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JOURNAL

AUGUST  
2019



# Women in STEM

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LS Building Products President Troy Reed points to the showroom area under construction at the Springfield facility.

# LS Building Products prepares to open Springfield location

**ARTICLE AND PHOTOS  
BY DAVID BLANCHETTE**

It's been a long, strange trip for LS Building Products, but the East Peoria-based wholesale distributor will soon open its largest facility, an 80,000-square-foot, full-service operation near the I-55 and Sangamon Avenue exit in Springfield.

The LS Building Products Springfield operation will open in early August following two years of planning, negotiation and weather delays. The building will feature a huge, drive-through contractor loading area, a fleet of delivery trucks and a showroom with partially constructed house sections where homeowners can see what the firm's products look like when installed.

"We will be showing a lot of the things that homeowners can't normally see," said Troy Reed, president of LS Building Products. "There will be all sorts of interior products, cabinets, Andersen and Marvin windows, and all of the trim stuff. Homeowners will be able to come down here to see and pick out the materials that are actually going into their home projects."

LS Building Products carries dimensional and engineered lumber, including trusses and wall panels; all types of siding; interior doors and millwork; stair parts; vinyl and aluminum fence and railings; roofing products; cabinets; and new and replacement vinyl and wood windows. The business will mainly serve residential and light commercial contractors, but its 3,500-square-foot showroom and on-staff designers will help homeowners with their own construction and renovation projects.

The Springfield facility at 3441 Lumber Ln., just behind the Road Ranger Truck Stop off of Camp Butler Road, will be LS Building Products' eighth location. System-wide, the firm employs 190 people, and they will start with 14 employees in Springfield with plans to increase that figure to 35 to 40 employees in the next five years, Reed said.

Ten of the employees will come from the firm's Virden operation, the former Garretson Lumber Company, which has made trusses for LS Building Products since 2016 and is being moved to the new Springfield location.

"It will be a full-service kind of a one-stop shop," Reed said. "We will have drivers making deliveries within a 50 to 75 mile radius, warehouse personnel, sales people, tech designers, management, customer service and draft people designing homes and room additions."

"We do well in the Peoria, Bloomington and Champaign markets and we feel it is an obvious next step to be in the Springfield area," Reed said. "The construction market in Illinois in general is not going very well, but

about 50% of our business is remodeling, so people who aren't building new are remodeling homes. Since we supply both new construction and remodeling, we don't have those

not be cost effective, so the company looked at existing structures and found what they felt was a good location on Springfield's northeast side. The building was several decades old



A building that has been vacant for years will soon house LS Building Products, following extensive renovations.

heavy-duty downturns in our business." The LS Building Products' Springfield location has been in the works for two years. Reed determined that constructing a new building with the square footage they required would

and had been vacant for a number of years, but it had solid infrastructure and good access. LS Building Products made an offer on the building and approached the City of Springfield



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LS Building Products President Troy Reed and Springfield facility manager Mark Kamphaus.

about creating a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to help offset the cost to renovate the structure. The Springfield City Council agreed and created a targeted TIF district specifically for the company. All seemed to be going well, until a problem familiar to the Springfield area cropped up.

"At the eleventh hour of closing on the building, we found that we had mine subsidence there," Reed said. "So we took our offer off the table and went looking for another building."

Reed conducted a thorough search but eventually realized that the first choice of location was still the best.

"We circled back to this building, and we are hoping that the mine subsidence event is over," Reed said. "So we had to start the process all over again. We re-did an offer, got accepted again, got going through the building permit process, fought some wet weather delays, and here we are now."

The company paid just under \$700,000 to buy the building and property and is spending another \$2.4 million in renovations, Reed said. He estimated that the TIF district designation

will mean just under \$1.5 million to the company in recaptured property taxes over the district's 23-year life span.

Springfield Office of Planning and Economic Development TIF manager Abby Powell worked closely with LS Building Products over the past two years and helped them to secure the TIF designation.

"We created this TIF specifically to attract them and help to incentivize the business," Powell said. "They are a unique industry, and they are going to bring some jobs and also fill a vacant building for us."

Powell said this particular TIF is unusual because it is for just one parcel of land, but she feels the end result will be worth it.

"The whole idea of TIF is that except for the incentive the development wouldn't have happened," Powell said. "We have seen decreased property values in this area, which has been hurtful to the other taxing districts and to the city. We are not impacting the established base property tax; the increase in the property tax goes back to this developer and we know that the sales tax they generate and the jobs that they create will be a positive





Workers put the finishing touches on the showroom for the new Springfield location.

economic benefit to the city.”

Mark Kamphaus worked for James Hardie Building Products, and LS Building Products was a long-standing customer of his. Kamphaus liked the way that LS did business, so when he was offered the manager’s job for the new Springfield location, he jumped at the opportunity.

“What excites me the most about this is the funding that they are putting into it, and

what they are giving us to work with, and the growth potential that comes with that,” Kamphaus said. “These guys are willing to do whatever it takes to grow a territory and throw resources at it, so that’s exciting for me.”

Kamphaus said that LS Building Products’ hours of operation will be weekdays from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. with special arrangements for pickup or delivery during off hours. The company has a strong contractor client base,

and Kamphaus hopes the Springfield showroom will increase the private homeowner side of the business as well.

“They will be able to see the interiors, the different door profiles, the trim and different sidings and windows,” Kamphaus said. “But beyond that, it gives our salesmen a little space to sit down with builders or homeowners and go through their plan and go through product by product and actually see it on the

wall, as opposed to just looking at a sample in your hand.”

“I think the bigger picture is they’re going to see a company that is really willing to take care of them from start to finish and back what we are selling them,” Kamphaus said. ♦

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PHOTOS BY LEE MILNER

On July 16, *Springfield Business Journal* celebrated the 2019 class of Forty Under 40 with a reception and awards ceremony held at University of Illinois Springfield. The program honors young professionals whose efforts enrich our local business community and who give back to the community as a whole. Longtime sponsors Security Bank and University of Illinois Springfield were joined this year by State Farm agent Mark Cortesi and AmeriCall Communications, who made it possible to recognize this outstanding group of young professionals.

To make a nomination for next year's Forty Under 40 class or see a list of previous selectees, visit [springfieldbusinessjournal.com](http://springfieldbusinessjournal.com).

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The 2019 class of Forty Under 40.





Gov. J.B. Pritzker stands in front of Springfield's Lincoln Depot on June 28 after signing a package of bills enacting a \$45 billion capital infrastructure plan. PHOTO BY JERRY NOWICKI, CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS

# Business groups view historic legislative session as ‘mixed bag’

## Late flurry of reforms offer more relief to larger businesses than smaller ones

BY JERRY NOWICKI,  
Capitol News Illinois

Representatives of some of the state’s largest business associations are looking back at a historic legislative session and the impact on businesses, which will see benefits from late legislative action.

“I think it’s a mixed bag, and it depends a little bit on what sector you’re in,” said

Rob Karr, president of the Illinois Retail Merchants Association. “For example, if you’re a convenience store, you’ve been absolutely hammered. But there were some clear wins as well.”

Karr said a \$15 minimum wage hike by 2025, a \$1 per-pack increase to the cigarette tax and a 19-cent increase to the motor fuel tax would hurt businesses in general and small retail convenience stores in particular.

The wins, according to Karr and representatives of the Illinois Chamber of Commerce and Illinois Manufacturers Association, include a phased-in repeal of the state’s franchise tax, added tax incentives for data centers and large-scale construction projects, protection of a retailer’s tax credit and a streamlining of a manufacturer’s purchase credit.

