryglen@tutera.com	129	Independent living	Rebecca Siltman	10	Restaurant-style dining, Sunday brunch, transportation, housekeeping, activities, social events, full-time lifestyle coordinator, cinema, library, lounge, gym, hair salon, store, pets welcome, utilities and basic cable included.	1986
5	Montvale Senior Living 2601 Montvale Drive Springfield, IL 62704	217-546-5577 montvaleseniorkiving.com info@montvaleseniorkiving.com	121	Independent living	Sarah Mather executive director	20	Transportation, housekeeping, chef-prepared meals, 24/7 emergency response services, pets welcome, salon, social activities, utilities included, some Wi-Fi, exercise room, billiards, weekly trips.	DND
6	Seasons Active Senior Living 3511 & 3201 Conifer Drive Springfield, IL 62711	217-698-5780	119	Independent living	Ruth Engleman Debbie Deopere	6	Garages and covered parking, covered patios, library, exercise rooms, private party room, walking paths, fishing lake.	2004
7	Arcadia on the Hill 555 W. Carpenter St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-525-1880 arcadialtc.com/arcadia-care-on-the-hill	115	Skilled beds	Leonard Koenig director	150	On-site therapy staff, on-call med director, in-house practitioner, dialysis transport, daily activities, IV therapy, pain management, laundry service, in-house social workers, Wi-Fi, transportation, day room, library, business center, private rooms, refrigerators.	2018
8	The Villas Assisted Lifestyle & Memory Care 100 Stardust Drive Sherman, IL 62684	217-744-9891 villasseniorkare.com rbognanovich@villasseniorkare.com	113	Assisted lifestyle	Russ Bogdanovich	56	24-hour nursing, transportation to medical appointments, physical, occupational and speech therapy on site, Wi-Fi, computer access, library, cat friendly, private suites, beauty/barber salon, respite care, bistro and chapel with weekly Mass.	1981
8	Arcadia Care Jacksonville 1021 N. Church St. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-4174 arcadialtc.com	113	Skilled beds	Chelsea Phillips	63	Hospice care, respite, IV therapy, Wi-Fi.	2015
9	Brenden Gardens 900 Southwind Road Springfield, IL 62703	217-529-4586 brendengardensretirement.com brendengardens@tutera.com	112	Independent living	Christine Brimer executive director	20	Three meals a day, weekly housekeeping, bus service five days each week, 100% maintenance service, year-round activities, 24-hour coffee café, laundry service, six laundry rooms and two elevators.	2006
10	The Villas Total Rehab & Skilled Nursing Care 100 Marian Parkway Sherman, IL 62684	217-744-2299 VillasSeniorCare.com Talicea@villasseniorkare.com	109	Skilled beds	Tonya Alicea	100	Accessible van and bus for outings, courtyard with walking paths and gazebo, therapy gym, Wi-Fi, Jacuzzi tubs, daily activities, aviaries, café, private and semi-private accommodations, salon, therapy wing, therapy gym and short-term rehab.	1987
11	Regency Care 2120 W. Washington St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-793-4880 heritageofcare.com/regency stulipana@heritageofcare.com	99	Skilled beds	Shelley Tulipana	66	Private and semi-private rooms, restaurant-style dining, beauty salon services, activities, transportation, Wi-Fi, cable TV, laundry service and private party rooms. Long-term and respite care and short-term rehab including physical, occupational and speech therapy.	1991
12	Illinois Presbyterian Home Communities - Fair Hills Residence, Cottages & Apartments 2005 W. Lawrence Ave. Springfield, IL 62704	217-546-5622 iphcommunities.org maryann.walker@iphcommunities.org	88	Independent and assistive lifestyle	Maryann Walker executive director	45	Scenic, park-like campus, open to all faiths, month-to-month rent. Assisted living - spacious private rooms with walk-in showers, 24/7 nursing assistance, laundry, housekeeping, meals, plus social and spiritual activities. Independent living - apartments or cottages with senior-friendly accessibility, all appliances, light housekeeping, utilities and more.	1954
13	Cedarhurst of Jacksonville 2225 W. Morton Ave. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-2996 cedarhurstliving.com	86	Assisted living, memory care	Stephanie Smith	54	Therapy, movie theater, lake with fishing, restaurant-style dining, person-centered dementia care, secured care, therapy gym.	2016
13	The Pointe at Jacksonville 20 Jacksonville Place Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-602-0930 thepointeatjacksonville.com	86	Supportive and assisted living, memory cares	Brittani King	DND	Private apartments. All inclusive.	2019
14	Cedarhurst of Springfield 3520 Old Jacksonville Road Springfield, IL 62711	217-203-6522 cedarhurstliving.com springfieldil@cedarhurstliving.com	79	Assisted living, memory care	Pete Bolt executive director	70	Therapy, movie theater, restaurant-style dining, person-centered dementia care, secured care, 24/7 nursing care, all private apartments and suites, therapy staff.	2019

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RETIREMENT AND CARE COMMUNITIES

Sources: The individual facilities.
DND - did not disclose
Ranked by total number of beds.

