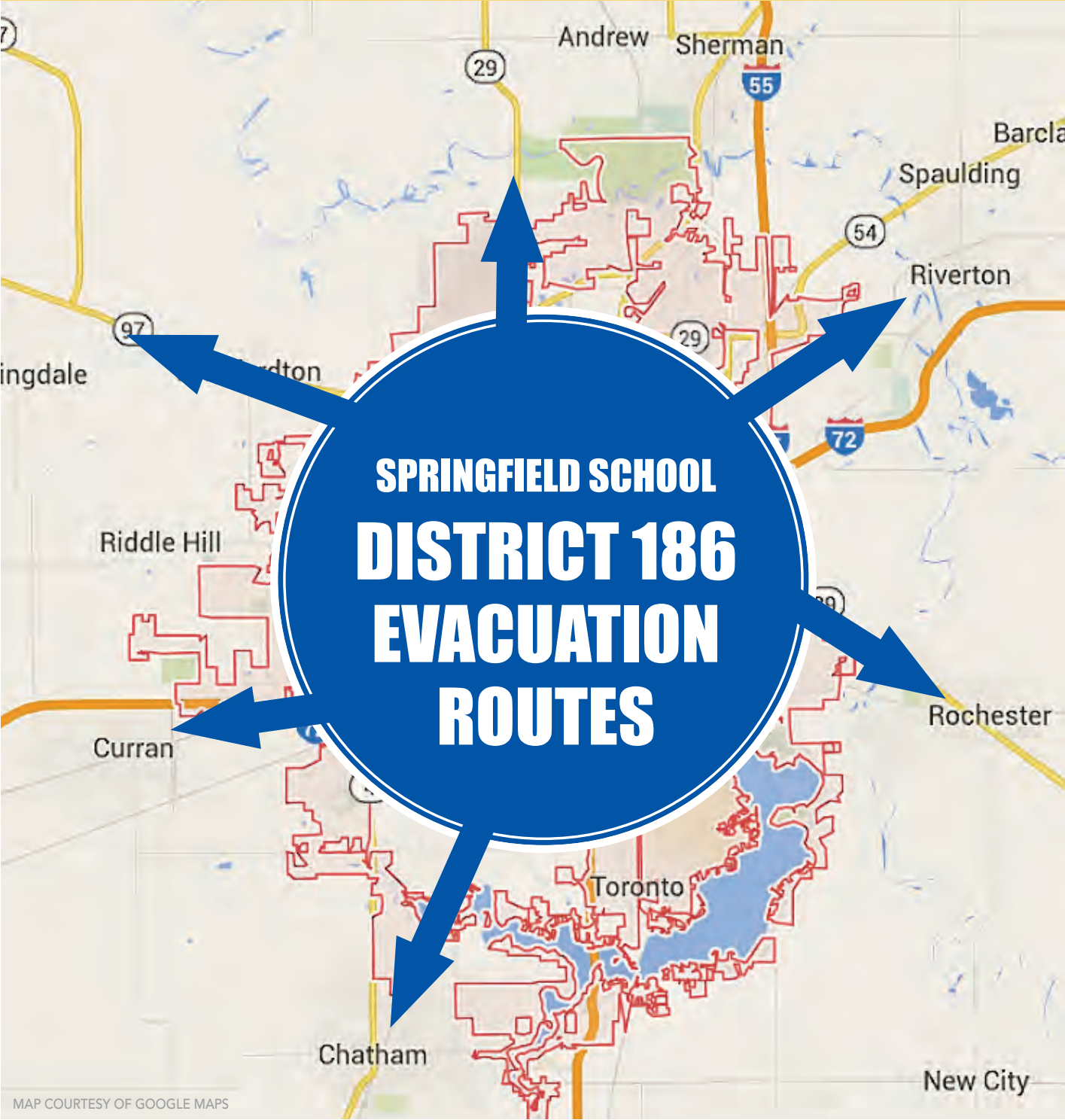


Local school districts in transition

Low-income students increase in outlying areas, hold steady in District 186

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Katie Davison aims to Innovate Springfield

By Gabe House

Katie Davison has returned to Springfield. Technically, she’s already been here for the past three years but the Springfield native had been working for the Northern Illinois University Center for Governmental Studies. Last month, Davison became the executive director of Innovate Springfield, a business and social innovation incubator based downtown at 15 South Old State Capitol Plaza.

“My passion really is Springfield, and I felt like I was sort of exporting my talents even as I lived here but didn’t really work here,” Davison said. “So when I saw this opportunity through Innovate Springfield, it really struck a chord with me. Not only was there the opportunity for direct impact in Springfield, but it was really exciting. This is new and creative, and I think it’s challenging. That was something that really compelled me.”

Davison’s background in strategic planning will be an integral strength as she seeks to truly combine the three prongs of Innovate Springfield. In addition to the business and social innovation incubator

aspects, the Sangamon CEO program also falls under her purview. That particular experiential learning program is for area high school seniors with entrepreneurial aims.

“It’s a holistic approach to fueling entrepreneurship,” Davison said. “All of these programs really feed into each other, and I think it’s an intriguing approach that will continue to grow the wealth of resources and develop that talent to create and continue to foster a strong business culture here (in Springfield).”

That very culture – and her parents, not coincidentally – are a large part of why Davison returned, she said. Not only does it make her new role as executive director more exciting, but it means there should be opportunities for growth for years to come. Davison personifies the prodigal child returned. The advantages of returning, Davison explained, are myriad.

“We’re right between Chicago and St. Louis, but we’re away from that hustle and bustle of those major metropolitan areas at the same time,” Davison said. “We have

the quality of life I think so many people are really focused on. They want business opportunities, but they also want a sense of community: good schools, good recreation ... and I think Springfield has all of that.”

Despite a spate of recent restaurant closings and the continued struggles of Legacy Pointe, Springfield still has a history of local ownership and hometown pride. Davison, in fact, feels that Springfield is on the verge of something truly special. And while it’s never a good thing to see state government struggle, it can be a catalyst to create something of one’s own.

“When I was a kid, state government was a guarantee, but that’s not the case anymore,” Davison said. “People are recognizing that, and I think it can be freeing. You realize there’s opportunity to go beyond obtaining employment in the state system. There’s nothing wrong with working in that sector, but this instability allows people to think outside the box for economic opportunities.”

So the time is right for an incubator like Innovate Springfield, which opened its

doors last month for the many interested parties. While she helped with the more perfunctory aspects of beginning any business-focused endeavor – choosing furniture and basically building the work space – Davison was looking forward to taking the website live for individuals and businesses interested in joining the incubator. The excitement was evident even as she acknowledged the pressures of such a multi-faceted position.

“It’s going to be a juggling act for sure, because it’s going to take some high-level, detail-oriented planning to keep all these (pieces) moving,” Davison said. “There’s so much happening right now, and Innovate Springfield can be a catalyst for the development of business opportunities and provide a nice platform for that. The intention is those businesses will then move out of the incubator and into spaces around Springfield. I’m very, very excited for that.” □

Gabe House is a freelance writer living in Springfield.

Ramping up for accessibility

By Catherine O'Connor

Most business owners know that in 1990 the federal Americans with Disabilities Act established standards to regulate removal of barriers in order to provide equal access to the public. Data shows that as the population ages, a greater number of citizens will have at least one form of disability that will require accommodations ranging from handrails to large print to mobility assistance. It is important for businesses to understand the purchasing power of this population sector and not overlook the important ways that accommodating special needs can improve the bottom line.

According to a 2010 report from the U.S. Census Bureau, one in five Americans – 19 percent of the population – have a disability, with more than half of them reporting the disability as severe. As the third largest market segment in our nation, people with disabilities surpass other diverse categories including teens, Generation X-ers, and all racial/ethnic groups. Estimates have suggested there is more than a trillion dollars in purchasing power represented by this vast number of consumers along with their families, friends and associates.

It's just good business sense to listen to customers and respond to their needs, according to Frank Heitzman, AIA, a suburban Chicago architect who is an expert in historic building renovation. As the former chair of Oak Park's Universal Access Commission, he found that listening to people with disabilities in the community can be a good way to begin to identify barriers and establish priorities for removing them. While eliminating all architectural barriers in older downtown buildings may not be readily achievable, there are various ways to create a business ethic that respects all members of the community. Often the positive attitude and extra effort shown by staff and employees can compensate for less than complete environmental accessibility.

The ADA and the ADA Standards for Accessible Design offer specific guidelines for environmental, physical and spatial uses, while the Illinois Accessibility Code provides the compliance measures used by local municipalities throughout the state. The task of evaluating public and commercial facilities, identifying existing barriers and developing priorities for increased accessibility is an ongoing process.



Businesses send a strong message to disabled users when they create comfortably accessible spaces, or train staff to be available to “shop along” with customers who have a cognitive, sight or mobility challenge, as Hy-Vee does.

PHOTO BY
CATHERINE
O'CONNOR

While some may assume that the ADA requires all public places be fully accessible, flexibility was intentionally written into the law to make it practical, according to Heitzman, who spent several years on a committee charged with updating Illinois' State Accessibility Code in 1997. The state didn't just adapt ADA guidelines but added various special requirements for situations like those presented by historic structures commonly found in typical downtown settings. “To give an idea of how complicated the Illinois Accessibility Code is compared to the Chicago Building Code (which is 13 chapters), the accompanying state code has 10 times that many chapters even after our efforts to simplify it,” Heitzman explained.

For example, there is specific loophole language in the law which requires that all new construction and alterations to existing buildings must be made physically accessible, “to the extent feasible.” Often it is not until a business owner begins remodeling, renovating, and changing structural elements like entries, partitions or walls, that they will technically delve into making significant accessibility accommodations. According to Heitzman, “even then, it's a complex subject that has left many architects in blissful ignorance. They understand fire and safety codes much better.”

The intent of the law is that the removal of barriers for the path of travel is to be a priority of architectural design. Therefore, a 20 percent cost set-aside is required for accessibility in every project beyond normal

maintenance. This could include moving walls, re-striping a parking lot, moving an ATM, installing new sales counters or display shelves, changing a doorway entrance, or replacing flooring, fixtures or carpeting.

Businesses can meet the letter of the law through alternatives such as providing carry-out service when it is not readily achievable to remove steps to a business entrance or widen an entryway to make wheelchair use possible. Those in the disability community recognize businesses that make strides toward full accessibility. Surveys of both disabled and non-disabled consumers show that they gravitate toward places that offer an easy, comfortable atmosphere and that they will avoid those which do not. It's just good business practice to train staff on accommodation alternatives so that by word-of-mouth customers with disabilities will know which businesses are working to attract them.

While it is often the courts which determine the spirit of accessibility laws, the free market dictates the reasons businesses should work to send the right message and avoid insulting the disabled community. Notable decades-long battles challenging barriers at Taco Bell and Burger King restaurants' signature “stanchions” in front of the ordering counter, have been waged in the U.S. Supreme Court. According to Heitzman, the fact that a business would put design over accommodation is insulting to the disabled and sends the wrong message to the public.