“The franchise tax has needed to be repealed for a long time,” said Illinois Chamber of Commerce President Todd Maisch. “It’s a very antiquated tax, and it’s a very difficult tax for businesses to understand.”

not meet certain requirements.

Maisch said the benefits of the data center act are compounded by the Blue Collar Jobs Act, another reform passed at the end of the legislative session that offsets some portion of labor costs of large-scale industrial projects.

“So I think all of a sudden, Illinois went from being a laggard when it comes to attracting billion-dollar data centers, to now being close to the front of the pack in terms of what we can offer to lure that investment here to Illinois.”

For Karr and IRMA, another win was maintaining a tax credit that allows retailers to keep 1.75% of the sales tax they collect “for serving as the state’s sales tax collector.”

He also praised a pair of provisions to require remote retailers such as Amazon to collect state sales taxes on any purchase delivered to an Illinois address. Those measures “level the playing field” for online sellers and brick-and-mortar businesses, he said.

Karr and Maisch both agreed, however, big businesses benefited more from the various reforms than smaller ones.

“Really, the problem with the end of the session is that small businesses did not get their fair share of relief. And so we’ll be calling on the governor to make small business a priority for next year,” Maisch said.

For Maisch, that means “re-examining” the minimum wage increase, possibly by creating a permanent regional tax credit for businesses to get greater relief in counties where \$15 hourly is a more burdensome expense.

Other ideas backed by the Chamber include creating tax-free savings accounts for small businesses planning for large expenses, and other possible small business investment credits.

Denzler said one of the next major hurdles for the IMA is figuring out ways to attract skilled workers. He credited Democratic Gov. J.B. Pritzker’s dedication to prioritizing career and technical education to increase awareness and interest in manufacturing jobs.

“We look forward to working with (Pritzker) and members of General Assembly, because that impacts every company, whether you’re a Fortune 100 or you’re a small metal fabrication shop in downstate Illinois, the ability to find qualified workers is a challenge.”

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# Women working in STEM fields

BY MEREDITH HOWARD

Although women earn 50.3% of all science and engineering bachelor's degrees, they account for only 29% of the science and engineering workforce, according to the National Girls Collaborative Project, which encourages girls to learn about and work in STEM fields. Despite this statistic, Springfield is home to many female business owners and managers with a STEM focus.

There are countless different paths one can take to end up working in STEM, and some Springfield women have followed routes that may seem unusual.

Michelle Tjelmeland was a school teacher before she had to change careers after becoming deaf during pregnancy.

"I had to reinvent myself, basically, because I could no longer hear," Tjelmeland said.

She decided to earn her master's degree in education and computer technology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, because she "didn't need to be able to hear in order to build websites." She has since started two businesses and one nonprofit organization.

Tjelmeland founded her first business, e-websmart, in 1999. E-websmart specializes in responsive design and development, social media marketing, graphic design and franchise marketing development.

In 2005, Tjelmeland founded the Cochlear Implant Awareness Foundation, which provides resources and information, as well as implants, to families in need. She was motivated to help other families receive cochlear implants because this device allowed her to hear again. One of Tjelmeland's daughters, Ellie, also received this implant because she was born deaf.

Tjelmeland then started a retail boutique, District 23 Mercantile and Foundry, to help fund her nonprofit. However, Tjelmeland's primary business is still e-websmart.

"I think the biggest challenge in any sort of technical business is trying to stay abreast and on top of technology, and you know it changes so rapidly... Facebook changes their website, their app, everything, on a daily basis," Tjelmeland said.

Susan McCormick, a civil engineer with Hanson Professional Services Inc., cited the same issue.

"With this type of field, there's always new technology, just the changes in how we do things," said McCormick, who has worked at Hanson since the early 1990s. "When I first started here...we were just starting to use computers to design things. And now, it's unbelievable what computers can do to help us with our design," McCormick said.

While civil engineering is one of the fields that have the fewest women (17.5%), McCormick said she wasn't bothered by sometimes being the only woman in the room.

"I have noticed at meetings, or just kind of everywhere you go as far as different firms or whatever, that there's not too many women.

But it was never an issue," said McCormick.

Julie Shipp, who began her career in 2008 as a civil engineer at Hanson, said that she became used to working in a field that is male-dominated when she was in college and had few women classmates.

are incredible. They work as a team, and the project managers really want to make sure that the engineers are doing their jobs, and doing it well, and have everything that they need."

Not every STEM field is as team-oriented



Susan McCormick and Julie Shipp

PHOTO/ HANSON PROFESSIONAL SERVICES INC.

She said that she has felt welcomed as a woman in engineering, and that it doesn't make a difference to her whether her colleagues are men or women.

Shipp said that one challenge she has faced working in engineering was the need for accuracy.

"Because we do deal with public safety, building roads, and bridges, and intersections, and things like that, our end product has to be correct," Shipp said.

When asked if she felt supported throughout the process of learning how to be an engineer, Shipp said, "The people here at Hanson

as engineering. Although scientists sometimes work in groups, the field is generally individualistic.

"It is very cutthroat, and that's something that I didn't quite understand with science... we're non-for-profit, we don't make money, so I wasn't really expecting everyone to be so cutthroat in this field, but it is," said Andrea Braundmeier-Fleming, an assistant professor at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine.

Braundmeier-Fleming also said she was supported, though, and felt that could make or break a science student.

"I was very lucky that no matter what environment I chose, I had strong mentors," Braundmeier-Fleming said.

Sheila Feipel, Springfield branch manager for HEART Technologies, echoed Braundmeier-Fleming's statement that support is paramount to succeeding in one's field.

"It's amazing to me how mothers encourage their daughters to do jobs that they think are appropriate for women, instead of saying, chase your dream, you can be all you want to be. You hear those things, and subconsciously it affects the way you look at your self-image, it affects the way you perform. So, I want people to start changing the narrative," Feipel said.

Feipel is a first-generation college graduate, and she planned her high school classes carefully so as to increase her chances of being accepted to college.

She said that when she was a high school student, girls were required to take a home economics class and boys were required to take shop class. Feipel found it important to take a chemistry course during her senior year, but she was told she was unable to because home economics was required for graduation.

"I said no, this is hurting my chances of going to college," Feipel said. "So I found myself before the school board."

Feipel said that after she addressed the school board about her concern, the board decided to change its policy so that home economics would be an elective course. Feipel was then able to take chemistry in its place.

Attitudes in schools surrounding what subjects should be prioritized have since changed.

Dubois Elementary School, which is in District 186, has a curriculum that encourages children to learn about STEM fields. Jaycie Nolting, an eight-year-old student, said that she learned about coding beginning in her first grade classroom.

Jaycie was taught about the basic functions of coding by playing games on her tablet.

"It was fun, I liked it," Jaycie said.

In contrast, Carol Kneedler wasn't introduced to computers educationally until she was in college, when her mother encouraged her to study computer science. Kneedler now owns O3 Internet Consulting, which specializes in online marketing, website design, social media and email marketing.

Kneedler graduated with a bachelor's degree in math with a concentration in computer science in the 1980s. She said that when she was a college student, she didn't take a single computer science class that was taught by a woman.

Although Kneedler didn't have any female computer science professors to learn from, her mother worked in engineering and prompted her to pursue a STEM field because "computers are getting to be the thing."