	NAME STREET ADDRESS CITY/ST/ ZIP	PHONE WEBSITE/EMAIL	TOTAL BEDS	SERVICES OFFERED	FACILITY MANAGER	NUMBER OF FULL TIME EMPLOYEES	AMENITIES	YEAR EST'D
15	Springfield Suites Rehab and Nursing 3089 Old Jacksonville Road Springfield, IL 62704	217-787-0000 springfieldsuitesreh.com cschaaf@bridgecaresuites.com	75	Skilled beds	Cindy Schaaf	120	Spa, business center, beauty salon, restaurant style dining, cafe, theater, therapy gym, game room, Wi-Fi, private suites, transportation. Short-term care facility, post-hospitalization, post-surgical, wound care, IV therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, respite care, work with hospice providers for hospice care.	2013
16	Trustwell Living 2451 W. White Oaks Drive Springfield, IL 62704	217-787-9000 trustwellliving.com lstrohl@trustwellliving.net	68 apart- ments	Independent and assisted living, memory care	Leslie Strohl executive director	22	Personalized care and services plans, private, spacious apartments, restaurant-style dining, licensed nurses, medication assistance, full activity calendar of educational, cultural, entertainment and social events, all utilities (except phone and cable), pet friendly community.	2022
16	Timberlake Estates 2423 Taylor Ave. Springfield, IL 62703	217-585-9400 projectmgr@timberlakeestatesil.com	67	Independent living	Janelle Jennings property manager	2	Beauty salon, ice cream socials, fitness center, theater room, wireless internet, billiard room, garden.	2008
17	Mill Creek Alzheimer's Special Care Center 3319 Ginger Creek Drive Springfield, IL 62711	217-726-7900 sinceriseniorliving.com/mill-creek jennifer.hubbert@sincerisl.com	66	Memory care	Jennifer Hubbert executive director	65	Dementia care program, specially trained staff, supervised, success-oriented activities program, supervised outings, three meals a day, linens and housekeeping, landscaped secured courtyard with walking areas, electronically monitored security system, support groups, educational programs, referral services.	2006
18	Avenues at Springfield 525 S. Martin Luther King Drive Springfield, IL 62703	217-789-1680 tmccullough@arcadialtc.com	65	Intermediate beds	Tanisha McCullough	50	Wound care, on-site X-ray, infection control, medication management, individual and group therapy, dentist, podiatrist and optometrist, diabetes management, pain management.	DND
19	Timberlake Supportive Living 2521 Empowerment Road Springfield, IL 62703	217-321-2100 gardant.com/timberlakeslf.com execdir@timberlakeslf.com	60	Supportive living	Katrina Hairl executive director	30	Providing lifestyle enrichment programming, three meals per day plus snacks, 24-hour/day aide support, nurses eight hours per day, housekeeping and laundry, transportation to doctor visits and shopping, therapy services in building, financial assistance, refrigerator and microwave, maintenance.	2009
19	The Carriages of Rochester 1121 Community Drive Rochester, IL 62563	217-660-8872 carriageslife.com ccrelations@carriageslife.com	60	Independent and assisted living, memory care, respite care and adult day care	Jenni Stephens executive director	25	Chef-prepared meals, concierge services from housekeeping and laundry to chauffeur, salon or pharmacy services. Fitness classes.	2021
20	Capitol Retirement Village 500 N. Bruns Lane Springfield, IL 62702	217-698-9441 crv500.org manager@crv500.org	59	Independent living	Tara Anderson	3	Wheelchair accessible, transportation to doctors and grocery stores, laundry room on each floor, beauty shop, locked entry, furnished patios and porch area, community room for parties and gatherings, versatile resident activities, live-in manager.	2004
21	Country Lane Memory Care - Assisted Living 875 Riverton Road Riverton, IL 62561	217-629-4265 CountryLaneMemoryCare.com Cari@countrylanememorycare.com	50	Assisted living, memory care	Cari Claussen	35	Memory care with 24-hour licensed nursing and medication management. Staff trained for Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Private and semi-private rooms. Three meals a day, daily housekeeping and laundry and individualized activities. Theater room, lounge areas, dining and activity room, beauty shop, courtyard with country views.	2016
21	The Villas of Holly Brook 825 E. Walnut St. Chatham, IL 62629	217-483-4655 meridiansenior.com vcha.adm@meridiansenior.com	50	Independent and assisted living	Kathleen Burton director	20	Three meals a day, transportation, activities, weekly laundry and housekeeping, assistance with ADL's, medication management, pet friendly, spacious apartments, movie theater, game room, all-inclusive care.	2012
21	Americare Centennial Pointe 3440 Hedley Road Springfield, IL 62711	217-546-9301 americareusa.net centennial@americareusa.net	50	Assisted living, senior day program, respite, memory care	Lisa Smith executive director	35	24/7 nursing on site, daily social enrichment programs, restaurant-style dining, beauty/barber shop, exercise area including outdoor walking path and garden, pets welcome. Controlled Multi-Sensory Environment (MSE).	2015
21	The Villas of South Park 10000 S. Main St. Chatham, IL 62629	217-697-5415 villasofhollybrook.com/chatham-il- assisted-living/ chatham_director@villasofhollybrook.com	50	Independent and assisted living	Paige Wernsing executive director	25	Fishing pond, scheduled activities, two courtyards with a garden and fireplace, ice cream, cappuccino and juice machine, onsite therapy, salon, jetted bathtub in spa room, exercise room, three daily meals, plus snacks.	
22	Villas at River Birch 4012 Cockrell Lane Springfield, IL 62711	217-547-0400 arcadialtc.com	42	Assisted living, memory care	Kelly Briseno executive director	40	Memory care with Pathway Memory Support Programming 24 hours. Assisted living nurse staff on site 24 hours, medication dispensing, home-cooked meals, person-centered care, on-site salon and stylist, linen and laundry services, housekeeping services, quiet and beautiful location.	DND
23	Rochester Estates Senior Living 4817 N. Oak Hill Road Rochester, IL 62563	217-498-6959 Laura.bogdanovich@sincerisl.com	37	Independent and assisted living	Laura Bogdanovich director	35	Private apartments, assistance with bathing, dressing, grooming, medication reminders and supervision, three meals a day and two snacks, weekly housekeeping and laundry, transportation to and from medical appointments, fun activities throughout the day, exercise class and trips out to restaurants and shopping.	2006



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State launches 10-year plan to improve seniors' lives

EngAging Illinois' focus ranges from housing to transportation to caregiver support

by Ed Wojcicki

The state of Illinois is in the early months of implementing an ambitious 10-year plan in which multiple state agencies, local governments and the private sector will collaborate to make life better for older adults and their caregivers.