Craig Staley, a former restaurant owner who became a wheelchair user

at midlife, conceded the point. “I didn't appreciate the need for so many accessibility accommodations, like wider parking places and doorways, until I needed them.” In many situations, knowledge, concern and common sense rule the day. Some everyday technology innovations can help a blind client “read” complex negotiation documents from a real estate office and a person with low vision to understand medical instructions translated into text.

According to Staley, “I really appreciate just having a clear shot to get into an antique shop and have the clerk take the effort to make the products visible.” Being a wheelchair-user falls somewhere between a struggle and an adventure each day, from discovering that you cannot access a public restroom or negotiate the narrow aisles of a favorite book store to finding that a hotel room listed as “ADA friendly” actually has carpet which prevents a wheelchair from rolling, to discovering the new neighborhood grocery store finally has produce cases that one can reach. “Hy-Vee – it's heaven!” Staley said.

There is a long way to go in educating the public and institutions about why accessibility is important. Though Heitzman is a professor of architecture, interior design and construction management at Triton College in River Grove as well as the author of *The Architects Guide to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990*, Triton did not take his advice in the multimillion-dollar renovation of their library. “It's hard to believe, but it was built with a beautiful new circulation desk that is too high for a person seated in a wheelchair to use,” he says.

Heitzman's best advice for communities like Springfield which want to echo the successful adaptive reuse business districts such as those in Oak Park, is straightforward. “Get into the mindset of a wheelchair user.” With the 25th anniversary of the ADA upon us, he suggests it might be a good time for Springfield to follow the lead of his village and form a universal access commission with a website presence and a mayoral awards program to recognize and motivate efforts to achieve accessibility, especially for small and independent businesses. □

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Hark! The Springfield siren call to pizza

By David A. Kelm

The lights were dim in the motel lounge off the Pennsylvania turnpike that served as the 2014 National Site Selector Convention (motto, “You Can’t Spell PARTY Without PA!!”). Amongst the half-empty glasses of expensed scotch and free appetiezers, the crowd of road-weary economic development experts hushed when Kansas City Bob spoke of a mythical land where pizza sauce flowed like honey and the crust was thin and crispy like a retiree’s skin poolside in Naples. Like the wise man on the mountain, Kansas City Bob chewed his cold mozzarella stick, sipped his warm Dewar’s and muttered, “Take your pizza concept to Springfield – the one in Illinois, not Missouri – and you will find success. Well, at least for the first few months...” With that, his voice trailed off...

If you’ve been able to pull yourself away from the Chick-fil-A countdown clock you’ve likely read about or seen the tidal wave of pizza restaurants opening, preparing to open, tearing things down in order to build or just randomly popping up in all parts of Springfield. You’ve likely turned to your co-worker or spouse recently and uttered words to the effect of “did you hear another pizza place is going in down the block/in the empty strip mall/by the new hot doughnut place/all of the above?” Well, it turns out you’re not crazy or paranoid or developing some sort of pizza derangement syndrome – Springfield is seemingly the center of an ever expanding pizza universe.

In just the last few months, Springfield has seen a couple of “fast casual” pizza joints open out west and up north. “Fast casual” provides pizza patrons the ability to select their ingredients while a “pizzarista” constructs the pizza before their eyes, typically all for one price. The pizza is then



fired up and ready in minutes. Yet another “fast casual” pizza place is going to call MacArthur Blvd. home now that the Building Formerly Known as Ross Issac has come tumbling down. Springfield is also the new home of a national pizza buffet, which is appropriate, given the city’s unofficial motto: “Springfield, Illinois – \$7.95 All You Can Eat.” In addition, a Wisconsin-based pizza chain (“Home of the bratwurst and extra, extra, extra cheese pizza”) and a Georgia-based pizza company are both looking at breaking into the Springfield market.

As someone who grew up near Chicago, raised on a steady diet of Uno’s and Edwardo’s Chicago-style stuffed spinach pizza, it was heartening to hear that there are at least two Chicago pizza companies planning on Springfield locations. While stuffed pizza,

as a la Chicago, has not fully made the transition to other markets (maybe it’s the Lake Michigan in the dough), perhaps Springfield will welcome such large, fulfilling pies to the neighborhood. Finally, proving the vitality of the Springfield pizza market, a video chain and gas station chain are currently delivering pizzas across Springfield.

According to industry publication *Pizza Magazine*, second only in creatively named periodicals to *Springfield Business Journal* (just kidding, Mr. Farrar), Americans devoured nearly \$39 million worth of pizza in 2014, baked by about 73,000 pizza joints. In Illinois, 53 percent of pizza places are independently owned while the others are corporate operations. Whether Springfieldians eat more pizza than the average American is unknown,

although the fact that we eat 100% more horseshoe pizza than anywhere else in the country is probably indisputable. It is certainly difficult to open a new pizza place in a town known for a local pizza place or corner bar with pizza or a great Italian restaurant that also has a beloved pizza.

Allow your intrepid, freelance writer, whose body composition is clearly comprised of 60% water (22% in the form of beer), 15% wings, 5% burgers and 20% pizza, to openly welcome all of our new pizza neighbors. Together, arm-in-arm, parmesan shakers aloft, we Springfieldians must rise to the challenge! We must meet bravely this tsunami of green pepper and sausage! We must reflect upon our better selves and honor our civic traditions by not building a wall to keep out wood fired-crust, by not retreating to stereotypes of stuffed Chicago-style and by not rejecting those pies that are differently shaped and topped with odd, artisanal ingredients!

Friends, these are the salad days (that’s a term of art – I don’t expect any of you to actually eat salad) of which you will tell your children and grandchildren. They will look upon your thin, crispy, bronze visage in wonder and awe as you tell them of the Pizzapaloozza which we call Springfield circa 2016. Our community has been blessed for generations with great pizza from local places, regional chains and even the big national chains. Let us throw our arms open to the huddled masses with their different recipes, strange names and exotic ingredients in the hope they will become part of our shared pizza heritage. □

David A. Kelm is a Springfield area attorney. He can be reached at DavidAKelm@gmail.com.

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Downtown Springfield, Inc. held its annual awards banquet on Jan. 20 at the Wyndham City Centre. A record crowd of more than 500 guests were on hand to honor outgoing DSI executive director Victoria Ringer and welcome Lisa Stott to her new position. Mayor Jim Langfelder gave his first state of the downtown address and highlighted ways the city hopes to encourage further economic development in the area. Several businesses and individuals were presented with awards to honor their contributions to the growth of downtown.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD, INC.



Mayor Jim Langfelder, Karen Davis and Lisa Stott.



Sarah Jennings and John Stremsterfer.



A record crowd attended this year's awards dinner.



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Local school districts in transition

Low-income students increase in outlying areas, hold steady in District 186

By Catherine O'Connor

In this first installment of a two-part project, SBJ examines the results of a study of public perceptions of Springfield's Public School District 186 in contrast to real statistics on the number of low-income students throughout Sangamon County. Next month, part two will take a closer look at school data related to graduation rates, academics, challenges and progress that programs and learning environments are creating for the local educational system, which impacts Springfield business on many levels.

A new analysis of 2013 federal data shows that for the first time in at least 50 years, a majority of U.S. public school students are living in low-income families, according to a Jan. 16, 2015, *Washington Post* report. With the number of low-income public school students in Springfield District 186 at 67 percent, currently higher than the national average, these are statistics with profound implications for the city, the county and the nation.

With lower wages, economic and demographic shifts, higher numbers of rental properties, an eroding tax base in older neighborhoods and a sizeable number of low-income students in District 186, public perceptions are playing a significant role in Springfield's residential real estate market.

Meanwhile, on the outer fringes of Springfield, home construction has been steady, with new businesses opening their doors in response to middle- and higher-income households choosing new residential options, often motivated by what are seen as better educational opportunities outside of Springfield's public schools.

The last couple decades have witnessed moderate population increases and strong property values in outlying communities,

supported by new construction and optimistic developments such as the Ace Hardware in Chatham and County Market grocery store in Sherman proving the adage "retail follows rooftops."

Perceptions about the quality of educational opportunities in various area school districts seems to be fueling a vicious cycle, as the decision about where to send kids to school creates ripple effects for communities. But is there a consistent pattern when we look at student family income data in order to try to define the trends shaping the residential real estate and business outlook?

A close look at the statistics on the numbers of low-income children in public schools whose families meet the federal poverty definition, reported by the Illinois State Board of Education on their "Illinois School Report Card" website, shows a surprising trend in the greater Sangamon County area. While the number of low-income students in Springfield School District 186 remained level, the number of low-income students in the outlying school districts has increased by a significant percentage in the past five years.

Specifically, the number of low-income students in Chatham increased a whopping 31.5 percent, from 15 percent to 22 percent of the total 4,658 student population in five years. In Rochester, the 40 percent increase, from nine percent to 15 percent, takes the number there to nearly 350 of the 2,321 district student body. The moderate numbers of low-income students in the smaller districts of Williamsville, Auburn, New Berlin and Pleasant Plains followed the upward trend as well.

Many questions have been raised. Has the cost of housing in the outlying districts started to become more affordable for lower income families? Are high income families staying in Springfield to take advantage of



PHOTO BY CATHERINE O'CONNOR

close proximity to recreation, culture and jobs but switching to non-public schools? Are they leaving the central Illinois area altogether, as state employment dries up, taking professional and higher level education and service sector opportunities down with it?

To address some of these concerns, the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce, at the request of Springfield Public Schools, has created a special task force to look at community perceptions of District 186, with the understanding that there is a strong connection between public education and a

vital business climate. According to chamber president Chris Hembrough, perception surveys of business members and of the local Capital Area Realtors have been created to determine how much of a factor schools are for those planning to buy a home, as well as making business decisions.

A summary of the responses by 94 Realtors who compiled the survey in late 2015 was completed recently by Dan Sale, CEO of CAR. A central theme emerged showing that the quality of schools was a highly important factor in location decisions made by homebuyers. With the explosion of

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online property information available to the public, Realtors are familiar with where to steer clients for data and information about public schools, said Sale. Nearly 75 percent of those surveyed reported that most home buying clients were knowledgeable and had already decided in which school districts they wanted to live.

Of the Realtor respondents themselves, 40 percent had not attended high school in this area, 33 percent attended District 186, and 37 percent in Sangamon County or non-public schools. More than 40 percent of the Realtor respondents have children who attended schools other than Springfield public high schools, with 26 percent graduating from District 186. Realtors perceive that factors such as neighborhood, school quality and convenience strongly influence home purchase choices and these characteristics were the least often compromised on in a final location decision.

The survey of chamber businesses is ongoing, with a plan to gather additional data to test the validity of the results and share the complete findings in a final report later this year, according to Hembrough.