"She was a pretty smart cookie," Kneedler said. ♦

*Meredith Howard is a summer intern with Illinois Times and Springfield Business Journal. She was the editor-in-chief of LLCC's student newspaper and she plans to attend Baylor University in the fall, majoring in journalism.*

## COVER PHOTO

Michelle Tjelmeland founded e-websmart, a website and graphic design company, in 1999 after changing careers due to hearing loss.

PHOTO BY TERRY FARMER





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# Does incentivized relocation pay dividends?

BY ERIC WOODS

For those not tied to their current living locations, a couple areas in the United States are hoping to entice people to head their way. Both Tulsa, Oklaholma, and the state of Vermont have recently established programs that will pay people to relocate. It may only be a matter of time before more cities and states follow suit, but would Springfield ever consider using this technique as a recruiting tool to get people to move to the capital city?

To be considered for the Tulsa Remote program, applicants need to meet four eligibility requirements. First, the person must be able to move to Tulsa within six months. Next, the individual needs to have full time remote employment or be self-employed outside of Tulsa County. Finally, anyone hoping to take advantage of the program must be at least 18 years old and eligible to work in the United States. A housing stipend is also provided in the hopes of sweetening the deal. The city will work to identify housing options that meet each person's unique needs.

Tulsa Remote was created to enhance and help boost the city's workforce community, and the city provides a total of \$10,000 to incentivize a move. Because remote arrangements take planning, the city provides some money upfront to help with relocation expenses, a monthly stipend and the rest upon the completion of the first year.

"I love the ingenuity of this program, but perhaps a better grant program at the moment would be making similar-sized investments to build up Springfield's culture to make it more attractive to transplants," said Lisa Stott, executive director of Downtown Springfield, Inc. "Grants of this size would go pretty far in down-

town, the type of neighborhood that is attracting younger workers, whether to get a new small business going – like the ones being developed in our Momentum on Main Street pipeline with



PHOTO/ PEXELS

Innovate Springfield – or to offset some of the costs of renovating upper story space into apartments."

Thanks to a bill signed by Governor Phil Scott, the state of Vermont began accepting applications at the beginning of 2019 for their

Remote Worker Grant Program. This program pays \$10,000 over two years to people who work remotely for an out-of-state company and are willing to move to Vermont. The grants were

be a full-time employee of a company outside of Vermont, perform most of their job duties remotely from a home office or co-working space in Vermont, be 18 years or older, and move to the state on or after Jan. 1.

Josh Collins, interim executive director of Land of Lincoln Economic Development Corporation, believes in Springfield's ability to bring in skilled workers. "I know from personal interaction that Springfield is home to a number of telecommuters, which is no surprise since our community has a highly skilled and productive workforce," he said. "I believe our community's overall quality of life, affordable living and cultural amenities make Springfield and Sangamon County a uniquely comfortable place to live. The Land of Lincoln Economic Development Corporation is currently developing a branding and marketing strategy that will focus on attracting businesses and people to the community."

While it would be difficult to predict whether Springfield would ever take this route as it relates to attracting people to move here, Tulsa and Vermont have similar reasons for offering these programs. In both cases, people are leaving the state, and the average age of the areas' workers is increasing. Governor Scott even announced his state's demographic problem last year, which helped get the new incentive program pushed forward.

Should these programs show a positive return on investment, Springfield might consider looking into a similar approach.

"While I'm not aware of any discussions to provide a cash payment to people for moving here, I believe our community can be successful by proactively improving our efforts for telling our story and marketing our assets," said Collins. ♦

awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis with a total of 50 grants allocated for the program. People can use the money for such expenses as relocation costs or even computer software and hardware.

For the Vermont program, applicants had to

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12 ♦ August 2019 ♦ Springfield Business Journal



# More consumers using voice assistants

BY HOLLY WHISLER

Artificial intelligence (AI) might sound like science fiction, but it is actually a part of many American's daily lives. Artificial intelligence is the creation of machines that learn from experience, adjust to new inputs, and respond or perform human-like tasks. Some AI examples are chess-playing computers, driverless cars and speech recognition such as Amazon's Alexa and Apple's Siri. Each time you give Alexa or Siri a command, you are using artificial intelligence.

Voice assistants such as Alexa and Siri have ushered in a new set of consumer interactions with technology. Individuals can use voice assistants on a range of smart devices to carry out a multitude of tasks. From asking for directions to shopping, voice assistants have enabled consumers to acquire information and make decisions in a quicker manner than ever before.

The number of smart speaker owners in the U.S. rose 40% in 2018 to reach 66.4 million, with total smart speakers in use rising to 133 million by January 2019, according to VoiceBot.ai, which tracks the growing industry. Management strategy consultants OC&C predict Americans will spend an estimated \$40 billion on voice commerce technology by 2022. The digital agency Salmon reports that 55% of American consumers already claim to shop via voice-activated devices.

VoiceBot.ai surveyed 1,203 U.S. consumers to better understand the products and services they buy the most using a voice assistant.

Everyday household items are the most ordered products by Americans through voice assistants (25.11%).

Americans are least likely to use a voice assistant to locate and give their business to a local service, such as a hair cutting or dry-cleaning outlet – with only 3.52% currently doing so

The aspect U.S. consumers most like about using a voice assistant to shop is that it is hands free (27.31%).

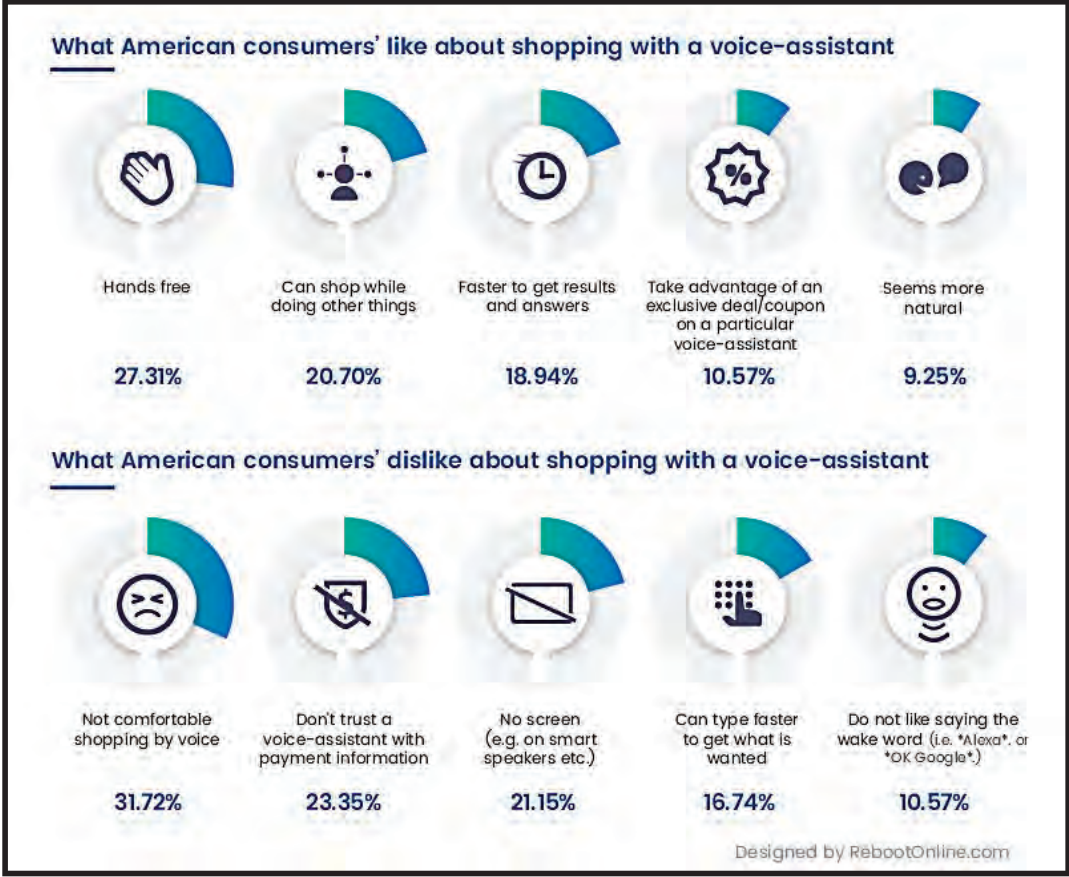
The biggest apprehension American shoppers have about utilizing a voice assistant to

buy goods or services is that a lot of them do not yet feel entirely comfortable shopping by voice (31.72%)