If all goes as planned, caregivers will have more resources, older adults will enjoy more affordable and accessible housing and transportation, and dozens of local communities and the state itself will be designated as "age-friendly."

That's just for starters. A 57-page report released early this year, EngAging Illinois: A Comprehensive Plan for Aging Well, has four major focus areas, 10 priorities and dozens of ideas and action steps. The report admits this effort is "ambitious" but declares it is designed to be "realistic" with measurable outcomes. Input for the report, which was mandated by a 2024 gubernatorial executive order to create a "multi-sector plan for aging," came from 15 state agencies, a 25-member community advisory council and many experts and advocates who participated in nine public-engagement sessions.

Overseeing the plan's implementation is a commission led by chief planning officer Michelle Hoersch, who started at the Illinois Department on Aging last year.

"We have no choice but to prioritize preparing for the aging of our population," Hoersch said. "We must act boldly and immediately."

To implement the 10-year plan, the commission has established eight working groups. One focuses on housing and will consult with appropriate state agencies and the private sector as it develops goals and strategies.

"When we use the term multi-sector, we mean it," Hoersch said. "The private sector has as much of a stake in the success of EngAging IL as anyone. We are already building relationships with developers of housing for older adults, municipalities that determine zoning, and adminis-



trators of older adult housing, to name a few."

That collaborative approach permeates the early efforts of the eight working groups, all of which address one specific aspect such as transportation, health or social connection.

Another group is concentrating on the report's findings about challenges facing caregivers. The report found that more than 2.2 million Illinoisans are providing unpaid care to aging loved ones, people with disabilities and others in need, and these caregivers often have health issues of their own as well as mental distress, including depression. "At the same time, paid caregivers – direct care workers, home care aides, home health aides, certified nursing assistants and personal attendants – deliver essential frontline care but often work part-time, are paid low wages, receive limited benefits and face excessive workloads," the report said. "This leads to high turnover."

To support them, the commission will create a centralized online portal for caregivers and modernize home and community-based services, looking for more ways to spread information and provide resources. Developing the EngAge Central portal is a complex task and still a year away from reality, Hoersch said, but it is expected to make it easier for caregivers, older adults and health and social service providers to identify resources to assist them.

The state has applied to be an Age-Friendly

State, an honorary designation awarded by AARP to recognize efforts to help older people live easily and comfortably in their homes and communities. AARP values initiatives focused on housing, caregiving, community engagement, volunteering, social inclusion and combating isolation among older citizens, and it calculates "livability scores" based on certain criteria.

The state-level designation matters, Hoersch said, because it "helps build an expecta-

tion and motivation for municipalities to strive to become and be recognized as age-friendly communities." The commission wants local communities to apply for the Age-Friendly Community designation, and so far, 15 Illinois cities have been recognized as such in the total of 1,037 nationally.

The state commission has short-term and long-term plans and hopes to raise the visibility of its ambitious initiative through its website, working groups and communication with partners, local governments and the Illinois public. It will engage elected officials, health and social services providers, community-based organizations, philanthropic groups, businesses and employers, Hoersch said. For example, Mary O'Donnell, president and CEO of the Chicago-based RRF Foundation for Aging, co-chaired the Community Advisory Council and remains active.

Asked if the plan might be too ambitious to implement, Hoersch replied, "No, I don't see failure as a possibility or an option. We fail if we do nothing. We are very intentional in how we are moving forward. So far, we have met with tremendous support and enthusiasm." **SBJ**

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



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The secret to staying young

Retired business owner is still active in his 90s

By Adrian Dater

A banana every morning, along with a glass of milk, and some pickleball in the afternoon. For Donald Taft, at least, this is his recommended elixir to older people who want to keep drinking from the fountain of youth.

At 93, the longtime Springfield restaurateur is believed to be the oldest active pickleball player in a city teeming with them. At the Springfield Racquet and Fitness Center on Chatham Road, where he plays three days a week, Taft sometimes plays against opponents close to a half century younger.

Opponents may marvel at his proficiency at the game for such an age. Asked to describe the current state of his game, however, Taft is a bit more self-deprecatory.

"Do you know what a snail is?" Taft asks. "How 'bout a fire hydrant? When I started playing about eight years ago, I was decent. I was moving pretty good. Not so much now. But, you know, every now and then I have one of those days where I'm feeling pretty good and hitting the ball pretty good and I'll throw my arms up and say, 'Oh my God, I feel like I'm 80 years old again.'"

Likened by some as a combination of ping-pong and tennis, pickleball has been the rage for several years now for older Americans wanting a brisk, low-impact form of exercise that brings out the competitive juices too. The Racquet and Fitness Center has nine indoor pickleball courts, with open play morning and night. Pickleball courts can be found elsewhere in the area at the Springfield Park District's Iles and Duncan parks, at the Chatham Community Park, the privately owned Premier Pickleball Center on Constitution Drive and at the Salvation Army and YMCA.