In a global sense, residential real estate trends will remain an important piece of the puzzle, because at the end of the day where families choose to live creates the local economy. If home is 20 miles from Springfield's historic "main street" business district, where groups like Downtown Springfield, Inc. are investing so much time and attention on promotion, busy families may opt out of another commute in the

evenings or on weekends for shopping, dining or entertainment. Low gas prices and technological advances are changing the way we value where we live and view public education systems that eat up such a sizeable chunk of tax revenues.

Even more questions loom, which policy makers and community leaders need to consider as they plan for the future. When entrepreneurs open yet another retail franchise or brand name specialty shop, are jobs with living wages being created and new sales tax revenues increased, or just relocated? With the region's population and wages basically stagnant over the past decade, are those with the economic resources just migrating outward and around neglected inner city infrastructure badly in need of creative updating and repair?

Those familiar with the story of cyclical out-migration by baby boomer families from metro Chicago in the 1950s and '60s to the much-preferred suburbs with their glistening modern schools and manicured playgrounds, know how the story goes. Many of the challenges of the city follow the crowded perceptions of location, location, location. □

To participate in the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce public school perceptions survey, go to: <http://ow.ly/YuJEx>.

Catherine O'Connor can be reached at catherineoconnor@gmail.com.



PERCENTAGE OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS PER DISTRICT

SCHOOL DISTRICT	% low income 2011	% low income 2015	% INCREASE	Est. Enrollment
ILLINOIS TOTAL	48%	54%	9%	2,000,000
SPRINGFIELD 186	67%	67%	0%	15,048
CHATHAM	15%	22%	31.50%	4,658
ROCHESTER	9%	15%	40%	2,321
WILLIAMSVILLE	8%	13%	38%	1,488
AUBURN	33%	35%	6%	1,414
PLEASANT PLAINS	10%	12%	17%	1,285
NEW BERLIN	25%	37%	33%	899
AURORA EAST	79%	82%	4%	14,799
PEORIA	75%	75%	0%	13,675
CHAMPAIGN	53%	58%	9%	9,948
DECATUR	69%	75%	8%	9,123
QUINCY	51%	61%	17%	6,868
DANVILLE	73%	81%	10%	6,012
BLOOMINGTON	53%	58%	9%	5,518

Stats courtesy of illinoisreportcard.com



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A vacation rental going up near Rapid City, South Dakota. The logs are the 8" x 12" pre-primed, rounded groove design ready for a customer applied True North finish.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMES MLINAR



James Mlinar.

PHOTO BY MARANDA POTTERF

Little log home builders on the prairie

By Roberta Codemo


James Mlinar first fell in love with log cabins when he was a kid after he and his family stayed in one while vacationing in Estes Park, Colorado. "They're part of our history," he said. Having always enjoyed building things, he jumped at the opportunity to help his brother build his log home several years ago and walked away impressed with the

company his brother used – True North Log Homes. He approached them and expressed interest in becoming a dealer. "They're an industry leader," said Mlinar, who has worked in construction and holds a bachelor's degree in industrial technology. He joined the company in 2015 and recently opened Prairie Log Homes, making

him one of the first log home dealers in Illinois. He named his new venture after the Prairie State to tie into Springfield. "This was an opportunity to do something different," he said. "Once I found out more about the company, it was a good investment." Headquartered in Bracebridge, Ontario, True North Log Homes has been building

log homes for more than 30 years and has a reputation for manufacturing the most technologically advanced log homes on the market. The company uses local suppliers on a build when possible, to cut down on shipping costs and save money. "A lot of people call them kit homes," said Mlinar because the logs come factory-

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True North Log Homes "Log Wall Technology Display," featuring a Hewn Axe log design with factory priming, stain and a UV block clear coat.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JAMES MLINAR



The red spring is the top of one of the many True North Log Homes "Log Lock Compression Systems" installed in the exterior log walls. Applying 2500 pounds of downward pressure, this log lock system is why True North can give a 25-year "ZERO" air infiltration warranty.

made. Each home is constructed from either eastern white pine or western red cedar with Douglas fir and comes with the industry's first 25-year zero air infiltration warranty and a five-year finish guarantee. All doors and windows are custom-made at the factory to specially fit each log home.

Mlinar has already started receiving phone calls and has had several realtors express interest. There are several log homes in the Springfield area.

According to the company's literature, there is a small cost difference between frame construction and log home construction, which is estimated at about 10 percent. The cost is offset by the home's

finished value, which appreciates with time.

Mlinar estimates that the average cost of a 1,200-square-foot, three-bedroom home is a few hundred thousand dollars. "It's high end," he said.

"I go where the customer is," continued Mlinar, who serves as a liaison between the builder, True North and the end user. "My job is to be there for the customer."

He carries his Planbook, which he calls a coffee table catalog, with him wherever he goes. It explains not only the technical aspects of the company's log home construction but showcases interiors and exteriors of True North Log Homes and contains floor plans and decorating ideas.

Mlinar works with clients through the initial design phase to completion. The company offers a choice of log styles and sizes, including finishes and hand-crafted accents. Each home is built to serve the needs of the homeowner.

Every home meets True North's specifications and features the company's patented Log Lock Compression System, which is the only self-adjusting, self-tightening device that prevents air infiltration and log separation. Additional features that come standard include a butt spline assembly, six seal tongue and groove system, keylock air seal corner and keyspline post slide system.

Every True North home is built to last

and are more energy-efficient and require less maintenance than traditional frame construction. "All you have to do is put a finish on it every five years," said Mlinar.

Log homes have a timeless appeal, evoking images of warm, cozy, comfortable living spaces. Typically associated with the mountains, log homes were commonplace on the prairie.

"There's always someone who wants one," said Mlinar. "The home sells itself because of the technology." □

Roberta Codemo is a full-time freelance writer. She can be reached at rcodemo@hotmail.com.



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RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE AGENCIES

Sources: The real estate agencies; Illinois Association of Realtors website (<http://www.illinoisrealtor.org/>), MLS Firm Market Share Report. + - does not include commercial division. (Ranked by sales volume Jan. 1 - Dec. 31, 2015.)

	BUSINESS NAME STREET ADDRESS CITY/ST/ ZIP	PHONE (-) FAX (=)	WEBSITE (www.) E-MAIL	MANAGING PARTNER(S) / OWNER(S)	NUMBER OF LICENSED AGENTS	TOTAL TRANSACTIONS	SALES VOLUME	% OF BOARD	YEAR EST'D
1	The Real Estate Group, Inc. 3701 W. Wabash Ave. Springfield, IL 62711	217-787-7000 217-787=7779	thegroup.com info@thegroup.com	Michael J. Buscher, Managing Broker; 28 individual broker/owners	130	2,751	\$441,340,197	22.57%	1997
2	Re/Max Professionals 2475 W. Monroe St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-787-7215 217-787=8957	viewspringfieldhomes.com	Michael D. Oldenettel, Managing Broker; Al & Linda Young, Owners	83	1,758	\$255,274,674	13.48%	1986
3	Coldwell Banker Honig-Bell 4205 W. Wabash Springfield, IL 62711	217-547-6655 217-547=6659	cbhonig-bell.com	Don Cave, Managing Broker	39	404	\$59,386,150	2.62%	2000
4	Re/Max Results Plus 1046 W. Morton Ave. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-9613 217-243=7183	www.jacksonvilleillinois-homes. com	Scott Eoff, Managing Broker Judy Eoff, Owner	7	243	\$31,211,300	1.76%	1996
5	Campo Realty, Inc. 610 Sixth St. Pawnee, IL 62558	217-625-4663 217-625=4664	camporealty.com nick@camporealty.com	Nicholas Campo, Managing Broker	9	176	\$22,012,669	1.14%	2001
6	Kennedy Real Estate LLC 400 W. Market, P.O. Box 764 Taylorville, IL 62568	217-824-8888 217-824=5080	kennedyrealestatellc.com info@kennedyrealestatellc.com	Helen Kennedy, Managing Broker	13	197	\$21,665,285	1.21%	2011
7	Steve Hills, REALTORS 900 S. Main St. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-9589 217-245=4198	stevehillsrealtors.com hills@jilnc.net	Dianne Steinberg	5	170	\$20,791,301	1.10%	1965
8	Grady Realtors Inc. 1501 S. MacArthur Blvd. Springfield, IL 62704	217-753-2121 217-726=2211	gradyrealtors.com sold@gradyrealtors.com	Patrick Grady, Betty Grady	9	134	\$20,562,200	0.87%	1969
9	Blane Real Estate Inc. 121 E. Douglas Petersburg, IL 62675	217-652-7521 217-652=3262	blaneinpetersburgil.com homes@blaneinpetersburgil.com	Judy Blane-Olesen, Peter Olesen	3	113	\$19,680,470	1.20%	1950
10	Craggs REALTORS, Inc. 650 N. Webster, P.O. Box 109 Taylorville, IL 62568	217-824-8131 217-824=9315	craggsrealtors.com skcraggs@aol.com	Stephen B. Craggs	7	130	\$13,940,248	0.80%	1971
11	Century 21 Real Estate Associates 2030 Timberbrook Springfield, IL 62702	217-789-7200 217-789=2600	reahouses.com kgraham367@aol.com	Kevin Graham	21	91	\$11,859,976	0.55%	2004
12	Do Realty 600 South 6th Street Springfield, IL 62703	217-391-3636 217-391=3666	dorealty.net BPO@dorealty.net	Stephanie L. Do, President/Broker	1	214	\$9,970,186	0.77%	2002
13	Grojean Realty and Insurance 360 W. State, P.O. Box 697 Jacksonville, IL 62651	217-245-4151 217-243=7573	grojeanagency.com grojean@grojeanagency.net	Charles Grojean, Tom Grojean	9	102	\$9,431,502	0.45%	1947
14	Wrightsmen-Musso, Ltd. 159 N. Springfield St. Virden, IL 62690	217-965-4115 217-965=5021	wmlrealty.com tmusso@wrightsmenmusso.com	Dom M. Musso, Todd M. Musso	16	132	\$9,020,910	0.48%	1940
15	The Real Estate Firm Inc. 1340 S. State St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-547-5500 217-522=5906	dennislpolk@gmail.com	Dennis L. Polk	17	78	\$8,583,899	0.33%	1989
16	Charles E. Robbins Real Estate Inc. 2144 S. MacArthur Blvd. Springfield, IL 62704	217-525-2112 217-525=2275	charlesrobbins.com res@charlesrobbins.com	Art Seppi, Managing Broker	13	66	\$8,219,600	0.38%	1962
17	Prairie Property Solutions 600 S. Grand Ave West Springfield, IL 62704	217-670-1865 217-670=0771	ppsrealty.com	M. T. Vann, Managing Broker	7	77	\$7,748,156	0.36%	2012
18	Snelling-Chevalier Real Estate Inc. 621 Seventh St. Pawnee, IL 62558	217-625-2411 217-625=7513	snelling-chevalier.com gail@family-net.net	Gail Chevalier Zini, Managing Broker	6	58	\$7,126,350	0.38%	1986
19	Curvey Real Estate, Inc. 611 Springfield Road, P. O. Box 677 Taylorville, IL 62568	217-824-4996 217-287=2111	curveyrealestate.com curvey@ctitech.com	Bernard A. Curvey, Owner/Broker; Joe Curvey, Managing Broker	9	69	\$6,929,960	0.37%	1985
20	Advantage Realty 933 South Grand Ave. West Springfield, IL 62704	217-528-1000 217-528=1026	528-1000.com advantagerealty1@hotmail.com	Marty Benoit	10	41	\$4,720,450	0.23%	1987

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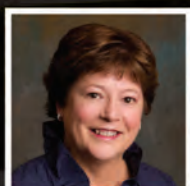
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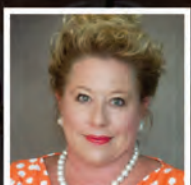
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A neighborhood organization with a vision

By Teresa Paul

Springfield ICON (Inner City Older Neighborhoods) held its first fundraiser and second annual Good Neighbor awards on Dec. 7.

