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Business
JOURNAL

March 2021

Q&A with
Jeff Baker, Illinois REALTORS®

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Best Places to Work

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Spring is coming

If winter comes, can spring be far behind?
(*Ode to the West Wind* by Percy Bysshe Shelley)

It may not feel like it, as we continue to dig out from yet another snowstorm, but the official start of spring is less than a month away. While most of us were more than happy to bid good riddance to 2020, this year got off to a rough start with political unrest in our nation's capital, followed by a series of winter storms that have crippled much of the country. At least we still have electricity and running water here in central Illinois.

We are approaching the one-year anniversary of the stay-at-home order for Illinois, and while life has yet to return to normal, there are certainly some promising signs. Most businesses have been able to reopen, albeit with precautions in place. Some industries have actually seen an increase in business as a result of the pandemic; more than one real estate agent and home remodeling contractor told us they had a record-setting year in 2020 (pg. 32 and pg. 18). The National Association of Realtors predicts these trends will continue for the foreseeable future as people spending more time at home begin to rethink what they want for their living space, which now often includes space for work and school (pg. 24).

And, while the vaccine rollout hasn't been fast enough for anyone's liking, it is well underway at this point. Every shot in an arm means we're that much closer to giving our economy a shot in the arm, as people start to feel more comfortable patronizing businesses and it becomes feasible to get together again for events. Plus, perhaps *Business Insider's* ranking of Springfield as the best place to live post-pandemic will lead to an influx of new residents attracted by our low cost of living, affordable real estate and welcoming Midwestern culture (pg. 30).

There are still challenges ahead, and it may be years before some parts of our economy fully recover from the fallout caused by COVID-19. But there are also many bright spots – and spring is almost here.



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Q & A
with
Jeff Baker

By Lana Shovlin

Jeff Baker became CEO of Illinois REALTORS in January, making him only the fourth association president in the organization's 103-year history. Baker has been with Illinois REALTORS since 2014 and became deputy CEO in 2019 as Gary Clayton prepared to retire after 30 years of leading the statewide association. He previously had his own law practice and also worked for Sorling Northrup in Springfield. Baker holds a juris doctorate from Loyola University Chicago School of Law and a master's degree in public policy from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. He was recognized as one of *Springfield Business Journal's* Forty Under 40 in 2019. Baker lives in Springfield with his wife, Kim, and three children.

PHOTO COURTESY ILLINOIS REALTORS®



What job did you dream of when you were younger?

If I ever had a singular dream, it was that I always knew that I wanted to get my law degree. When I graduated from law school in 2009, though, it was literally the worst time to graduate. We were in the absolute depths of the foreclosure crisis and the recession. If law firms weren't completely closing their doors and shutting down forever, they were firing lawyers left and right.

Did that make you reconsider your plans?

There was a lot of questioning and wondering about where life was going at that point. Postgraduate education is hard, and the amount of information you have to absorb and retain is so immense. I remember taking the Illinois Bar, and in the hours following the exam feeling like I had just run two marathons. My brain literally hurt, but you put yourself through that with the hope that there's something better for you on the other side. I had just put in an intense three-year commitment and I was really kind of asking myself what I did it for. I definitely knew that I wanted to practice law, and I knew that a law degree would open doors for me, but when you graduate in the middle of a recession there are no doors being opened.

What brought you to Springfield?

After graduation, I was living in Boston but felt the urge to come back to Illinois. I had a business connection at a law firm in Springfield, and I applied for a position there as an associate attorney. I was offered the job, and while working there, I developed a love for business transactions, contracts, negotiations and business deals. I did a lot of real estate work, too, and that's how I got introduced to Illinois REALTORS®.

Would you have believed someone who told you that you would become CEO of Illinois REALTORS®?