However, almost the same number of Americans (31.1%) would like an integrated commerce experience by using a voice assistant to help them locate products as they navigate inside a store.

A 2018 report published on forbes.com by contributor Laura Heller reveals that many households have smart speakers and voice assistants, but the statistics for making online purchases were very low. However, this data may not be indicative of the future for voice commerce. Heller noted, "The best part about voice is that it's being driven by consumers in these early days — humans who speak and are looking for answers. What they're asking already varies depending on the brand or operating system they're interacting with, and this is telling researchers a lot about consumer intent and how voice commerce will develop."

While AI, in the form of speech recognition, is being used on a daily basis in many households, there still appears to be a great deal of untapped potential for getting consumers used to making online purchases. ♦



Online marketplace OnBuy.com analyzed findings from a VoiceBot.ai survey of 1,203 U.S. consumers to better understand the products and services they buy the most using a voice assistant.

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1	<b>Senergy Technologies</b> 509 N. Elm St. Williamsville, IL 62693	217-566-2826 217-566=2827 senergy-electric.com	Matthew J. Giacomini, President Brandon M. Keafer, PE, Vice President	52	✓		✓	✓	✓		Fire and intrusion security, design, installation and testing, NICET certified, door access control and video cameras, paging, intercom and voice evacuation.	2014
2	<b>George Alarm</b> 917 S. Ninth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-525-1334 217-241=7500 georgealarm.com sales@georgealarm.com	Doug George	50	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Burglar, fire and video systems, door access control, fire testing and sensitivity testing, patient monitoring systems, and phone apps systems that are smartphone compatible, NICET certified staff, UL certified central station. DMP, Honeywell, HIK Vision and Bosch systems.	1957
3	<b>Young's Security Systems, Inc.</b> 440 N. First St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-744-9000 217-789=6447 youngs-security.com jhavey@youngs-security.com	Jim Havey Bill Havey	35	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Local UL listed central station, commercial and residential security systems, commercial fire alarms, camera systems, door access systems, entry door security, medical alert systems.	1985
4	<b>A-1 Corporate Hardware</b> 101 N. Fourth St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-744-7575 217-744=7662 a-1lock.com info@a-1lock.com	Joseph White	23	✓			✓	✓	✓	Locksmith services and door hanging hardware solutions for residential, commercial and government agencies. IP surveillance solutions for commercial and government agencies. Radio dispatched technicians available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.	1945
5	<b>Central Illinois Security</b> A Levi, Ray & Shoup, Inc. Company 2451 W. Monroe St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-787-4970 centralillinoissecurity.com swilson@centralillinoissecurity.com	Dick Levi, President and CEO Sharon Wilson, General Manager	22	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Global information technology solutions including the design and installation of security systems, fire alarms, video surveillance, smart home automation, access control systems and video conferencing technologies for both residential and commercial applications. State-of-the-art, UL approved central monitoring facility provides alarm monitoring throughout the central Illinois area.	1979
6	<b>SEA Group, Inc.</b> 3901 Pintail Drive, Suite A Springfield, IL 62711	217-523-1717 Seagrp.com info@seagrp.com	Joe Marchizza	16	✓		✓	✓	✓		IP video security solutions including license plate recognition, sound masking systems, nurse call, access control and low voltage infrastructure, information technology consulting and strategic staffing.	1984
7	<b>AmeriCall Communications</b> 477 B N. Walnut St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-522-2255 217-522=2257 americallinc.com pfelton@americallinc.com	Gene Dinardo Melanie McDaniel Joe Ushman	15	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Commercial security services including security cameras for parking lots and building exteriors, interior offices. Customized secure access controls and monitoring for every type of facility including retrofitting security platform into existing environments.	2003
8	<b>Heart Technologies</b> 1831 S. 11 <sup>th</sup> St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-544-3100 heart.net sfeipel@heart.net	Sheila Feipel	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Fire and intrusion security, design, installation and testing, NICET certified, door access control and video cameras, paging, intercom and voice evacuation.	1987
9	<b>Lloyd IT Services, LLC</b> 505 St. John Drive Sherman, IL 62684	217-496-6722 www.lloyditservices.com klloyd@lloyditservices.com	Kevin Lloyd	1	✓					✓	Installs and maintains security camera systems of any size and scope which clients can access from anywhere in the world, both live view and playback.	2015

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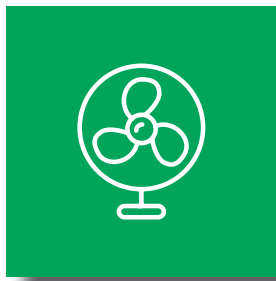
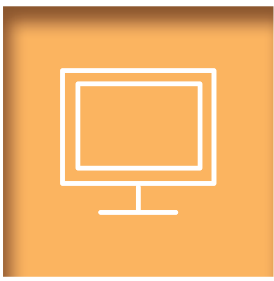
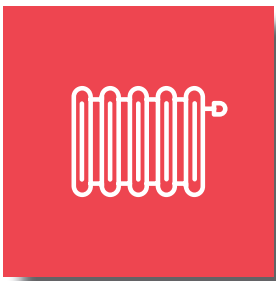
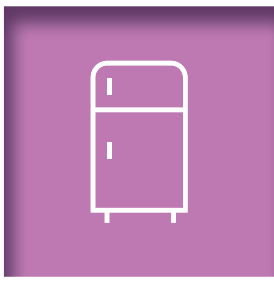
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# Small business cybersecurity and the internet of things

BY MICHAEL KOKAL

The “Internet of Things” (IoT) promises to connect everything from microwaves to pace-makers to shipping fleets to automobiles. It is estimated that 50 billion new devices will come online within the next five years. Retailers and suppliers are using the IoT to run cameras, track inventory and connect shelves.

According to *Forbes*, 70% of small business retailers intend to invest in some form of IoT technology. However, unlike security protocols and best practices for servers, personal computers and smart phones, which are better understood, security for IoT devices is rarely sufficient and poses a significant problem for small businesses. Since IoT devices are connected to the internet, they can also be hacked just like any other internet-enabled device. Moreover, because IoT devices contain more connections to the internet, this allows hackers an expansion of “attack surfaces,” or entry points to your network, further exposing your business to outside security risk. Here are a few recommendations for safely operating IoT technology for your small business:

Keep devices up-to-date. It is not uncommon to see devices five to seven years old in

use in offices and at home. It is critical to keep devices running on their latest firmware and software. It is important to select an IoT vendor that continues to support, update and provide security patches for its products. Most reputable manufacturers will release security updates for their IoT devices when vulnerabilities are discovered. If the IoT device your business is considering implementing is at the end of service or is no longer supported by the manufacturer, you may want to weigh the benefits of that purchase against the potential threat that that device might be hacked in the future.