“The organization began in 2009 and was an outgrowth, in part, of the protest over the increased railroad traffic on Third St.,” said Carol Kneedler, chair of Springfield ICON.

The protest caused a group of neighborhood leaders, people who had been involved in neighborhood associations as well as others, to come together.

Mark Mahoney, who at that time was the Ward 6 alderman, had encouraged the group to organize and to promote visionary leadership in Springfield city government.

As its name suggests, the mission of Springfield ICON is to improve the quality of life for Springfield residents in older inner city neighborhoods.

“We actually gave Mark an award at our meeting in December 2015 for his role in helping to promote the startup of Springfield ICON,” Kneedler said.

Mahoney currently serves as the city of Springfield public works director.

Because Springfield ICON is a political action committee rather than a nonprofit, the organization feels a responsibility to help elect visionary leadership to Springfield city government.

“We are unusual in Springfield in that we represent a collection of folks who are interested in older neighborhoods,” Kneedler said. “I think we give a unique perspective. Even though our mission is one that is common among neighborhood associations, I think we have the freedom to be more pointed in our commentary. We have the potential to be effective. Our goal is to help to create new neighborhood associations and promote good public policies, not just for older neighborhoods but all neighborhoods.”

Part of the impetus behind the December fundraiser was the fact that the last city election was the first time the organization had endorsed candidates. “We knew a big part of the effort comes from neighbors who want to influence city government to make improvements that need to be made, and that the city needs to take leadership,” said Polly Poskin, member and vice president of Springfield ICON. Poskin moved to her neighborhood in 1993 and the following year joined the Harvard Park Neighborhood Association where she



Carol Kneedler, chair of Springfield ICON.

PHOTO BY GINNY LEE

currently serves as president.

“Our alderman at the time was Mark Mahoney, and he told us that we were going to have to remember one important fact,” Poskin said. “The city council needs six votes to pass any ordinance that you think will help improve older neighborhoods. Mark taught us early on that these are political decisions. The city’s governed by ordinances,” Poskin said. “If you favor a certain improvement of the city it will have to go through an ordinance review process. Be certain you have the required votes of the city council.”

“Springfield ICON attends most all the ward meetings,” Kneedler said. “One of the things I heard was, no matter which ward you are in, neighborhoods continue to have issues with deteriorating infrastructure or lack of infrastructure: no sidewalks, no curbs and snow and garbage removal.”

Darrell and Sharon Riffey are members of the Historic West Side Neighborhood Association and in their roles as the Springfield ICON city council chairs are tasked with attending city council meetings and reporting back to their members to track the votes on issues of interest to the organization. “Every other week is the committee of the whole, which is the 10 aldermen without the mayor,” explained Darrel Riffey. “We are there for all of it. We were there for the city budget meeting. The city council knows us and we know them.”

“Our members are typically already leaders inside their own neighborhoods,” Kneedler said. “We do have some at-large members, people who have time to be involved. One of the things that attract our members is that by addressing issues on a bigger level and acting together, speaking

with one voice, we can have a larger influence on the city council, on public policy, and a bigger voice in the city of Springfield to get things the city needs to have healthy, older neighborhoods.”

“We are the glue that keeps the older neighborhoods invested in themselves and a force to put our message out there,” Poskin added. “As a member, it is very satisfying to come together with people who care about their neighborhoods and inspirational to see the dedication and commitment of our members.”

“We are a group of people working really hard to improve not just our neighborhoods but all neighborhoods throughout Springfield,” Kneedler said. “We want to be the voice of Springfield residents.” □

Teresa Paul can be reached at teresadawn1970@yahoo.com.

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Sources: Springfield Area Home Builders Association; The Builders and Remodelers.
(Listed by number of full time employees.)

	BUSINESS NAME STREET ADDRESS CITY/ST/ ZIP	PHONE (-) FAX (=)	WEBSITE (www.) E-MAIL	NUMBER OF FULL TIME EMPLOYEES	PARTNERS/ PRINCIPALS	% REMODEL RENOVATION	% NEW HOME CONSTRUCTION	YEAR EST'D
1	Buraski Builders, Inc. 3757 S. Sixth St. Springfield IL 62703	217-529-5172 217-529=9356	buraski.com buraskibuilders@yahoo.com	25	Frank Buraski, Pres.; Barbara Buraski, Sec./Treas.; Jason Buraski, Heather Sobieski	50%	50%	1981
2	Michael von Behren Builder, Inc. 3537 S. Douglas Ave. Springfield IL 62704	217-698-8484 217-698=8486	mvbbuilder.com mike@mvbbuilder.com	19	Michael J. von Behren, Pres.; Cheri M. von Behren, Sec./Treas.	80%	20%	1982
3	Moughan Builders Inc. 3140 Cockrell Lane Springfield IL 62711	217-899-5484 217-793=6013	moughanbuilders.com jim@moughanbuilders.com	18	James E. Moughan, David P. Moughan	10%	90%	1992
4	Griffitts Construction Co., Inc. 1501 N. Dirksen Pkwy. Springfield IL 62702	217-522-1431 217-522=5809	griffitts.net griffitts@griffitts.net	12	Harry Griffitts, Vicky Griffitts-Runyon	95%	5%	1953
4	Zinn Construction, LLC 1323 Hawthorne Chase Sherman IL 62684	217-496-3112 866-359=0816	zinnconstruction.com phil@zinnconstruction.com	12	Phil Zinn	30%	70%	2003
5	DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen 3730 Wabash Ave. Springfield IL 62711	217-529-9300 217-529=9333	dreammakerspringfield.com ctrampe@dreammakerspringfield.com	10	Curt & Deb Trampe	95%	5%	1998
5	Bobby Shaw Property Maintenance and Remodeling 3351 S. Sixth St. Frontage Rd E., Suite 5 Springfield IL 62704	217-546-3973 217-546=6410	bobbyshawmaintenance.com bobby@bsmaint.com	10	Bobby Shaw, Owner	90%	10%	1987
5	Ozella Construction, Inc. 530 E. Sheridan Petersburg IL 62675	Phone & Fax: 217-632-7193	ozellaconstruction.com facebook.com/ozellaconstructioninc ann@ozellaconstruction.com	10	Steve and Ann Ozella	30%	70%	1984
6	Creasey Construction of IL., Inc. PO Box 9286 Springfield IL 62791	217-546-1277 217-546=1760	creaseyconstruction.com creaseyconst@comcast.net	9	Jan Creasey, Pres., Lisa Creasey	60%	40%	1983
7	Craig Ladage Builders, Inc. 14915 Kennedy Road Auburn IL 62615	217-438-9206 217-438=5706	clbuilders@royell.org	8	Craig Ladage, Debbie Ladage	40%	60%	1977

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11	Illinois Builders & Contractors, Inc. 4120 S. Second St. Springfield IL 62703	217-585-9490 217-529=9456	ilbuildersandcontractors.com ilbuilders2@yahoo.com	7	Fred Pryor	90%	10%	2003
12	All-C Construction, Inc. P.O. Box 9737 Springfield IL 62791	217-787-1900 217-787=1901	allcconstruction.com allcconstruction@att.net	6	Frank Conder, Paula Conder	30%	70%	1999
12	Timber Creek Home Sales, Inc. 2800 Via Rosso, Suite 1 Springfield IL 62703	217-585-8900 217-585=8908	timbercreekliving.com frank@timbercreekliving.com	6	Douglas Daniels, President; Frank Hoover, Sales Manager	0%	100%	1999
12	Coady Construction Co. Inc 143 Circle Drive Springfield IL 62703	217-502-0602	adamcoadyconstruction.com coadyconstruction@comcast.net	6	Adam Coady	20%	80%	2006
13	D & S Builders 30 White Road Glenarm IL 62536	217-529-6288 217-697=8149	todd@d-sbuilders.com or dan@d-sbuilders.com	5	Todd Dudley, Owner, Dan Schrage, Owner	40%	60%	1995
13	Hasara Construction Co. Inc. 125 E. Main St. Rochester IL 62563	217-498-1472 217-498=1472	hasaraconstruction.com j.stites@comcast.net	5	John H. Stites, Jr., Pres./Owner	5%	95%	1976
13	Roth Homes 350 Williams Lane Chatham IL 62629	217-483-6086 217-483=5200	www.rothhomesinc.net	5	Terry Roth	25%	75%	1984
14	Robert McCurley Contractor, Inc. 4152 Mt Zion School Rd Springfield IL 62711	217-553-9730 217-679=3533	www.robertmccurleycontractor.com bobmccurley@comcast.net	4	Bob McCurley, President Ki McCurley, Sec./Tres.	30%	70%	1968
15	Ryan Homes & Development, Inc. 500 W. Monroe, Suite 2W Springfield IL 62704	217-523-3976 217-523=3990	homesanddevelopment.com paula.ryan2321@gmail.com	2	Mike Ryan, Paula Ryan	30%	70%	1974

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High appraisal for family

By Eric Woods



PHOTO BY MARANDA POTTERF

Greg Kienzler

Title: Owner, Kienzler Appraisal Services

Education: B.A. in business administration from St. Joseph's College

Family: Wife – Carleen; Children – Joe and Brian; four grandchildren

Favorites –
Movie: *Pretty Woman*
Author: Lee Child
Restaurant: Bella Milano

Tidbits –
Avid golfer
Wants to travel more
Always enjoyed science classes in school

Greg Kienzler has lived his entire life in Springfield and loves the fact that everyone seems to know each other. “There is such a small-town atmosphere for a town of our population,” he said. “Of course, you have to be careful what you say because you never know who you might be talking to and who they know.”

The current financial situation facing the state of Illinois is having a ripple effect across the board, according to Kienzler. “I do not know how much longer they can go without paying their bills,” he said. “This is hurting landlords and social services who are not getting their funding.”

The working life for Kienzler began in his mid-teens. His most uncomfortable job was cutting corn out of beans on a farm. “That was a godawful job,” he said. Another high school job was working as a bag room boy for the old Surf Club swimming pool. He eventually became licensed as a lifeguard and worked at Illini Country Club. His biggest influence growing up was his father. “I saw how he handled people. His word was his honor.”