Springfield Pickleball League president Tony



Don Taft, 93, stays busy with regular pickleball games, golfing three times a week and riding "Boss Hoss," his 445 horsepower, three-wheeled motorcycle with a Corvette engine. PHOTO BY STEVE HINRICH

Stang says there are more than 600 registered players, in all age ranges. It was once seen as a sport mainly for older people, but Stang said more and more younger players are taking it up.

A regulation pickleball court measures 20 feet wide by 44 feet long, not counting out-of-bounds space, while a regulation tennis court is 27 by 78 for singles and 36 by 78 for doubles.

"You obviously don't have as much ground to cover, which can be an attractive thing to an older person, let's say," says Jack Handy, 73, a local pickleball player and teacher. "People get really addicted to it very fast. The rules are pretty simple and it's easy to play."

An estimated 5 million people play pickleball in the U.S. The sport has even gone professional, with 20 teams from around the country currently competing in Major League Pickleball, including one in Illinois, the Chicago Slice.

Taft first fell in love with handball, which he said he played for about 20 years, then graduated to playing regular racquetball, which became all the rage in the 1970s and '80s. Then, he played regular tennis for years until, about eight years ago, he switched to pickleball. His other activity, three days a week, is a round of golf with his two

sons.

The Rochester native, who grew up on a dairy farm, is a distant relative of former U.S. President William Howard Taft. To longtime Springfield residents, he is better known for being the owner of the Heritage House, an all-you-can eat smorgasbord that opened on South Sixth Street in 1964 before closing in 2004.

"We had an all-you-can eat lunch buffet for \$1.19 when we first opened. Dinner was \$1.85, and a drink cost a quarter more," Taft said. "We did very well for a long time, but then all-you-can eat places started popping up everywhere, and the business dropped

off some. At one point, though, I think I had 12 stores in the Midwest area."

In 2010, Taft got back into the restaurant business, opening a Le Peep franchise store on the west side of town. He sold his interest in the store several years ago. He divides his time between Rochester and a home in Florida and is now fully retired.

But not from pickleball.

"I urge everyone, especially those a little older who maybe are bored with just walking or what-not, to pick up a racquet and give it a whirl," said Taft, a former licensed pilot who flew missions for the U.S. in the Korean War. "A lot of people like to play doubles, and so it's also a great way to socialize, maybe meet some new friends. Most of us all just laugh and have a good time together. But, I like to win sometimes too!" **SBJ**

Adrian Dater, a longtime former sportswriter in Denver and author of seven books, moved to Springfield in 2023 to get his first taste of life in the Midwest.

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How to know when it's time to retire

by Ed Wojcicki



Ed Wojcicki, left, confers with UIS alumnus Donovan Pepper at the University of Illinois Lobby Day in 2013 at the State Capitol.

I'll never forget one respected colleague's lament a few years after he retired from University of Illinois Springfield.

"I think I stayed two years too long," he commented. He had contributed so much as a faculty member and administrator and enlightened many of us, particularly on issues of diversity. But as he watched new faculty and administrators rising in stature and his own perceived influence dwindling, a nagging bitterness grew within him, and he left with more exasperation than satisfied sense of accomplishment. That was sad to watch.

Besides that man, I watched a lot of coworkers retire during my 46 years working at UIS and other places. No matter the location, I witnessed a common pattern in the weeks leading up to their last day. When asked why they were retiring, they would pause, sigh, exhale and slowly drag out the simple sentence, "It's time."

For only a few was that merely a rational statement that they had enough years to collect a pension or otherwise live comfortably. For most, what had come before the decision was some combination of weariness, a diminishing zeal for the mission and a little frustration that things weren't the same as they used to be. "It's time" slowly began to make sense to them.

Famously, in the late 1990s, then-Gov. Jim Edgar was only 51 and was considering three options: whether to run for a third gubernatorial term, run for U.S. Senate or retire. He prepared three speeches with those three announcements at the end, and on the day he made the announcement, he had the entire state in suspense about which of the three choices he would reveal from the executive mansion.

He called it "a very, very difficult decision ... [but] I have concluded it's time for Brenda and me to begin a new chapter in our life. It is time to afford someone else the rare, precious opportunity to govern and lead the greatest state in the union." Notice he said "it's time" twice. The popular Edgar never ran for office again but used his stature to become a senior statesman and support favored causes for nearly three decades before he died last year.

For me, five years ago, after I had left UIS and was leading a statewide association with 1,400 members, I began to feel the world of work was moving faster than I wanted it to, and my days began and ended earlier and later than I wanted them to. I could sense some fatigue and diminishing ambition to fully tackle challenges big and small.

"It's time," I said to myself. I talked to my board

about a succession plan, and we implemented it over a period of months. I retired. I had been visibly active and engaged throughout my career, so many did not believe me when I said I was looking forward to sitting in my living room recliner, drinking coffee and reading books. I had no bucket list.

I had asked people older than I how to really know when it's time. They all had the same vague answer: "You will know; you will feel it."

The feeling about readiness to retire is different from considering a change in jobs due to being stuck, wanting more money or ejecting yourself from a toxic situation. Over the decades, I accepted new opportunities for all those reasons.

The good news is the decision to switch jobs or retire is almost always a personal choice. If you don't feel "it's time" yet, you are probably right. Don't leave too early. But if you find yourself privately sighing with some sense of relief that yes, it's time, it's wise to pay attention to that inner voice, so you don't stay too long. **SBJ**

Ed Wojcicki worked in journalism, higher education and association management for 46 years and freelances from Springfield.