Choose known vendors when buying smart devices. IoT devices are not based on one single technology; instead, they rely on an interconnected series of data and devices. When one of these elements goes down, it can affect the entire ecosystem. After many years, the original IoT manufacturer may be out of business. For example, according to *Network World*, one IoT start-up called Emberlight created an IoT technology to develop “smart light sockets.” However, it turned out that Emberlight’s technology architecture required a call to the company’s cloud service for commands to turn the lights on or off. When Emberlight closed its doors, its smart socket products no longer worked for

companies which relied on the company’s cloud service, which was no longer operational. This illustrates the importance of choosing reliable vendors whose technology may survive after business termination.

Train staff on proper use. Educate your staff on proper use of devices and general cybersecurity best practices. The U.S. Small Business Administration has a free online course that business owners and staff can take to orient themselves on ways to keep workplace’s network secure.

Utilize cloud management. Major information companies like Amazon, Microsoft and Google now offer IoT management options through IaaS Solutions. Small businesses with many IoT devices should consider going that route, which would provide them the ability to manage all their IoT devices from one location. Managing multiple devices can be made easier by using remote management services. Not only can such tools help companies become more efficient in managing numerous devices, but these also ensure that device vulnerabilities are always patched properly.

Change the default and administrator access. Many devices come with out-of-the-box and easy to access administrator credentials.

Some even use default settings with generic user name and password combinations. Using the default settings are among the most common ways attackers and malware gain access to devices. For example, the Mirai Botnet malware brought down major internet sites several years ago by taking over network devices using default password settings and employing them as bots to launch a DDoS attack on a DNS service provider used by sites such as Twitter, Reddit, Netflix, Airbnb and many others. It is imperative to change the credentials to hard-to-guess phrases and passwords to keep those credentials secure. As soon as you connect a new device, make sure to change the password.

The IoT represents a huge opportunity for businesses of all sizes. The potential applications are virtually limitless. Weighing the value of the technology against the security concerns can go a long way in ensuring your business can make the most efficient use of this exciting technology. ♦

*Michael Kokal is a certified privacy information professional (CIPP/US) and licensed intellectual property/patent attorney. He practices law at the Springfield office of Heyl Royster where he heads the firm’s cybersecurity committee.*

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Sources: The companies.  
Ranked by number of local employees.

	NAME / ADDRESS	PHONE / FAX (=) WEBSITE / EMAIL	OWNER/ MANAGER	NUMBER of EMPLOYEES	NETWORKING	WEB DEV.	TELE. EQUIP.	SERVICES OFFERED	YEAR EST.
1	<b>Levi, Ray &amp; Shoup, Inc.</b> 2401 W. Monroe St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-793-3800 217-787=3286 www.lrs.com Email through website contact page	Dick Levi	364	✓	✓		Global information technology solutions specializing in software development, IT staffing, technical training, infrastructure, cloud, cybersecurity and analytics solutions. Responsive website development, custom design, application development, content management systems, mobile apps, search engine optimization and creative services. Tech support for business networks, servers and computers including network design and installation, work station configuration, server setup and support. Managed IT services include remote monitoring, patch management, disaster recovery and data backup. On-site services include computer repairs, server crash recovery and assistance with Microsoft Exchange issues. Audio and video conference room technologies.	1979
2	<b>CDS Office Technologies</b> 612 S. Dirksen Parkway Springfield, IL 62703	217-528-8936 www.cdsot.com	Mark Watson	135	✓	✓	✓	Free network and security assessment, network planning, installation streamlining, monitoring and expansion, business continuity and disaster recovery and backup, compliance assessments (PCI, HIPAA, etc.), website design and services, system upgrades and new hardware sales/leasing and installation.	1971
3	<b>MSF&amp;W Consulting, Inc.</b> 3445 Liberty Dr. Springfield, IL 62704	217-698-3535 www.msfw.com info@msfw.com	John Marucco Darrell “Duke” Stoddard	60		✓		Expertise in custom application development, primarily in Microsoft technologies. This includes all facets of software development: IT project management, system analysis & design, database administration, information architecture, usability and accessibility testing, training, and end-user support.	1991
4	<b>SynapSiS, Inc.</b> 3161 W. White Oaks Dr., Suite 302 Springfield, IL 62704	217-503-4990 www.synapsisinc.com info@synapsisinc.com	Mastan Reddy Paidela	35	✓	✓		Some of the services include software application development, integration, networking, security, database programming.	2012
5	<b>Prairie Telecom Services</b> 148 Forrest Ave. Springfield, IL 62702	217-306-1503 www.prairietelecom.com jblackburn@prairietelecom.com	Jason Blackburn	24	✓			Network cabling and fiber infrastructure—directional drilling for fiber/conduit placement as well as network cabling and fiber splicing.	1996
6	<b>SEA Group, Inc.</b> 3901 Pintail Dr., Suite A Springfield, IL 62711	217-523-1717 www.Seagr.com info@seagr.com	Joe Marchizza	16			✓	Nurse call solutions, sound masking systems, IP video security solutions/access control, structured cabling/network backbone/copper and fiber optics, and IT staffing.	1984
7	<b>AmeriCall Communications</b> 447 B N. Walnut St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-522-2255 217-522-2257 http://americallinc.com pfelton@americallinc.com	Gene Dinardo Melanie McDaniel Joe Ushman	15	✓		✓	Phone Systems / VOIP Specializing in VOIP, Digital, and Analog solutions—Discovery and design support, facilities to mobile integration. Structured cabling and fiber optic solutions—customized structured cable plants, block hour programs, leasing options, discover and design, project management support, wireless points. Tele-Connect /Carrier Services—DSL, PRI, SIP trunking, fiber trunks, VPN, DS3, POTs, long distance.	2003
8	<b>Hanson Information Systems, Inc.</b> 2433 W. White Oaks Dr. Springfield, IL 62704	217-726-2400 217-726=3239 www.hansoninfosys.com info@hansoninfosys.com	Raj Mohanty President	12	✓	✓	✓	Equipment purchase, server co-location, on and off site backup, Hosted Exchange email server, DNS hosting, web hosting, website design and development, dedicated internet circuits, AT&T Partner Exchange wholesaler – Platinum Level partner, Comcast wholesaler, computer networking; network security; financial industry and medical industry system security, penetration testing, Windows, Linux, and Cisco systems, firewalls, virtual machines, antivirus and antimalware software, managed software, disaster recovery, cloud computing, Hanson Cloud Drive collaboration tool, general tech support. IT services for banks and the financial industry.	1997
8	<b>Aggieland Software, Inc.</b> 15 S. Old State Capitol Plaza, Fl. 2 Springfield, IL 62701	224-601-5241 www.aggielandsoftware.com info@aggielandsoftware.com	Persis Dhankher	12		✓		Specialize in mobile and web application development. Blockchain-based technology, artificial intelligence and data analytics. Software project management(agile).	2015
9	<b>HIP Advertising</b> 2809 Mansion Rd., Suite 1 Springfield, IL 62711	217-789-4447 217-789=4441 www.hipadvertising.com info@hipadvertisng.com	Myra L. Hoffman	8		✓		Responsive web design and development, web hosting and monthly maintenance.	1993
9	<b>Thirdwave Data/Comm, Inc.</b> 500 North St., Suite 19 Springfield, IL 62704	217-544-4720 217-544=4758 www.thirdwavedata.com sales@thirdwavedata.com	Brian McLean Chris Oury Jeff Reazer	8	✓		✓	VOIP, cloud, hybrid, digital and analog telephone system solutions. Mobile integration. Analog, TVI and IP surveillance solutions. Structured cabling and fiber optic solutions for voice, data, surveillance and audio/video. Panduit, Avaya, Speco, Star2Star, Salient, Nortel, Vivotek and Axis.	2002
10	<b>Novanis IT Solutions</b> 3161 W. White Oaks Dr., Suite 100 Springfield, IL 62704	217-698-0999 217-698=1087 www.novanis.com walter.meek@novanis.com	Walter Meek	7	✓		✓	Network infrastructure, wired and wireless networks, servicers, desktops, cybersecurity software, software, implementation services, technology and consulting services.	1982
11	<b>MAM/COMM1 Services, Inc.</b> 1427 S. Eighth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-522-8942 217-522=8948 www.mamcomm1.com mamcomm@mamcomm1.com	Michael Milburn	6			✓	Design, installation and maintenance of LAN systems, including data, voice and fiber optic cabling, CATV, security systems and telephone systems. Telecommunications equipment—Allworx, Avaya, Partner.	1993
11	<b>GoWeb1</b> 400 S. Grand Ave. West Springfield, IL 62704	217-241-8554 goweb1.com theteam@goweb1.com	Mark Roberts, III	6		✓		Website development, domain names, hosting, SMS text marketing - TextClubs.com, mass alerts - AlertsMadeEasy.com, copywriting, search engine optimization, SSL certificates, ongoing creative services, graphic design, consulting, DIY solutions.	2008