Kienzler is a second-generation appraiser, as his father paved the way for him to get into


the industry. “My dad ran Citizens Savings and Loan, and I went to work for him in 1973 after college until 1998,” he said. At that time, the banks had their own appraisers, and according to Kienzler it was a much simpler time. “Back then we had a one-page form with percentages on it. There is a lot more to an appraisal now. What used to take four to six hours now takes six to 10.” Scrutiny is far greater now as well, due to all of the changes over the years. The biggest change he has seen in the industry has been the way mortgages are treated. Before, they were originated for the lenders’ portfolios. When Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae started securitizing, they became commodities.

Kienzler received his designation from the Appraisal Institute in 1981, and in 1996 he started his own business. “Appraisal 101 is simply about defining the appraisal problem. The house is vacant, so what is it worth? There is a puzzle with all these pieces, and we have to make sense out of all of it,” said Kienzler, who began in residential but now focuses about 90 percent of his work in commercial. “Appraisers have solidarity. We go to them.”

Looking to the future of the industry, Kienzler believes technology is already shaping where appraising is headed. “As the data get better, appraisers will require more math skills. Statistical analysis is what it is really getting into,” he said. “Technology has helped appraisals significantly, but it is a double-edged sword. The good thing is that there is so much more data. The bad thing is, there is so much more data.”


Kienzler appreciates being able to pick and choose his hours but does not see himself stepping back for at least another year. He will continue to enjoy the city life and his family. “I enjoy the atmosphere of knowing your neighbor like it is a small town. I like to take my Pandora onto my patio and just watch people,” he said. Kienzler also enjoys spending time with his grandchildren. One of their favorite activities is walking to the corner of MacArthur and Williams Street and watching the trucks go by. “Family is the greatest thing. I enjoy having the kids playing around.” □

Eric Woods can be reached at ericw93@aol.com.




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APPRAISERS

Sources: Capital Association of Realtors, the appraisers.
(Ranked by number of certified appraisers)

	BUSINESS NAME STREET ADDRESS CITY/ST/ ZIP	PHONE (-) FAX (=) WEBSITE (www.) E-MAIL	NUMBER OF CERTIFIED APPRAISERS	OWNER/ PRESIDENT	% COMMERCIAL % RESIDENTIAL	YEAR
1	Taft Appraisal, Inc. 1999 Wabash Avenue, Suite 205A Springfield, IL 62704	217-787-5533 217-787-6949 barrytaft@aol.com www.taftappraisalinc.com	7	Barry Taft	90% 10%	1989
2	Green Appraisal Service 3624 Wexford Dr Springfield, IL 62704	217-698-1277 360-323=8566 greenappraisalservice@comcast.net www.greenappraisalservice.com	2	Angela K. Chiaro	0% 100%	1994
3	Domer J Huffman Jr Real Estate Appraisals P.O. Box 337 Springfield, IL 62705	217-787-2066 217-787=8377 DomerJ3@gmail.com	1	Domer J. Huffman III, RAA	0% 100%	1969
3	Gary D Harvey, SRA 6400 Preston Dr Springfield, IL 62711	217-483-3534 harveygd@comcast.net	1	Gary D. Harvey	0% 100%	1993
3	Kienzler Appraisal Service 410 South Grand West Springfield, IL 62704	217-525-6050 greg@apraze1.com	1	Gregory Kienzler	90% 10%	1996
3	Michael J. Call Appraisal Service 833 South Grand Avenue West Springfield, IL 62704	217-747-0252 217-747=0253 callappraisals@comcast.net callappraisals.com	1	Michael J. Call	0% 100%	1987
3	Phillips Appraisal Inc. 6305 Wind Tree Rd Springfield, IL 62712	217-529-3929 217-529=9351 rjp01@comcast.net phillipsappraisal.com	1	Randall J. Phillips, SRA	0% 100%	2000
3	Williams Appraisals 881 Meadowbrook Road Springfield, IL	217-793-9234 217-793=9274 john.williams50@comcast.net	1	John Williams	0% 100%	1993
3	Findley Appraisals P.O. Box 18 Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-8141 findleyappraisals.com karylfindley@findleyappraisals.com	1	Karyl Findley	0% 100%	1995

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Big family, bright future

By Eric Woods

With the exception of living in Australia for a year, KC Sullivan has spent the majority of his life in central Illinois. His family is in Petersburg, and Sullivan moved to Springfield with his wife last November after they got married. “I met her two years ago, and we were friends for a year before I even asked her out,” he said. Sullivan enjoys the close proximity Springfield has to anything they need. He does have to do a lot of travelling to see their families, though. “The family lives in Menard County. I am used to them being a jog away, and now it is a little different.”

Sullivan would like to see more of Springfield’s young people stick around after high school. “A lot of kids are moving away,” he said. “We are heading in the right area, but we need to ask what we need to do to get our youth to stick around and attract young professionals to the area.”

Growing up, Sullivan wanted to be a marine biologist but gave up that idea when he learned that he would have to live on an ocean far away from his family. His first job was with his brothers and cousins. “I started a hay crew. We went around and put up hay for farmers who called us,” he said. Sullivan also worked as a teacher for a period of time and while living in Australia taught adventure tourism, in which he would take

tourists on different excursions around the country. “I did not feel called to be a teacher, though. I realized I was meant to be somewhere else. I do have a huge respect for teachers who have the gift.”

It has been almost five years since Sullivan started working at The Real Estate Group. “I love real estate. My responsibilities vary so much in a day,” he said. Maintaining and updating current listings, staying in touch with clients, showing properties and going on appointments to secure new listings are several of the things Sullivan handles on a regular basis. “Once a buyer finds the appropriate house, we place an offer. I negotiate the price along with the buyer and prepare the finalized contract.” Sullivan also stays in contact with his buyer’s lender, organizes inspections and reviews and evaluates the inspection reports.

Real estate is a very complex industry and Sullivan believes education is extremely important. “Before anything, shadow a real estate agent. Just call one and ask to tag along,” he said. “After shadowing, reflect on the experience and start taking your tests.” Sullivan also advises not to go in blind as there are a number of hidden costs that go along with being an agent.

The heavy real estate season is coming

up quickly, according to Sullivan. “I am gearing up for this race as the onslaught is coming up soon,” he said. “I love the challenge.” Gaining people’s trust is what he enjoys most about the job.

Sullivan is part of a big family, including three brothers and four sisters. He learned the importance of family from his biggest influence. “My grandpa Sullivan was the patriarch for this huge family. He was a man’s man and even pitched for the St. Louis Browns,” he said. Family remains a primary focus to such a degree that if there was one thing Sullivan would want to know about the future it would be the challenges his grandchildren would be facing so he could be an activist for them now.

Prior to his real estate career, Sullivan looked to retirement at the earliest time possible as he felt that he had limited freedoms at his other jobs. “I feel like a free man in real estate. I can arrange my schedule of the spectrum of things I am doing in a day,” he said. He envisions his future as a happy husband and father living on a farm with his family while still helping his clients with their real estate needs. □

Connect with Eric Woods
at ericw93@aol.com.



PHOTO BY MARANDA POTTERF

KC Sullivan

Title: Realtor, The Real Estate Group
Address: 3701 W. Wabash Ave., Springfield
Family: Wife - Kendra

Favorites -

Hobby: Bow hunting
Movie: *Forrest Gump*
Book: *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho

Tidbits -

Frequently travels to Australia
Loves NCAA football and basketball
Collects arrowheads



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Call, a long-time resident of Springfield, has been with Troxell for 16 years. A graduate of Illinois State University, Jennifer has excelled as a producer with the agency, concentrating her work in the areas of Personal, Business, Life and Health Insurance.

Jennifer is a Board Member of United Way of Central Illinois and the Leaders Guild Co-Chair for the 2015 United Way Campaign Cabinet. She is also an active member of the Westside Rotary Group. Jennifer is married to Ben Call and together they have three children.

“Jennifer is a tremendous asset to the organization and the community for building strong long-term relationships with clients.”

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Home is where the smart is

By Roberta Codemo

Savvy homeowners are driving demand for smart homes and area home builders are paying attention.

The technology has changed drastically since its beginnings. “A long time ago it was just audio,” said Mike Fox of Fox Audio Visual. In the past, people would install modified car speakers in their home ceilings. With the advance of technology, it is now possible for everyone in the house to listen to their favorite music in separate rooms throughout the home while controlling everything remotely.

A modern smart home integrates nearly every system in the home – heating, air conditioning, lighting and audio-video along with security and camera systems – and connects them to a central controller through the home’s Wi-Fi system that can be accessed and managed through a single app using a smart phone, iPad or tablet from anywhere in the world.

Using the app, a smart home owner can check the status of their home and receive a detailed activity report, as well as program the system to turn the lights on and off at certain times or to unlock the door for the babysitter and lock it behind her. With surveillance cameras, it is possible to pull up real-time video and check on who just rang your front doorbell in Illinois while on the beach in Florida. “Our whole world revolves around our cell phone,” observed Fox.

The remote app can be used to schedule the system to open the shades in the morning when you wake up, turn on the lights, have your favorite music playing in the master bathroom while you shower, turn on the “Today” show in the living room, have your coffee brewing and reset the thermostat. And that’s just the beginning. A smart door can even be programmed to notify you when your child comes home from school.

It’s only been within the past 10 years that Springfield area home builders have started seeing an uptick in interest in smart technology. There is a common misconception that each individual smart device makes your home a smart home. However, a true smart home is one where each device works together seamlessly rather than having a separate app for each device on your phone.

“It’s becoming more and more popular,”

said Jim Moughan of Moughan Builders, Inc. “Especially among 30 to 50 year-olds.”

A whole home automation system can run from as little as \$1,000 for a controller to automate your lights to between \$3,000 and \$4,000 for a basic four-room package that includes audio, door locks, thermostat and lights, said Fox, depending on what the homeowner wants.

As the cost has come down, the technology has become more accessible to the average homeowner. Today there are a number of smart devices that are available off the shelf that are designed to make life easier – everything from thermostats to coffee pots and crockpots – for around \$200 each.

Consumers know what they want. The most popular features are home entertainment, environmental and security systems, with thermostats, lighting, audio and door locks among the most requested devices.

“They’ll come in with a checklist,” said Mike Ryan of Ryan Homes and Development, Inc., who has seen a lot of changes in the home building industry over the past 20 years.

The technology is becoming more user-friendly compared to the past where there was a steep learning curve. “Customers understand it,” said Jason Buraski of Buraski Builders. “People just want peace of mind.”

Buraski works with customers to tailor their homes to meet highly personalized needs. “If they know they want a smart doorbell, it’s easier to plan for it,” he said, adding it’s more expensive to make changes afterwards. A lot of customers only want one or two components. It’s rare that he receives a request for an integrated system.

People also want the latest toys. Joe Laurin, national director of market development for Liaison Home Automation, has seen this technology explode in popularity with the iPad as people want to find more and more uses for their devices. The global smart homes market was valued at \$20.38 billion in 2014 and is expected to reach \$58.68 billion by 2020. “People enjoy this lifestyle,” he said. “They want to be comfortable.”