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Sources: The individual agencies.
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NAME STREET ADDRESS CITY/ST/ ZIP	PHONE WEBSITE/EMAIL	AGENCY MANAGER	NUMBER OF FULL TIME EMPLOYEES	PRIMARY SERVICES OFFERED	YEAR EST'D
Advanced Healthcare Services, LLC 3900 Pintail Drive, Suite A, Springfield, IL 62711	217-726-6956 ahslc.org	Juanita Jones	47	Skilled nursing, physical, occupational and speech therapy and medical social work.	2007
Apria Healthcare 775 E. Linton Ave., Springfield, IL 62703	217-789-0461 apria.com	Jamie Bell	10	Home health care equipment, respiratory equipment, wound care, wheelchairs, hospital beds.	DND
BrightStar Care of Springfield, Decatur and Bloomington 801 S. MacArthur Blvd., Springfield, IL 62704	217-318-3396 brightstarcare.com/springfield-decatur julie.miller@brightstarcare.com	Chris and Julie Miller	40	Home care, medical staffing, IV infusion, wound care.	2015
Enhabit Home Health of Illinois 2970 Baker Drive, Springfield, IL 62703	217-542-7138 enhabithomehealth.com	TBD	26	Skilled nursing, physical and occupational therapy.	1984
Family First Home Care 1999 Wabash Ave., Springfield, IL 62704	800-853-5292 familyfirsthc.com Latasha.Barnes@myfamilyfirsthc.com	Latasha Barnes	DND	Pediatric private duty nursing.	1999
Gentiva Hospice 2815 Old Jacksonville Road, Suite 201-202, Springfield, IL 62702	217-525-6200 gentivahs.com	Timothy Banks	38	Hospice care.	DND
Hands of God Hospice 1500 N. Fifth St., Suite 203, Springfield, IL 62702	217-284-9070 www.handsogodhospice.com dlithgow@handsogodhospice.com	David Lithgow	8	Hospice care, pastoral support, bereavement support.	2022
Help at Home, LLC 605 W. Jefferson St., Suite B, Springfield, IL 62702	217-753-0211 helpathome.com springfield@helpathome.com	Dana Platt	1,362	Housekeeping, laundry, shopping, meal preparation, personal care, errands.	1975
Home Instead 1440 W. Walnut St., Suite A6, Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-9192 homeinstead.com/545	Jerry Best Gina Hayes owners	12	Non-medical in-home care including companionship, meal preparation, personal care, Alzheimer's care and more.	2004
Home Instead 2040 W. Iles Ave., Suite A, Springfield, IL 62704	217-547-1300 homeinstead.com/762	Rob First Amy Best	100	Personalized in-home caregiving services including companionship, meal preparation, personal care, Alzheimer's care and more.	2011
Memorial Home Care 701 N. First St., Springfield, IL 62781	217-788-4663 800-582-8667 memorial.health	Christina King director	67	Skilled nursing, physical, occupational and speech therapy, home health aide assistance and medical social workers.	1988
SYNERGY HomeCare of Central Illinois 3259 W. Iles Ave., Springfield, IL 62711	217-303-8555 synergyhomecare.com taylorstevens@synergyhomecare.com	Taylor Stevens regional community liaison	10	Senior home care and in-home support with caregivers who assist with needs such as meals, mobility, bathing, transportation and companionship as well as specialized support for those living with Alzheimer's memory loss, stroke recovery, chronic conditions, post-hospital transitions and more.	2013
Visiting Angels 2731 MacArthur Blvd., Suite 201, Springfield, IL 62704	217-568-6308 visitingangels.com	Benjie Polnick	53	Personal in-home care including hygiene, meal preparation, medication reminders, housekeeping, errands, companionship and memory care. No minimum hour requirement.	2017



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by Dilpreet Raju



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Is the problem time management – or yes management?

by Kelly Gust

I've never met a leader who told me they needed another hour in the day. What I hear instead is that we're overwhelmed, overcommitted and struggling to keep up with competing priorities. Our calendars are packed, our inboxes are full, and the list of things we intended to accomplish somehow remains untouched.

Most of us assume we need to get better at time management. I'm not convinced. I think we have a yes-management problem.

Recently, I was preparing a frontline-leadership training for healthcare leaders and clinic staff. It's a class I've taught before, and in the discussion about managing priorities, one theme always surfaces: leaders frequently commit to work before they commit time to accomplish it. They agree to projects, volunteer for committees, accept meetings and take on additional responsibilities without first asking a simple question: Where will this fit on my calendar?

One of the principles I teach is straightforward. If the thing you need to do is important, put it on your calendar. If there's no room on your calendar, that should tell you something. It might be a no.

The challenge is that many of us don't treat our calendars as a reflection of reality. Instead, we treat them as a collection of meetings while assuming everything else will magically happen in the spaces between. Strategic thinking, project work, performance conversations, planning, development, exercise, family commitments and personal appointments all get left to chance. Then we're surprised when we run out of time.

Time blocking forces a different conversation. Before agreeing to a new commitment,



you allocate the time required to fulfill it. If you can't find the time, you're forced to confront a difficult truth: saying yes to one thing often means saying no to something else.

What gets people into trouble isn't usually the word "yes," though. It's the word "maybe:" Maybe I'll get to that this week.

Maybe we can fit it in.

Maybe we should revisit that next month.

Maybe sounds polite. It feels flexible and noncommittal. In reality, it often creates more frustration than a direct no. A clear no allows people to adjust expectations, develop alternatives and move forward. Maybe keeps everyone waiting.

I've come to believe that maybe is one of the most expensive words in business. It delays decisions, obscures priorities and creates a false sense that work is progressing when it's really sitting in limbo.