TECHNOLOGY

Sources: The companies.  
Ranked by number of local employees.

	NAME / ADDRESS	PHONE / FAX (=) WEBSITE / EMAIL	OWNER/ MANAGER	NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES	NETWORKING	WEB DEV.	TELE. EQUIP.	SERVICES OFFERED	YEAR EST.
12	<b>Heart Technologies</b> 1831 S. 11th St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-544-3100 www.heart.net sfeipel@heart.net	Sheila Feipel	5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Managed services, hosted services, cloud storage, wireless networks, cyber security, infrastructure, virtualization, nurse call, fire alarm, video surveillance, access control, phone systems and hosted voice.	1987
12	<b>KB Computer Consulting, Inc.</b> 510 E. Apple Orchard Rd. Suite 103 Springfield, IL 62703	217-529-0108 www.kb-consulting.net karl@kb-consulting.net	Karl L. Backs	5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A full service computer consulting and IT company specializing in managed services, offsite backup, cloud services, network security, web services, networking, hardware/software sales, MS Office 365 and consulting, among other services.	2000
12	<b>Clearfire, Inc.</b> 956 Clocktower Dr., Suite 1 Springfield, IL 62704	217-953-0321 www.clearfirestudios.com hello@clearfirestudios.com	Casey Reid	5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom website design, web applications development, content management systems, mobile-friendly websites, technical consulting, digital marketing, search engine optimization and creative services.	2007
12	<b>e-websmart</b> 130 John St. Rochester, IL 62563	217-553-1073 www.e-websmart.com info@e-websmart.com	Michelle Tjelmeland, Owner Crista Gebhardt, Manager	5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Website design and development, social media marketing and management services, graphic design, franchise marketing collateral.	1999
13	<b>Hupp Information Technologies, Inc.</b> 6401 Stonehaven Ridge Springfield, IL 62701	217-816-4877 dhupp@huppinfotech.com www.huppinfotech.com	Dean Hupp	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	A full service technology company offering custom programming for stand alone and web application along with their support.	2001
14	<b>Khamma Group, LLC</b> 226 W. State St. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-487-6888 www.khamma.com sroberts@khamma.com	Scott Roberts	3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Managed IT services, managed security, security assessments.	2007
15	<b>Cave Interactive Media</b> 509 N. Elm St. Williamsville, IL 62693	217-496-6755 www.caveim.com hi@caveim.com	Denny Cave	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Website design and development, custom web application development and WordPress-based solutions including e-commerce, multisite networks and performance-optimized hosting.	2003
15	<b>03 Internet Consulting, Inc.</b> 2016 S. Fourth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-528-9803 www.03internet.com carol@03internet.com	Carol Kneedler	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provides internet marketing to small businesses and nonprofit organizations, including website design and development, search engine optimization, social media and email marketing.	2007
16	<b>Lloyd IT Services, LLC</b> 505 St. John Dr. Sherman, IL 62684	217-496-6722 www.lloyditsservices.com klloyd@lloyditsservices.com	Kevin Lloyd	1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	A managed IT services provider, providing on-site and remote computer tech support, network installation and security camera systems to commercial and residential clients. After-hours emergency support is also provided.	2015



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# Workplace privacy

BY THOMAS C. PAVLIK JR.

With smart phones and the internet, employees have more ways than ever to communicate from work. Although these increased modes of communicating have brought many benefits to employers, they carry with them a host of legal issues.

As a general rule, employers have a legitimate interest in knowing how employees spend their days. For example, employers aren't going to want employees surfing the internet for pornography from work or engaging in any number of inappropriate activities. As a result, employers are allowed (within limits) to monitor the communications of its employees and to take appropriate action in response to what's discovered.

Why might an employer want to monitor employee communications? Perhaps it's because an employer can be held liable for an employee's harassment of another worker via the email system. Or, perhaps it's to find out if employees are dishing out the company's trade secrets? Or to make sure that employees don't visit websites that will subject the company's network to malware and viruses. There are a whole host of reasons for employers to monitor the following:



## BLOGS

**Blogs** - Obviously, a blog is intended to be read by the public. But, like the Microsoft

employee who blogged about his employer purchasing Apple computers for use at work, your employees may not be saying the nicest things. Although this is a developing area of the law, the current trend seems to support the firing of an employee who engages in blogging that's detrimental to the employer. Employers are generally given great latitude in terminating disloyal employees.



## VOICE MAIL

**Voicemail** - Unless an employer has given the employee reason to believe that voicemails will remain private (for example, allowing an employee to password protect voicemail), an employer will generally have the right to monitor and access such information. And even with password protection, the employer may still have the right to access voicemails if there's a compelling work-related reason.



## EMAIL

**Email** - For the most part, courts have upheld an employer's right to read employee email - especially if there's a sound reason such as investigating harassment or the improper use of company intellectual property

and trade secrets. As with voicemail, there may be a heightened expectation of privacy if the employee is allowed to password protect his or her email.



## INTERNET

**Internet** - Employers may not only monitor employee internet usage, they can also block access to certain sites and can even limit the time that can be spent online.

What can an employer do to protect itself if it chooses to monitor its employees as described above? First, it should inform employees that they will be monitored, even when communications are password protected, such that the employee has no legitimate expectation of privacy. Employees should be told that they can be disciplined or fired for using any form of work technology for non-business matters.

Second, it's probably a wise move to have employees sign a consent form indicating that they understand the company's monitoring policies. Alternatively, although not as good as a written consent, make sure that your policy contains language that an employee's use of any communications system constitutes his or her consent to the company's review and monitoring.

Finally, an employer should only monitor for good cause. Good cause could include keeping track of productivity or monitoring customer service. Good cause would not include reading emails to find out about your new hire's ro-

mantic life. As with so many things in life, just exercise common sense.