The really smart part of a smart home comes in the form of energy savings.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WWW.LIAISONHOMES.COM

Laurin estimates a homeowner could save between 10 and 20 percent on their heating and cooling costs, depending on how the technology is utilized. A total smart home can expect to save 50 percent in energy costs.



Home buyers will often choose a smart home over a non-smart home. This is borne out by a 2015 Coldwell Banker Real Estate survey of 513 sale associates where two out of three reported buyers are more interested in smart home technologies than

they were two to five years ago.

Fox said the new technologies are addicting. “You just want more and more,” he said, adding the latest advances he is seeing are with home appliances.

“Your home is a big investment,” said Ryan, who foresees a time when every home incorporates smart technologies. □

Roberta Codemo is a full-time freelance writer. She can be reached at rcodemo@hotmail.com.



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Blueprint for a strong career

By Eric Woods



PHOTO BY MARANDA POTTERF

A native of Springfield, Paula Ryan has lived in the area her entire life with the exception of a five-year stint in Chicago. The familiar atmosphere is what she enjoys most about the city. “I have family here and I am always running into people all over town who I have known my whole life,” she said. Ryan would like to see more growth in the business sector of Springfield, especially in manufacturing. “It hurts our own business when businesses don’t move to town.”

Early in her life, Ryan wanted to be an artist or a ballerina. Her first job, at 17 years old, was working in the cafeteria at Memorial Medical Center. “That job was gross but fun. We always had to scrape food off the trays, but I had a blast,” she said. Ryan has spent 22 years working with her husband, Mike Ryan, a homebuilder, starting out at only one day a week. That work morphed into helping with the design aspect of his business, which was her background. “I enjoy the remodeling projects to help people finish their homes.” Ryan is also active in the community. She is a member of Illinois Women in Leadership

(IWIL), King’s Daughters Organization and is a volunteer for Contact Ministries.

Paula Ryan Design is actually a division of Ryan Homes and Development. Ryan handles staging, remodeling, new builds and design. Furniture layouts, accessories and selecting the complimentary hard surfaces are all part of what she handles. “Remodeling has really picked up thanks to the HGTV shows. That helps me explain what I do better,” she said. Business has been good and normally remains steady throughout the year, according to Ryan. “People are starting to get cabin fever this time of year and start planning right before spring.” Currently, Ryan is close to finishing restoration of the former Hoogland family home to its original state. Ryan is very excited to see the completion of that project.

Ryan emphasizes that to be successful, a designer must listen to the clients. “Try not to be a cookie cutter. Your designs may not always match what the client wants,” she said. “Communication and honesty are the biggest keys to making things successful.”

Ryan also feels that keeping the stress level down is important.

Although Ryan learned quite a bit on her own, she does credit Maria Killam and Tobi Fairley for giving her guidance along the way. “I have taken online classes with Maria, and she gave me confidence. Tobi is a designer and taught me about being a businessperson,” she said. Ryan will be going to a three-day color workshop in March hosted by Killam and is very excited to be attending.

Ryan does not look to retirement in the near future, although she does have an interest in cutting back a bit. “I will still be doing this, but maybe more part-time and in a warmer place,” she said. Speaking of warmer places, she is looking forward to an upcoming trip to Arizona to visit her children.

“I could do this always. I have a passion for design and love helping people make their homes more inviting.” □

Connect with Eric Woods
at ericw93@aol.com.

Paula Ryan

Title: Owner, Paula Ryan Design
Address: 500 W. Monroe, Springfield
Education: B.S. in recreational therapy from Illinois State University
Family: Husband – Mike; Children – Chris and Elle; five stepchildren; four grandchildren

Favorites –
Movie: *The Shawshank Redemption*
Book: *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak
Restaurant: American Harvest

Tidbits –
Breast cancer survivor
Finished in the top 200 in the World Masters CrossFit Open
Would like to take a mission trip to Africa

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BUSINESS PROFILE



Todd Scanlan, Karen Cunningham and Bear.

PHOTOS BY RHONDA BUCKHOLD



Staff of Woodhaven Woodworks.

Better living through woodworking

By Rhonda Buckhold

Bear, a fluffy black and tan, chow-Australian shepherd mix, courteously awaits as customers enter Woodhaven Woodworks. She bows her head for an optional pat, and then lazily looks to Linda at the front desk for her cue to lie down or start the tour. You know right away to expect something different at a business where you are greeted by a dog. Woodhaven Woodworks is a fine illustration of this difference.

Business owners who take their pets to work tend to provide a personal touch. They are down to earth, approachable and take time to show visitors a hospitality that immediately makes them feel at ease.

Todd Scanlan, owner and operator of Woodhaven Woodworks, rescued Bear over a decade ago and the furry fellow has been the business’s mascot through the tremendous growth the company has recently realized. The story of Woodhaven’s success is an object lesson in small business growth.

Scanlan has been a woodworker for over 27 years. In 1989, working out of a small shop in his home, he started his company as a side project to his full-time position as a building project manager with the Illinois Department of Corrections. Two years ago he retired from the state and has since devoted his time to

growing his woodworking business.

In February of 2015, Woodhaven Woodworks expanded from his small home shop to its current location. Renovating the large facility at 3112 Normandy Road allowed for a cost savings over new construction.

Scanlan modestly tells the story of transforming an auto body shop into a woodworker’s dream. “The building sat empty for a couple of years after Maaco Auto Body went out of business. It was a great space for the expansion we needed. There were already large air compressors, painting booths and some of the ventilation systems built-in. A few modifications and we had a facility that met all of our needs.”

Karen Cunningham, marketing and special projects director, says the new facility “offers increased production capabilities, expanded manufacturing space and efficient work flow.” The added visibility of a more public location draws in potential new customers.

Cunningham has been an integral part of this expansion. It was once common practice for her to drive around prospecting leads by searching for new construction. When she spotted a place with a crew onsite, she would trudge through mud and debris to make an introduction and offer Woodhaven’s



Woodhaven Woodworks’ new facility at 3112 Normandy Road.

services. Word of mouth recommendations about their craftsmanship and customer interaction continues to build their client base. Cunningham has great things to say about the company’s founder. “Todd’s creative. He is a visionary. He listens to what the customer wants in order to come up with a design that makes them happy.”

Scanlan has perfected more than the art of cabinet making. He has built a team of multi-talented professionals with years of experience. Linda England not only serves as the receptionist, but is also a designer, with many years in the cabinetry business. The workers in the shop, even the newest staff members, have longevity in their areas of expertise.

Perhaps the most impressive of Scanlan’s qualities is the ability to combine technology with the craftsmanship of woodworking. He is proficient in design programs and his shop is a modern marvel of digitally precise machinery that allows for the creation of unique pieces with very little trial and error. All their products are built onsite and local customers can easily drop by and watch while their design concept is being made.

Woodhaven is a member of the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce and Springfield Local First and is also active in

the revitalization of the Stevenson Drive corridor. While Scanlan can produce wood that looks aged or distressed, he has also acquired salvaged materials from other local businesses. He acknowledges the advantages of businesses working together.

Woodhaven’s high-end custom kitchen and bath cabinets, built-ins, fireplace mantles, custom trim and examples of several specialty items can be viewed at their website woodhavenwoodworks.com or their Facebook page. The best way to experience Woodhaven Woodworks, however, is to visit their showroom and shop in person. It is clear that Scanlan loves what he does, and his enthusiasm is contagious.

Bear is a bonus. She is the best sort of greeter, with a nonchalant welcome, a nod in the right direction, and no pressure for anything more. She is an old girl with a purpose. She has helped build a successful business. Give her a rub behind the left ear as a reward. □

Rhonda Buckhold is a freelance researcher and writer as well as a private contractor in restoration, preservation and design for historical accuracy. She can be contacted at MrsBuckhold@gmail.com.



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Decatur Memorial Hospital joins BJC Collaborative
Decatur Memorial Hospital has joined The BJC Collaborative, a collaboration among health care systems throughout Illinois, Missouri and Eastern Kansas. BJC HealthCare (St. Louis), Memorial Health System (Springfield), Saint Luke's Health System (Kansas City, Missouri) and CoxHealth (Springfield, Missouri) founded the collaborative in October 2012 to improve the quality and efficiency of health care in the region. Blessing Health System in Quincy joined in May 2013, Southern Illinois Healthcare in Carbondale joined in September 2013 and Sarah Bush Lincoln Health System in Mattoon joined in November 2015. While remaining independent, member and participant organizations collaborate to achieve savings, implement clinical programs and services to improve access to and quality of health care for patients, lower health care costs and create additional efficiencies that will benefit patients and communities. A significant benefit of the BJC Collaborative is being able to tap into the best practices developed by the organizations to positively impact Decatur Memorial Hospital patients and its employees. Members of the Collaborative also combine purchasing to provide the latest technology and health care services to local communities. "The BJC Collaborative makes Decatur Memorial Hospital an even stronger hospital in our community," said Timothy D. Stone Jr., president & CEO, Decatur Memorial Hospital. "By aligning with other providers of high quality health care services in the Midwest,

together, we can provide even higher quality health care to our patients." Currently, the Collaborative comprises 6,160 hospital beds, nearly 60,000 employees and 7,900 employed and affiliated physicians across their adjacent service areas.

Memorial's 2015 Festival of Trees sets attendance record, raises more than \$332,000
Last year, more than 35,000 people attended Memorial's 26th annual Festival of Trees, which raised \$332,107 to fund health-related projects and programs at Memorial Health System and in the Springfield community. The family-friendly event continues to be a success because of the support of generous sponsors, talented designers, dedicated committee members and more than 1,000 volunteers who staff the nine-day event, said Elena Kezelis, executive director of the Memorial Medical Center Foundation. "Year after year, Memorial's Festival of Trees continues to grow, and we credit our sponsors, designers and the community," Kezelis said. "This event has become a tradition for everyone involved – our visitors, our volunteers, our entertainers. Not only are they enjoying themselves while surrounded by beautiful trees and wreaths, they are helping raise money for health care grants the Memorial Medical Center Foundation awards each spring." Memorial's Festival of Trees began in 1989 to benefit the mission of Memorial Medical Center. Since then, the festival has raised more than \$4.2 million.

Proceeds from Memorial's Festival of Trees are used to fund grants focused on education, research, technology and patient care. The 27th annual Festival of Trees will be Nov. 19-27. Evelyn Brandt Thomas is the honorary chair. The theme is "Remember When," and the colors are red, turquoise and white.