Leaders are especially susceptible to this trap because many genuinely want to help. They want to encourage ideas, support their teams and be viewed as collaborative. The unintended consequence is that they approve new initiatives, accept additional responsibilities and layer new priorities on top of existing ones.

Eventually, everything becomes a priority. And when everything is a priority, nothing is.

This is why effective leaders spend time managing their time. They don't simply react to the week as it unfolds. They regularly schedule time to think.

A talented sales trainer I used to work with called this – time in your "thinking chair." A few minutes every morning helps identify immediate priorities the same day and the next. A few minutes at the start

of every week creates space to assess commitments and prepare for upcoming demands of this week and next. Monthly and quarterly look-aheads help leaders anticipate major projects, vacations, healthcare appointments, deadlines and other obligations before they become last-minute emergencies.

This planning time can feel unproductive when you're busy. In reality, it's often the most productive time you spend.

The leaders who seem the most organized aren't necessarily working harder than everyone else. They're spending more time looking ahead. They understand that every commitment requires space on the calendar, and they know that protecting that space is just as important as making the commitment itself.

So the next time you're feeling overwhelmed, resist the urge to download another productivity app or search for a better time management system. After all, you can't manage time, you can only manage yourself.

Instead, look at your last 10 commitments and ask yourself a different question: Were they truly a matter of time management, or could a few well-placed no's have solved the problem before it started? **SBJ**

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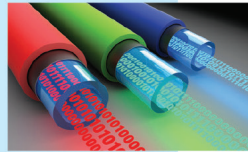
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PHOTOS BY ZACH ADAMS

6 ST. CAFÉ

By Thomas C. Pavlik

Although I'm hopeful that the soon-to-be-constructed apartments at the former Sangamo Club, the eventual influx of office workers at the Armory and the future BOS Center expansion will lead to greater dining choices downtown, right now the pickings, as they say, are a bit slim. But one reliable choice, which may not be on your radar, is the 6 St. Café located on Sixth Street near the Old State Capitol Plaza.

Perhaps one reason 6 St. Café may not be on your radar is that its menu is hard to find online. I don't know about you, but before I visit a new restaurant I want to know what they serve and what it costs. Despite having a surprisingly extensive breakfast and lunch menu, the menu options aren't listed on the café's website. In

today's environment, this strikes me as a missed opportunity. Fortunately, the food more than makes up for the inconvenience.

6 St. Café's menu includes breakfast served all day, sandwiches, burgers, salads, soups and a handful of Springfield-style comfort food favorites. Prices remain quite reasonable, particularly given today's restaurant environment.

The restaurant itself is modest in size. There is seating at the bar, a few tables near the front windows and several more in the back. Video gaming terminals occupy part of the space – a familiar feature in many Illinois establishments. The dining room is often busy with downtown workers, and there appears to be a strong take-out business as well. Throughout lunch, custom-

ers regularly stop in to pick up orders to go. I've also run into quite a few regulars on my visits, a testament to 6 St. Café's staying power.

What keeps people coming back, however, is not the décor – it's the food. My personal favorite is the BBLT. The description is straightforward: double bacon, lettuce, tomato and mayo served on toast. There is no unusual aioli, artisan bread or chef-inspired reinterpretation of a classic sandwich. It is simply a BLT with extra bacon. The bacon deserves special mention. I find bacon to be one of the most botched items in the restaurant business. Too many kitchens cook it until it becomes brittle enough to use as kindling. Other restaurants go in the opposite direction and serve it with unrendered fat (gack). 6 St. Café

consistently finds the sweet spot: it retains some chew and texture while still providing enough crispness to complement the sandwich.

Likewise, the cheeseburger (available in various formats) clicks all the boxes for a classic standby: gooey American cheese, crisp veggies and a well-seared smash-patty.

My wife is particularly fond of the fried egg breakfast sandwich. Like many of 6 St. Café's offerings, it succeeds because it focuses on fundamentals – well-toasted bread, properly cooked eggs, flavorful meat and correct proportions. There's no need to reinvent breakfast when the traditional version is done well.

6 St. Café's menu includes several other options that caught my attention, including the breakfast burger and ponyshoe, the Monte Cristo and the buffalo chicken salad.

Another standout are the tater tots. Tots, all too often overlooked on a menu, occupy a food category that should be easy to execute but often is not. The best versions arrive hot, crisp



The BBLT is a BLT with double bacon served with tater tots – both standout items on the menu.
PHOTOS BY ZACH ADAMS

and golden brown, while retaining a soft interior. The worst versions taste as though they spent too much time under a heat lamp. 6 St. Café's tots consistently fall into the first category.

Service deserves recognition. Staff is consistently welcoming, efficient and attentive without becoming intrusive. The employees seem to know many customers by name – usually a good indication. One of the small details I note with

appreciation relates to take-out orders – I generally ask for a pickle. 6 St. Café makes an extra effort to make sure pickle juice doesn't soak into the other items to create a soggy mess. Nicely done. 6 St. Café focuses on serving satisfying breakfasts, quality sandwiches and reasonably priced comfort food in a convenient downtown location. More importantly, it does so consistently, which is one of the most underrated qualities in the restaurant business. And that's what I've found over my multiple visits here: good breakfasts, excellent bacon, crispy tater tots, friendly service and fair prices. There are flashier restaurants in town as well

as more ambitious menus. But when looking for breakfast or lunch downtown, I continue to return to 6 St. Café.

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Providing Daily Bread

Senior Services program regularly feeds more than 200 homebound seniors

by Janet Seitz

Anne Daly spent 40 years as a registered dietitian. Six months into her retirement, she wanted to fill her schedule with something that fit her interests. One evening while watching the local news, she saw a clip about Senior Services of Central Illinois' need for volunteers for its Daily Bread program.