Employers also need to know that there are certain protections afforded employees Under the Illinois Right to Privacy in the Workplace Act. Among other things the act prohibits employers from: Requiring employees to disclose usernames and passwords for social media accounts; requiring an employee to access his/her social media account in the employer's presence; requiring an employee to invite the employer to join the employee's social media group (e.g. friend on Facebook); or requiring an employee to join an employer's own social media group.

The Act does allow an employer to require an employee to share content from his/her social media account when required by law or when related to investigations of workplace misconduct or employee theft. And, as discussed above, even though employers can monitor employee internet use, an employer can run afoul of the Act if information protected thereunder is discovered. For this reason, employers should have a policy to handle such situations.

In addition, if an employer uses biometric identifiers (retina scan or fingerprints) for time-keeping or for security purposes, a 2008 law requires the employer to have a written policy that discloses how long that information will be stored and describes how it and when it will be destroyed. Further, an employer can only use biometrics with the written consent of its employees.

With both technology and the laws constantly evolving, it's always a good idea to consult with your attorney if you have questions about how to handle employees' use of technology in your workplace. ♦

*Thomas Pavlik is an attorney with Delano Law Office in Springfield. He can be reached at [tpavlik@delanolaw.com](mailto:tpavlik@delanolaw.com).*



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## Professional Women's Calendar of Events

*You play a key role and we thank you for your contributions to our community.*

### Illinois Women in Leadership (IWIL)

IWIL kicks off "The Year of You" with a lunch on Thursday, Aug. 15 at 11:30 a.m. at Illini Country Club. Julie Davis, Desiree Logsdon, Diane Newell and Darlene Weaver will speak on the topic "One Thing I know for Sure" in a panel discussion moderated by Diane Rutledge. These professional women will offer a glimpse into their decades of experience and share stories and examples from their lives. You are sure to walk away inspired and with much to contemplate about your own path. For more information or to register, visit [iwil.biz](http://iwil.biz). Interested in joining a coaching circle led by one of these women? Complete the survey at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/IWILCoachingCircle](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/IWILCoachingCircle).

### Women Entrepreneurs of Central Illinois (WE-CI)

On Wednesday, Aug. 14, WE-CI will hold a lunch at the Sangamo Club at 11:30 a.m. Speaker Danual Berkley describes himself as an "author, full-time firefighter, husband, father of two little boys, Army vet and a guy with a dream." As a kid, he never saw any children's books about black families, so his focus was to create stories and characters that kids of color can relate to and show that families come in all shapes and sizes. To register, or for more information on upcoming monthly programs, visit [wildapricot.org/events](http://wildapricot.org/events).

### Association for Women in Communications (AWC)

AWC offers opportunities to stay at the top of your game with opportunities for learning, committee involvement and networking opportunities. AWC holds monthly professional development programs with a variety of educational speakers. Members can also participate in AWC national webinars at no cost. For more information or to make reservations for an upcoming event, visit [www.awcspringfield.org](http://www.awcspringfield.org).



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## MEDICAL NEWS

# Construction for new downtown YMCA underway

BY MICHELLE OWNBEY

The groundbreaking held in March for the new YMCA facility at Fourth and Carpenter Streets involved golden shovels and photo ops, but the actual construction work began on Monday, July 22. Mike Sunley, senior project manager with O'Shea Builders, said he anticipates the project will create 210 direct jobs and another 99 indirect jobs, with \$25 million of the \$33 million total budget going toward construction costs.

In February 2018, *Illinois Times* broke the news that Memorial Medical Center was in discussions with the YMCA of Springfield to help build a new downtown facility to replace the outdated building at 701 S. Fourth St. The following month, Memorial Medical Center kick-started the fundraising with an \$8 million donation, later increased to \$9 million. Developer Joe Hurwitz and Paul Wheeler, an architect with FWAI Architects in Springfield, unveiled the preliminary construction plans at a meeting of the Enos Park Neighborhood Improvement Association on March 13.

However, officials from the YMCA later tweaked the plans based on feedback received from a market survey of the area, a survey distributed to current members and community forums open to the public. "All of those sources were used to make decisions," said Kris Fulford, chief operating officer, noting that original plans

were expanded to include two large group exercise rooms and a dedicated room for spinning classes as well as two racquetball courts. "Those were big items for our membership base. They were very interested in making sure that contin-



Architectural rendering of the new YMCA facility to be built at Fourth and Carpenter.

PHOTO/ COURTESY FWAI ARCHITECTS

ued," said Fulford.

The new facility will also have a larger gym, with three half courts and an additional place for gymnastics to accommodate the growing programs. One new addition that neither of the YMCA locations currently offers is a functional fitness area appropriate for high-interval inten-

sity training programs. "We have yet to decide if we're going to be licensed for CrossFit, but it will be very similar to that type of area," said Fulford.

At approximately 86,000-square-feet, the new facility will be the same size as the existing

downtown YMCA, but development director Lynn Eck noted that a more efficient design will allow for additional amenities. "Being laid out in a more modern fashion, we can do more with the space," said Eck. "We have a lot of

hallways and closets now that aren't necessarily utilized."

The new downtown location will be approximately 40% larger than the Kerasotes YMCA on the west side of Springfield, and while most of the amenities will be similar, the increased size will allow for some additional features. "I get a

lot of questions about the track," said Fulford. "It had to be cut from Kerasotes, but the new facility will have a very large, nice indoor track area."

The new downtown building will also have an 8-lane competition pool equal to the size of the pool at the Kerasotes location, plus a smaller pool intended to introduce children to swimming. "It won't be a recreational pool like you'd see at outdoor facilities, but it will have zero entry on one size and go down to 3 1/2 feet on the other end," explained Eck.

Although construction is slated to begin next week, fundraising efforts are ongoing, according to Eck. "We had a goal of \$6.5 million for our community fundraiser, and we are just about there," she said, "We're only \$200,000 shy of that goal."

In July 2018, the Springfield City Council approved \$5.9 million in TIF funds to come from a combination of the Enos Park and Central Area TIF districts. YMCA officials are still waiting to learn whether the project will receive New Market Tax Credits, which Eck said would account for another \$2-\$2.5 million. "Whatever is remaining on the balance, we'll finance."

Fulford said she has appreciated the response so far from the public. "We've had tremendous support; the community has really gotten behind the project. It's made our job a little bit easier for sure," she said. ♦

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Owner Nico Scaduto at work in the kitchen.

PHOTO BY STACIE LEWIS

# Good food with no pretense at Nico's Homestyle

BY THOMAS C. PAVLIK JR.

Nico's Homestyle holds itself out as a new diner in town with a logo of "Real. Delicious. Food." In the main, Nico's delivered just what it promised.

Nico's is located in the former Palermo's space on Durkin Drive near Clocktower. There's little left of the space's former Italian themes. Instead, Nico's delivers a clean space, with some farmhouse flair, that screams Midwestern American food. This isn't the kind of diner where you'll see Flo. No – it's a bit more upscale than that. Still, there's counter seating if you're so inclined, together with table and booth seating. Half walls help cordon off the space and create a sense of privacy.

My guests and I arrived on a scorching hot day right at noon. Thankfully, Nico's HVAC was up to the task and we never felt hot. There was a steady stream of patrons, with Nico's being about two-third filled for most of our visit. I thought our fellow diners were a little more of the social crowd than the business crowd.