HSHS St. John's Hospital names Allison Paul as chief nursing officer
HSHS St. John's Hospital has announced that Allison Paul, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, will be serving as chief nursing officer (CNO). Paul has served as interim CNO since September 2015. "In the short time Allison has been at St. John's, she has made a very positive difference with her strong leadership and innovative ideas," said Charles L. Lucore, president and CEO of St. John's. "We are extremely proud to have her leading our nursing staff, which is critical to providing outstanding patient care that's aligned with our mission at St. John's." St. John's' mission is to reveal and embody Christ's healing love for all people through high quality Franciscan health care ministry. Paul became part of the St. John's family in February 2015 when she started as the executive director of St. John's Children's Hospital and Women's Services. She came to Springfield from OSF Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria where she was the director of children's care services after starting there as a pediatric nurse in 2003. "Becoming the chief nursing officer at St. John's is something I've always desired," said Paul.

"Nursing is a challenging but very rewarding profession. As CNO, I feel honored to be leading a talented group of nursing leaders and colleagues to improve the patient experience and provide high quality health care." Allison received a bachelor of science in nursing from Illinois Wesleyan University, a master of science in nursing from Saint Francis Medical Center College of Nursing and a doctor of nursing practice from Rush University College of Nursing.

Memorial to offer free seminar on hand surgery
Memorial Medical Center will host a free seminar on hand surgery at 6 p.m. Thursday, March 3, in the Memorial Center for Learning and Innovation. The one-hour program, "When Should you See a Hand Surgeon?" will feature Dr. Ashkon Razavi, an orthopedic surgeon with the Orthopedic Center of Illinois. Topics to be discussed include symptoms that should prompt a patient to schedule an appointment with a hand surgeon, an overview of conditions and innovative treatments and surgical techniques. The Memorial Center for Learning and Innovation (MCLI) is at 228 W. Miller St., at the southeast corner of Rutledge and Miller streets. Free parking is available on the first and third levels of the parking garage south of the MCLI at Rutledge and Carpenter streets. The seminar will be in the 2A Curtis Theatre Classroom. To register, visit MemorialMedical.com or call 217-788-3333. □

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ZG Worldwide Partners with Hugo Systems

Headquartered in Springfield, the consulting firm ZG Worldwide (Zukunft Group Worldwide LLC) announces its partnership with computer manufacturer Hugo Systems. Hugo Systems sells and services customizable computers geared towards small businesses.

Austin Duffie, Hugo Systems cofounder, said “Hugo Systems is competitive in price and performance, and doesn’t require long-term contracts. Our niche is providing small businesses wanting to upgrade their computer systems with a localized, personal, and affordable solution. Without long term contracts and complications with outsourcing, Hugo is unique in the Springfield marketplace. We build the computers here, work with businesses to fit our systems to their needs, delivering a superb product with amazing service.” Hugo Systems is a startup located in the new “Innovate Springfield” business incubator, or iSPI, downtown in the McGladrey & Pullen building at the southwest corner of Fifth and Adams Streets. They have been selling computers since September 2015.

Until now, Springfield was one of the few large cities downstate without a business incubator program. The goal of the incubator is for startups to expand business and eventually stand on their own. ZG Worldwide is a broad-spectrum consulting firm that besides now having computer system expertise, offers management consulting and a number of specialized business, healthcare and media services. Its wide range of media and communication services are one of the most comprehensive in Illinois. Of its 40 associates, half are in

Illinois and the rest in several other states and on five continents. For more information about computer expertise or any of its other services, visit zgworldwide.com or contact info@zgworldwide.com.

Michael von Behren Builder welcomes new managers



John Ferguson



Lynn Alewelt

John Ferguson has been named project manager for Michael von Behren Builder, effective January 1. Ferguson has more than 20 years’ experience in the construction industry, starting out as a framing carpenter in 1993 and eventually owning his own business for a number of years. Lynn Alewelt joined the team as Michael von Behren Builder’s in-house designer, also effective January 1. Alewelt earned a bachelor of science degree in

interior design from University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. She has been involved in kitchen and bath design and the home construction business for more than 20 years. Ferguson and Alewelt are well-known in central Illinois, and Michael von Behren Builder is pleased to have them on staff.

Governor signs executive order directing Department of Commerce to work with new economic development nonprofit
Governor Bruce Rauner has signed an

executive order directing the Illinois Department of Commerce to work in collaboration with the newly formed Illinois Business and Economic Development Corporation (ILBEDC) to attract businesses and investment and encourage job growth and economic development throughout Illinois. Rauner was joined by DCEO director Jim Schultz, Illinois Chamber of Commerce chairman Matt Gambs, Illinois Economic Development Association Chair Angela Griffin and business and local economic development leaders from across the state. “This executive order formally establishes collaborative efforts between the Department of Commerce and the Illinois Business and Economic Development Corporation to jump-start economic development in our state,” Rauner said. “ILBEDC will make us more competitive to put Illinois back in the game after years of sitting on the sidelines, idly watching neighboring states and others lure businesses and jobs away from Illinois. This collaboration will field a highly competitive, proactive organization focused strictly on business development and job creation.”

The Department of Commerce will collaborate with the corporation to more efficiently pursue economic development through the use of private sector resources and expertise. Once fully operational, the corporation will focus on increasing competitiveness for jobs and investment in Illinois through marketing, sales and exceptional customer service. The corporation also will lead the research and development of best practices for economic development, and make recommendations to the Department of Commerce.

Private economic development

organizations are used in 16 other states including Indiana, Ohio and Florida. “We’ve lost tens of thousands of jobs and residents to other states in recent years,” Schultz said. “The corporation will employ economic development best practices to help reverse these trends and bring businesses back to Illinois, while working with the Department of Commerce to maintain high standards transparency and accountability.”

Illinois Chamber of Commerce chairman Matt Gambs applauded the Governor’s action. “The best way to improve Illinois for everyone is to improve the state’s economy,” Gambs said. “Creating this new economic development corporation will be a great benefit for Illinois’ business community, because investment in our economy means jobs and that’s good for everyone.” The corporation will maintain strict standards of transparency and accountability, including a robust conflict of interest policy and public disclosure of donors. The Department of Commerce will maintain final authority and oversight of all state grants and incentives. The Illinois Business and Economic Development Corporation will be governed by a diverse board of directors comprised of business, industry and civic leaders representing the entire state of Illinois. The organization will be modeled from best practices of other successful state and local economic development organizations and will focus on sales, marketing and exceptional customer service. It will work at the speed of business and maintain lean, efficient operations. ILBEDC currently is seeking 501(c) (3) IRS status. For additional information on ILEBDC and to follow future news and developments, visit www.ilbedc.org. □



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Construction loans

By Sarah Delano Pavlik

Are you dreaming of a new home? One to be built to your exact specifications? If so, you will likely need a construction loan, which can seem tricky if you have not encountered one before.

Most people are familiar with home mortgage loans. You find a home you want to purchase and a bank or mortgage company to lend you the money. You take title to the property and the lending institution holds a mortgage as a first lien on the property. But what if you want to build a home? Construction loans are more complicated than traditional mortgages because a lender will not advance you the total sum to build a home when there is no collateral to secure the debt.

In order to secure a construction loan, you will need to provide the lender with a construction timetable. Construction loans are generally for a one year period or less so the home needs to be built in a timely manner. Funds will only be released once certain progress levels are verified by the lender. The release of funds is called a “draw” and lenders will have different procedure’s for how draws are obtained. The homeowner and the builder will be required to sign off on the terms of the draws. In addition, a lender will not release

funds until it has received lien waivers from all subcontractors.

The lender will require lien waivers from subcontractors because a mechanic’s lien can be superior to a construction loan. A mechanic’s lien gives someone who furnishes goods or services to construct or improve real property a lien on that real property by which payment can be enforced. Mechanic’s liens in Illinois are governed by the Mechanic’s Lien Act. Its provisions are automatically included in every contract regarding improvements to real property.

If the lender paid the general contractor without receiving the lien waivers, a subcontractor or material supplier could appear claiming never to have been paid. Those subcontractors or material suppliers likely have valid mechanic’s liens against your property, which they can enforce through foreclosure – which means the property is sold to satisfy the debt. Faced with this situation, a homeowner may pay, again, rather than face such drastic consequences. Although that homeowner may well have a claim against the general contractor, that claim will likely need to be enforced through litigation. A lender will want to avoid any disputes of this type.



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Association for Women in Communications (AWC)


AWC will meet on Wednesday, March 9th from at the Memorial Center for Learning an Innovation, located at 228 W. Miller St. A tour of the facility will be offered at 11 a.m., followed by a time for networking at 11:30 and the lunch from 12-1 p.m. On a daily basis there are potentially five different generations working side-by-side in the current workforce. Combining this multi-generational work environment with varying communication styles can potentially create a high-stress and high-emotions atmosphere for all involved. Communicating with Generations takes a strategic look into generationally preferred communication styles of Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation 2020; and how to maximize preferred styles as a means for better understanding, energizing and developing others. Communicating with Generations is presented by Josh Slaughterback, Consultant in Leadership & Team Development at Memorial Health System. Josh is a Registered Organization Development Professional (RODP), and an American Society of Training and Development certified trainer and coach. Make reservations and pay online at www.awcspringfield.com.

Women Entrepreneurs of Central Illinois (WE-CI)


WE-CI will hold its annual membership drive on Wednesday, March 9th from 5:30-7 p.m. at Chesapeake Seafood House. All new and prospective members are invited to learn more about how the organization can help women in all phases of their careers. WE-CI can provide support and encouragement, education and advice, networking opportunities, and more for women business owners. For additional information, contact Sara Lieber at seniorsidekicks@gmail.com. The cost for the meeting is \$20 for members, \$10 for guests, and \$25 for walk-ins. Make reservations at www.we-ci.org.

Illinois Women in Leadership (IWIL)


IWIL will hold a new member reception on Wednesday, March 16 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at Sarah Beuning's home (email for directions and more information). This is a time to honor and recognize new IWIL members and a great social gathering for all members. New members email lara@gotrcentralillinois.org to register for free.




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As the homeowner, however, you should know that the escrow is set up to protect the lender, not you. In other words, a construction loan escrow is no excuse to relax your diligence, and you will also want to verify the quality of the work and that all lien waivers are received. Although a lender will inspect the property to ensure that certain work has been completed before issuing funds, its inspection is not a quality control inspection, and the lender is not reporting on the quality of the work done. It is up to the homeowner to monitor the quality of the construction, and you may wish to engage a construction manager to do this.

In the past, a construction loan was paid off after construction by means of a second loan, a traditional mortgage. Now most lenders are offering “construction-to-permanent financing,” which requires only one loan closing and therefore should reduce overall closing costs.

The interest rate on a construction loan may be higher than for a traditional mortgage as the lender is generally taking a larger risk. The rate may also be variable. Generally, the borrower only pays the interest on the loan during the construction phase and does not make payments on principal. If rates are low

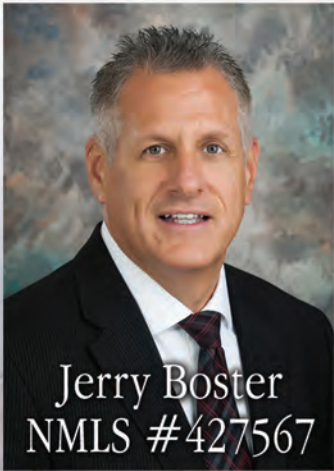
at the time you begin building your home, ask your lender about the ability to lock in the rate once your traditional mortgage goes into effect.