"I knew immediately this sounded like a good fit for me," Daly said.

The nonprofit Senior Services of Central Illinois provides older adults with non-medical services that enhance quality of life and promote

independent living. It launched its Daily Bread midday-meal program in 1973, expanding core nutrition and support services over the decades.

Daily Bread now offers meals to seniors 60-plus at seven sites in Sangamon and Menard Counties where residents enjoy a nourishing meal, fellowship, informative programs and social activities. Meals are delivered to those who are homebound. All meal plans are approved by licensed dietitian nutritionists.

Daly, who first volunteered more than four years ago, drives her route on Wednesdays. She picks up the meals, which include a hot meal and a lighter cold meal, at 9 a.m. and typically finishes her deliveries in 60 to 75 minutes. "My routes have varied and changed slightly over time but have mostly included a neighborhood area that I've come to know well," she said. "It really is a minor demand on my time for what I know is a huge benefit to recipients."

Clients must meet certain criteria to be eligible to receive meals. "Most of my clients

are limited mobility, with some being totally bedridden," Daly said. "All of them are in serious need of nutritional support. The meals we provide are nutritionally balanced, attractively packaged, and the menus are common foods that are generally popular to a wide audience. Recipients are very, very appreciative of these meals."

Daily Bread Nutrition Director Jennifer Duprey said that Senior Services' volunteers are an essential part of keeping the important program going. "I am a firm believer of keeping seniors healthy, independent, self-sufficient and in their own homes for as long as their health allows," Duprey said. "Daily Bread is forever grateful to all of our amazing volunteers for their dedicated, generous and valuable time that they all put into our program. Every single volunteer is truly making a difference in each and every one of our seniors' lives."

Daily Bread Volunteer Coordinator Kristie Reynolds reported that 48 volunteers regularly deliver meals to 262 homebound seniors. Ad-

ditionally, eight substitute volunteers help cover routes as needed, and three professional and community groups provide volunteers on a regular basis for an assigned day and route.

Reynolds said she is passionate about the program. "One of the greatest challenges in my role is balancing the logistics of the program with the human side of what we do," she said. "There are a lot of moving pieces behind the scenes – coordinating volunteers, covering routes, managing schedules, handling last-minute changes

and making sure everything runs smoothly. ... Seeing how much a meal, a friendly conversation or simply knowing that someone is checking on you can mean to a person has reminded me why this work matters. It's rewarding to know that what we do helps older adults remain independent while also letting them know they haven't been forgotten."

Daly said she is glad to have the opportunity to give back to the community in a way she knows matters. "Besides receiving the meal, our visit provides at least a small snippet of social interaction on a daily basis for people who may have little or no company on a regular basis ... while others are less social during my visits," she said. "It makes me feel happy knowing I have a dedicated appointment weekly to participate in this highly important program."

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



Carol Sobeck, left, and Terri Hempstead volunteer with Daily Bread through King's Daughters Organization.
PHOTO BY KRISTIE REYNOLDS



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Expensive contract clauses nobody reads

by Thomas C. Pavlik Jr

Most business owners spend hours negotiating the purchase price of a business. Then, after all that effort, they'll sign a contract without reading half of it. We see it all the time – the first few pages, which generally set out the basic business terms, get everyone's attention. The remaining pages become legal stuff, fatigue sets in, and finally the signature page appears.

Unfortunately, many of a contract's most important provisions are found near the end. In many cases, these provisions determine who wins, who loses and who writes the largest check when things go sideways.

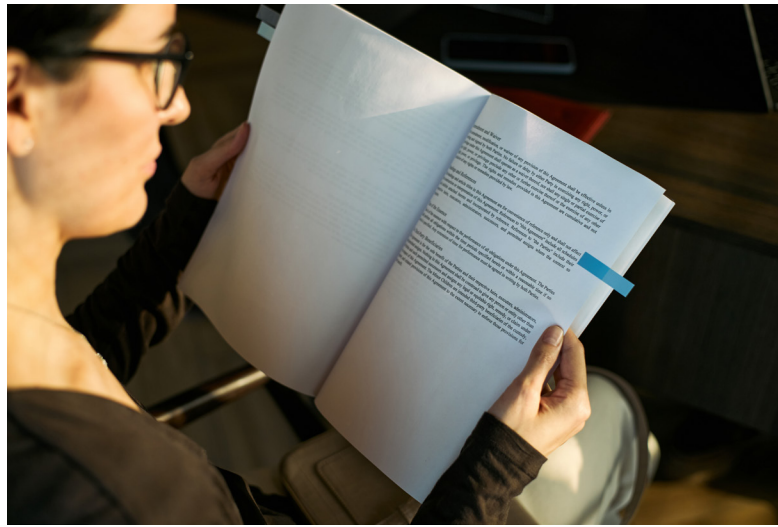
Here are five of the most consequential and expensive contract clauses business owners routinely overlook.

Attorney fee provisions

Under Illinois law, the general rule is that each party pays its own attorney fees unless a statute or contract provides otherwise. Many business owners do not realize that a simple sentence tucked away in a contract can completely change that rule. Suppose you have a dispute involving a \$25,000 contract. You may believe your worst-case scenario is losing \$25,000. But if the contract contains an attorney fee provision requiring the losing party to pay the prevailing party's legal fees, the exposure can increase dramatically. It's not uncommon for attorney fees to equal or exceed the amount actually in dispute. Even more concerning, many contracts are drafted so only one side gets the benefit of the provision. The stronger party often reserves the right to recover fees while denying the same right to you. Before signing, determine whether an attorney fee clause exists, whether it is reciprocal and whether the potential liability makes sense in relation to the transaction.