Nico's menu, not surprisingly, is breakfast forward. After all, they serve it all day. All of your usual suspects are covered, together with breakfast skillet and a breakfast shoe. If you're not into breakfast, you're down to a half-dozen sandwiches, shoes or one of three salads. I personally prefer a smaller menu as I know the items are fresher as more product is moved and that the kitchen will be turning out tighter and more focused dishes. Nico's also advertises that it serves

locally grown seasonal produce from Willow City Farm, and most items can be upgraded at an additional cost with Willow's proteins.

We were four for lunch, and were therefore able to cover quite a bit of the menu. We decided to go with the corned beef skillet (\$7.99), the summer harvest salad (\$8.75), the grilled chicken sandwich (\$8.19) and the club sandwich (\$7.99).

The salad hit all the right notes, but there



Breakfast platter with eggs, homemade sausage patties, hash brown potatoes and marbled rye toast. PHOTO BY STACIE LEWIS

really wasn't anything to elevate it. Part of this is the very nature of a salad – there's nothing too exciting about it, other than the dressing. Given Nico's emphasis on real and home-style, we were somewhat surprised that his salad came with a prepared package of commercial salad dressing. It wouldn't have taken much effort to whip up vinaigrette that could hold for

two or three days in the fridge. Small touches like this would go some way to set Nico's apart from its peers, and it soured my friend's experience.

The chicken sandwich is available grilled or



A lunchtime favorite with the regulars - burger and fries. PHOTO BY STACIE LEWIS

breaded, with Swiss cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, onion and pickle. Buffalo style costs you an extra 75 cents. All sandwiches come with fries (upgrade to sweet potato for \$1.99 or sub in a salad or cup of chili for \$1.29). My guest, apparently gunning for my job as food editor for SBJ, announced that the fries gave him a "taste of Idaho." That's good praise. He also appreciated that the salt level was on the low side, which allowed him to customize to his comfort level. He also appreciated the texture play between the well-grilled bun and the chicken that was soft, yet still loaded with grill

flavor. He declared himself pleased.

I shared his views on the fries, and was likewise pleased with my club. I ended up swapping out ham for bacon, which I think really elevated the dish, especially given Nico's generous portions. And, I was particularly pleased that the turkey didn't come out ice cold – something that can really ruin a club. The sourdough bread, again perfectly griddled, also helped elevate Nico's club from a sandwich to a composed offering.

My guest who ordered the corned beef skillet alerted us that he was a corned beef aficionado. After being informed that Nico's corned beef was homemade, there really wasn't any other choice for him. When it hit the table, I admit I was jealous – it came with toast, two eggs, grilled peppers, onions, cheese and potatoes and was cooked with Hand of Fate beer from

Petersburg. It looked mouthwatering. It was also generously sized for \$7.99. Most importantly, the corned beef was reported as moist and with all the right flavor notes. Next time I'm at Nico's, I plan on ordering it.

Service was exceedingly friendly and efficient. We never felt rushed, and our drink glasses were well-monitored. Nico's isn't a fancy restaurant, nor is its food. But it's generally fresh, made with quality ingredients, at reasonable prices and with generous portions. Couple it with some good service, and we predict that Nico's will have some staying power. ♦

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Volunteers refurbish donated computers to be passed on to low-income families, disabled veterans, schools and even other nonprofits.

PHOTO/ COURTESY OF DAVID FOWLER

## Computer Banc contributes technology

BY JANET CARLSON

For the past 20 years, Springfield's Computer Banc has provided an investment in technology at a reduced cost. What started as a small effort with the support of a local church has grown to a nonprofit organization supporting other nonprofits, schools and the underserved with thousands of refurbished computers.

Computer Banc currently works out of a 17,000 square-foot building, the former Sangamo Electric facility, which executive director David Fowler said allows the organization to grow with operations and space needs. In the organization's early years, individual donations brought in about 300 computers a year, from which the group was able to send out 100 annually. Corporate donations began in 2012, and Computer Banc has been able to enjoy the technology changeouts from local hospitals, banks, engineering firms, individual businesses and its most recent partner, Ameren Illinois.

The organization is also an authorized nonprofit Microsoft refurbisher, meaning it is officially licensed to repurpose computers with up-to-date Windows software.

"Many of our nonprofit customers are United Way-affiliated organizations in the Springfield area," said Fowler, "although we ship computers all over Illinois." Fowler said that numerous public schools in central Illinois also work with Computer Banc, motivated by "a greatly reduced cost, a free one-year warranty and outstanding customer service. Most of these organizations have been greatly impacted over the past few years by the Illinois budget impasse."

While Computer Banc is staffed by two full time employees and a half-time office manager, a team of 15-20 volunteers drive the tech support, wiping hard drives compliant with Department of Defense standards, rebuilding and thoroughly testing systems. Fees charged are a fraction of what new equipment would cost, but still necessary, as Fowler points out. "It's expensive to do what we do." He added, "We manage our expenses well."

Many volunteers have been working at Computer Banc at least as long as Fowler has been on board, which is about 11 years. "Our workforce is still firmly grounded by volunteers," Fowler said, "and is now enhanced by internships, AmeriCorps and other work programs. Over the past four years Computer Banc has partnered with Urban League, Capital Township, Lawrence Education Center and others to provide work and educational opportunities.

"Computer Banc is thriving and is supporting more Illinoisans, organizations and schools than ever," Fowler continued. "Donations from corporate organizations and other nonprofits have dramatically increased. The donations of computer equipment, in turn, provides grade-A quality computers back to the community at an affordable cost--in effect supporting the efforts

towards literacy and education in schools--our children.

John Kelker, president of United Way of Central Illinois, said Computer Banc is a United Way partner and providing refurbished computers to schools is aligned with United Way's education work. "The work Computer Banc does with nonprofit agencies and schools allows these organizations to save money and still have top-level technology. Computer Banc is a wonderful resource not only locally but to organizations around the state of Illinois," Kelker said.

Kelker added that United Way purchases second generation, refurbished computers and monitors from Computer Banc "at a wonderful savings. These are quality computers at a fraction of the cost of purchasing them new."

Rutledge Youth Foundation has also benefited from Computer Banc. "We have purchased desktops for the offices and laptops for our caseworkers at a greatly discounted rate," said the organization's executive director, Marty Michelson. "Also, their IT knowledge has helped our staff become more tech savvy. As budgets are always tight and our staff has grown, this has been a very valuable service for us," Michelson continued. "Since most of our work is done in the field, it's important for our staff to be able to document what's going on, keep files up-to-date, and have access to necessary info. We serve more than 300 youth and their respective natural and foster families annually. All of these have benefitted from our relationship and the contributions of Computer Banc."

Besides computers, Computer Banc also welcomes monetary donations, which helps offset fees to provide computers to children or other populations in need. While Computer Banc's programs primarily serve Illinois, it does have a national program for active duty military, veterans and a special program for disabled veterans. That is a program that Fowler gets emotional about, as he said he receives about three emails a week from disabled veterans all over the country and hears their stories. As the degree of disability increases, so does the cost reduction for a computer, all the way up to 100%.

For now, with inventory and improved nonprofit and school cash flow, Computer Banc is keeping up with orders. Fowler added, "I feel blessed we can step up and help, in addition to the other programs we have in place."

For more information on Computer Banc's programs and ways to support the organization, visit [www.computerbanc.org](http://www.computerbanc.org) and [www.gofundme.com/disabled-veteran-computer-fund](http://www.gofundme.com/disabled-veteran-computer-fund) or call 528-9506. ♦

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