The lender will not release the final draw on the loan until a certificate of occupancy has been issued for the property. A certificate of occupancy is issued by the Sangamon County Department of Public Health Building Safety Division. A property cannot be occupied, whether for residential or commercial use, until it has received a certificate of occupancy. Before issuing the certificate, all major systems of the home will receive a final inspection, including plumbing, electrical and mechanical. These systems will have received inspections during the construction process but at the final inspection everything must be installed correctly and be operational.

There are many things to be monitored while building a new home – the construction itself, the operation of your loan, lien waivers, etc. but at the end of the process your new home will be exactly how you want it. □

Sarah Delano Pavlik is an attorney with Delano Law Offices, LLC. She can be reached at sdpavlik@delanolaw.com.

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RESTAURANT REVIEW



PHOTOS BY MARANDA POTTERF

Springfield Char House

By Thomas C. Pavlik, Jr.

I've been a fan of Star 66 Café for quite some time, and recently enjoyed its sibling restaurant, Chenoa Family Restaurant, up north in Chenoa. So I was happy when the same owners opened up Springfield Char House in the former Carlos O'Kelly's space last fall. It wasn't until recently that I had the chance to see if the ownership could pull off a trifecta – turns out the answer is yes.

Springfield Char House is more upscale than its diminutive siblings. Think casual steakhouse rather than high end diner. There's a dark wood bar with plenty of seating and other touches in keeping with the steakhouse theme. Still, there's a light enough feel that you know you aren't in a traditional club room – this wasn't going to be too stuffy.

My guest (who prefers early lunches) and I arrived precisely at 11 a.m. as Char House was opening the doors for lunch. We noted a handful of cars already waiting in the parking lot – always a good sign. Noting that they were on the older end of the age spectrum, we made tracks to the door to beat the rush.

As the lunch hour got into full swing, however, we noted that the patrons skewed to a younger demographic that represented a good cross-section of Springfield. By the time my guest and I left around 12:20 p.m. (having lingered to chat) we were both pleasantly surprised at how full it was. Despite the crowd and the wood floors, acoustics were not a problem.

Char House has a separate lunch menu that runs the gamut from soups, salads and sandwiches to pasta, seafood, steaks and chops. If you can't find something to eat on this menu you are too picky. More traditional entrée items come with two sides (one side for pasta), while sandwiches and burgers come with fries and a cup of soup. Sides include salad (garden or Caesar), potato (baked,

mashed, roasted or fries), rice, soup, veggies or cottage cheese.

We noted the adobe chicken wrap (with onions, tomatoes, chipotle sauce and jack and cheddar cheeses - \$8.95), the uptown pot roast melt (grilled sourdough with mozzarella, grilled onions and horseradish sauce - \$9.75), the strawberry bistro salad (baby field greens, strawberries, cranberries, pecans, croutons and feta, served with pita and a low-fat raspberry dressing - \$8.95, with chicken \$11.95), and the broiled tilapia (8 ounces, \$12.50).

But my guest and I came to Char House to try out the meat – wanting to know how Char House stacks up against Springfield's other steak houses. So we opted for the 14 ounce New York strip (\$23.95) and the two 8 ounce pork chops (\$15.95). As sides, we got the fries, soup, roasted potatoes and Caesar salad.

The strip came out cooked a perfect medium rare, exactly as ordered. My guest, no stranger to the ins and outs of the restaurant business, was particularly impressed that his steak came up warm and hadn't been waiting on a warming table. It had a nice crust and good char marks. And, in the true test, he found the meat itself to be of high quality. His only complaint was that it was a bit under-seasoned – but that didn't stop him from cleaning his plate. The Caesar was reported as above average, but nothing to write home about, while the roasted potatoes were moist and fluffy on the inside with a nice brown on the outside.

The pork chops were likewise spot on with a nice char. It's good to see that Char House takes its name seriously. Bone left in to help maintain some juices, they were not overcooked like so many of Char House's competitors. As with the steak, however, I found them to be slightly under-seasoned. While that may be a personal



Tuscan chicken.



Springfield Char House is a casual steakhouse located in the former Carlos O'Kelly's.

preference, my guest and I agreed that an additional punch of seasoning would have elevated the offerings.

My sides were excellent – the soup was clearly homemade and, for a vegetable soup, packed with flavor. The generous portion of fries was well-salted with the right combination of crispness and softness.

Char House, apparently mindful of the maxim that you eat with your eyes, also took pains to give us well-presented plates. It was a nice touch.

Service was prompt and efficient. Had my guest and I wanted to get out in under an hour, it's clear that wait staff could have easily accommodated us. As we opted to

linger, we were pleased that they didn't try to rush us out the door. Our servers (plural) must have also had eagle eyes on our glasses as they never got below half-full. We also appreciated that they cleared our plates at the same time – rather than clearing one set while the other diner continued to eat. Well done.

Char House is well suited for business or social lunches. We plan to be frequent visitors. □

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

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Wheelchair Access: Yes

Credit Cards: Yes

Atmosphere: ★★★★★

Service: ★★★★★1/2

Food: ★★★★★

Price: ★★★★★ (more than fair for quality and quantity)

Suitability for Business Lunch: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Brick Solid...

When Ryan Scott purchased his home, he saw the potential in updating it's 70s décor and has been making major renovations. He took out the kitchen's pink countertops and transformed it into beautifully modernized space. While he still has a checklist of projects left to go, he is happy to have his son Logan, 6, eager to help.

Ryan is quite the handyman and that comes in handy when you own 10 rental units. As he acquired new properties, he knew he could trust the professionals at BrickKickers for a quality home inspection. He got to know the owner Bill Brittin well, since they work in similar industries and share a military background. Ryan remembers, "I tried getting Bill to hire me part time for years. I finally said, 'If you're not going to hire me, sell it to me.'"

With Ryan's offer, Bill decided to retire. Ryan majored in business management and was happy to carry on the trusted BrickKickers name. As a father and soon-to-be husband, he values making sure a home is safe for families and helping them protect their investment. What makes his inspection company stand out? Ryan does same day

reporting and free re-inspections. For more on the company, visit brickkicker.com.

Since Ryan prides his business on quality service, he appreciates having a bank like First Bankers Trust Company that shares his business ideals. He first came to First Bankers with his loan officer, Cynthia Mackenzie. "I liked Cynthia so much I moved everything. She has helped me with all my loans – she's gold! And now, Nancy Richards is just like Cynthia. I can't imagine working with anyone else. They make it so easy."

Living in Rochester, Ryan loves using the bank's mobile app and First Mobile Deposit. "I can deposit checks from home. That saves me time and saves me money." When he does get to the bank, he says, "I've banked a lot of places, and they are the only ones that know you when you walk in and Logan, too. They know what sucker he likes – who does that? They are just a great bunch of people, and they want to help you succeed in anyway they can."

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Through its community service committee, CAR has donated close to \$150,000 to charitable causes over the past 10 years. PHOTO COURTESY OF CAR

Realtors work to build stronger communities

Daniel R. Sale, CAE, RCE, SPHR
Capital Area Realtors

If you happen to know any Realtors, chances are pretty good that you know them through their community involvement, whether it be through work with charities, social causes or perhaps business organizations. Realtors serve on planning commissions and zoning boards, they volunteer with Habitat for Humanity and their Rotary, they serve as village trustees, township trustees and county board members, just to name a few. When it comes to involvement in their communities, Realtors are right there pitching in. While it is true that involvement in charities and business associations is a great way for a Realtor to demonstrate their credibility, most get involved out of a genuine desire to give back.

Realtors are also making a positive impact in their communities at an organizational level. The Capital Area Realtors has left a positive mark in the community in a variety of ways. Some of CAR's more substantive contributions include being an original investor in the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce's Q5 Initiative, one of the founding organizations behind the Homeownership Coalition for People with Disabilities and a cumulative contribution of over \$150,000 to CAR's various charities of choice throughout the past ten years. Additionally, individual brokerage firms engage in the support of worthwhile causes as do the Illinois Association of Realtors and the National Association of Realtors.

The Capital Area Realtors was one of the original investors in the Q5 economic development initiative. We feel strongly that working collectively in this initiative is especially important so that we gain every advantage possible to advance our economic footing. Also, CAR has several

members active in Q5 through its Strategic Leadership Council, the Community Development Council and the Development Policy Council.

Additionally, Capital Area Realtors was a founding member of the Homeownership Coalition for People with Disabilities. This group helped assist 215 families of disabled individuals in realizing the dream of homeownership over the past dozen or so years before ceasing its activities in 2015.

CAR's community service committee is one of the most popular volunteer opportunities offered through the organization. The committee would be a great partner to have for ANY social service organization. Last year, the Friends of Sangamon County Animal Control was chosen as CAR's charity of choice and received over \$17,000 for its work. A record number of submittals were received for the 2016 charity, which required the completion of an application outlining the organization's mission and how they would use these additional funds. Three finalists were invited to offer a presentation explaining what their cause is all about.

Generally, the committee likes to direct its energy to those causes where it can make the largest impact and where the money is allocated to a specific identifiable need. It can be a very difficult process and it is often hard to narrow it down to one cause because there are so many worthwhile causes. Everyone has their own pet organization but at the end of the day, once the charity is chosen, everyone rallies to support it.

The 2016 charity of choice is the Refuge Ranch. The Refuge Ranch was developed to rescue the equine, mentor the child, and provide hope, healing and community for at risk children and families in central

Illinois. The Ranch, which is located near Rochester, provides a beautiful setting and unique experience that helps to develop empathy, responsibility, work ethic, perseverance, problem solving and many other character traits and life skills in the clients they serve. The Refuge Ranch incorporates horsemanship, mentoring and the unique joys, challenges and responsibilities of farm life to accomplish these goals. To learn more about the Refuge Ranch go to: <http://www.refuge-ranch.org/>. CAR's major fundraising initiative to benefit the Refuge Ranch will be a trivia night fundraiser scheduled for April 29 at the Knights of Columbus Hall on Meadowbrook Rd.

Through its community service committee, CAR has donated close to \$150,000 to charitable causes over the past 10 years including the Boys & Girls Clubs, Contact Ministries, Land of Lincoln Honor Flight, M.E.R.C.Y. Communities, Central Illinois Foodbank, Salvation Army, Helping Hands and the Iles House, to name a few. Other activities that CAR has engaged in over the years has been the sponsorship of homeownership fairs, homeowner counseling, career days, Habitat builds and collection of toys at Christmastime for area youth. CAR has also supported tornado and hurricane relief efforts. Suffice it to say, when all told, Realtors have a big impact on their communities. □

The Capital Area Realtors® is the Voice for Real Estate in the Capital Area representing more than 750 members involved in all aspects of the real estate industry throughout a 13-county area in central Illinois. The Capital Area's Resource for Real Estate Information can be found at www.SeeHouses.com.



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