Personal guarantees

Well-advised owners usually form corporations or LLCs, in part, to separate business liabilities from personal assets. Then they sign a personal guarantee. A personal guarantee essentially allows a creditor to bypass the business and proceed directly against the individual owner. If the business cannot pay, the guarantor becomes personally responsible. This is common in commercial leases, bank loans, equipment financing agreements, vendor contracts and franchise



agreements.

Many owners spend years carefully building an LLC only to unknowingly give away much of the protection it provides by signing a guarantee without understanding its scope. Some guarantees apply only to a single transaction. Others are continuing guarantees covering future obligations. Some expire. Others do not.

Sometimes, it's a non-negotiable item. But if you're being asked to sign a guarantee, it's worth understanding exactly what you're guaranteeing and for how long.

Automatic renewals

This is one of my pet peeves. Owners constantly sign service contracts like software subscriptions, equipment leases, maintenance agreements, waste removal agreements and various consulting arrangements. They almost always include automatic renewal provisions. At first glance, they seem harmless. But the problem arises when a contract automatically renews for another one, three or even five years unless notice is given during a narrow cancellation window.

I have met with many business owners who believed a contract was about to expire only to discover they had missed a 60-day or 90-day notice requirement several months earlier. By the time they realized the issue, the agreement has already renewed for another lengthy term. The result is often an expensive buyout or years of paying for services they no longer need or want.

First, try to remove auto-renewal provisions. But if you can't, put the termination deadline on your calendar immediately.

Liquidated damages

A liquidated damages provision attempts to establish in advance the amount one party must

pay if a particular event occurs. Sometimes these clauses are reasonable. Sometimes they are breathtaking. I've seen contracts that impose large penalties for missing deadlines, terminating agreements early, failing to meet minimum purchase requirements or violating non-competition provisions. The danger is the stated damages rarely attract attention during negotiations. Everyone assumes the relationship will work out. Nobody expects a default, but then circumstances change. Suddenly the clause nobody discussed becomes the most important provision in the entire document.

Whenever you see a liquidated damages provision, ask yourself a simple question: If I had to write this check tomorrow, would the amount seem fair? If the answer is no, further discussion is warranted.

Forum selection/venue

This may be the most overlooked clause of all. Many contracts specify where disputes must be resolved. That location may be Illinois. But for many non-local parties, it's often in places like California, Texas, New York or somewhere else entirely. Owners often dismiss these provisions as technical legal details. They are not.

Imagine you've signed a contract requiring all disputes be litigated in another state. Now a disagreement arises involving a relatively modest amount of money. The cost of hiring out-of-state counsel, traveling for court appearances and managing litigation in a distant jurisdiction may make defending or prosecuting the claim economically impractical.

A venue clause can influence the outcome of a dispute before the first argument is ever made. At a minimum, understand where the contract requires disputes be handled and whether that location is acceptable. Better yet, try to negotiate a local venue or, as a last-ditch effort, try to leave the matter silent and let common law ultimately dictate what location is appropriate. **SBJ**



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

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New businesses

Sangamon County new business registrations, August 16 – September 15, 2026

Schafer Services, 3041 S. 12th St. 217-685-0162. Trap 404 LLC.

C4 Attachments & Implements, 4178 Old Route 36. 217-622-3237. Jenny McCarthy, Nick McCarthy.

Sadie's Hill, 2621 Kipling Drive. 217-306-0117. Byron Deaner, Jennifer Deaner.

Cocoa Blue Chocolates, 117 E. Main St., Rochester. 217-498-1261. Mary Boesdorfer.

DarSallie Beauty, LLC, 708 Breann Drive, Riverton. 217-860-9996. Sallie Lee Harmon.

Prairie State Painting, 1837 N. Albany. 217-361-7419. Jeremiah Martin.

NS Lawn Care, 3701 W. Bluffs Road. 660-624-3023. Nolan Andrew Scott.

Pearl & Paper, 4870 Sage Road, Rochester. 217-414-2094. Bridget L. Moore.

Billing and Books, 2917 S. Walnut St. 309-644-9421. Amy Figueroa.

Midwest Enterprises, LLC dba Déjà Vu Showgirls, 3220 Lake Plaza Drive. 217-339-6900. CDR Holdings, LLC.

The Goddess Touch, 1620 S. 15th St. 262-573-8391. Arshanda Jones.

Sterling Harbor Goods, 6317 Cherylwood Drive, Apt. 2. 708-510-5405. Leslie Celestine Willis.

ActOnyx Designs, 2642 Stratford Drive, Apt. C. 636-352-8820. Jill A. Graham.

Body By Que, 731 Hackberry, Chatham. 618-304-2400. Erik Bogner.

4Eva Hauling, 1611 W. Glenn Ave. 217-953-1981. Jennifer Holloway, Vincent Holloway.

D'S Lawncare, 1401 N. Third St., #75, Riverton. 217-971-8127. D&G Legacy Group LLC.

Quarter Dun Horsemanship, 4674 Starwalt Lane, Sherman. 309-706-3796. Daytona Detmers.

Capital City Home Watch, 3104 Widbey Court. 217-685-5669. Mitchel Engleman.

Sherman IL Hometown Bistro, 487 Parkway Drive, Sherman. 217-971-0434. Sarah Trigg, James Pacha.

Nightingale Designs, 2616 Arrowhead Drive. 217-494-2389. Gayle C. Blair.

Ryder Fleet Management Solutions, 3414 Lumber Lane. 217-917-1229. Chris Westbrook I.



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