Definitely not. Our headquarters is right across from the Governor's Mansion and half a block north of us is the Illinois Municipal League. My grandfather was executive director of the Illinois Municipal League when I was young, and I can remember visiting him in his office and sitting at his big desk. Once, he got a new briefcase and he gave me his old one. I remember thinking how much I wanted to be like him and do important work. Now, here I am with my very own briefcase and doing important work in almost the exact same location he was. It all kind of came full circle for me.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

Illinois REALTORS® has around 50,000 members, and that provides us with an incredible opportunity to help a large number of people every single day. We help people buy and sell their homes, build their wealth and live the American dream. We help them move up in life and be able to provide a stable, secure environment for their families to thrive in. That's our mission and how I see my purpose.

What brings you the most joy?

I have three children and I love every minute with them, whether we are doing homework, playing games or taking a vacation. I get so excited when I leave work and get to go home and see them.

If you could give your younger self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Work hard and enjoy the moment, because no matter how hard you try to convince yourself that you know where life's taking you, you're going to be wrong. Try to remember that life is a little like dominos, and eventually everything will fall into place.



(Top) Illinois REALTORS® CEO Jeff Baker covers industry legal topics during an event. Also pictured: Betsy Urbance, Illinois REALTORS® general counsel and vice president of legal services. (Bottom) CEO Jeff Baker speaks during an Illinois REALTORS® event. The statewide trade association has more than 50,000 members throughout Illinois. PHOTOS COURTESY ILLINOIS REALTORS®



Springfield Business Journal holds a variety of awards programs throughout the year, but Best Places to Work is unique because it requires employees to nominate their own company for recognition. Instead of simply trading their time for a paycheck, these employees realize that their work is serving a larger purpose and they feel valued and appreciated for it, thanks to the culture created by the company's leadership.

As you peruse the profiles of this year's Best Places to Work on the following pages, you are bound to notice some common themes. From new employees to seasoned ones, entry level to management, there is a shared purpose and vision. Perhaps hearing their stories will inspire you to think about how you might improve upon your own workplace culture.

Our event sponsor, United Community Bank, hosts a reception and awards ceremony that is open to the business community. We hope you will join us on Wednesday, March 18 in recognizing the 2020 Best Places to Work.

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Westwoods Lodge Pub & Grill

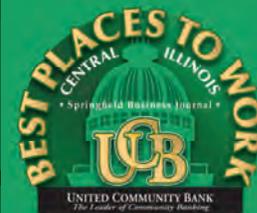


PHOTO BY TERRY FARMER

Mick Wanless opened Westwoods Lodge Pub & Grill in Springfield back in March 2000. As the former owner of Northern Lights, a bar in Springfield, Wanless decided to expand into the food industry. "We have always been about the wings, but we have picked up on the wild game now and are one of the only places to offer that in town," he said.

"Mick truly cares about his employees and is the best local owner," said Zachary Hulcher, an employee of Westwoods Lodge. "Mick is more of a father than he is a boss. If I ever needed anything, he wouldn't hesitate to help. He's very kind and generous to his employees, especially during these trying times."

"We are a well-established business with an amazing customer base," said Ashley Bruley, a longtime employee. "We are on a first-name basis with a large portion of our customers. We have employees

that have been here 10, 15 and 18 years. The restaurant business is not easy, but Mick continues to be innovative and build Westwoods up to be bigger and better, not just for himself, but for the employees as well."

Bruley has worked at Westwoods since she was 21 years old and has nothing but fond memories of the business. "I personally have worked for Westwoods for nearly 16 years," she said. "Mick has always been amazing to me, my family and now my two little ones. He has allowed me to grow in the company and shared his business knowledge and know-how. I'm proud to say I work here and proud to call Westwoods my family."

In March 2020, right as the pandemic was taking hold, Westwoods celebrated 20 years in business. While the restaurant industry was one of the hardest-hit sectors, Westwoods was able to weather the

storm.

"The business was able to make it through COVID, mainly due to our amazing customer support and a lot of hard work from Mick," said Bruley. "Mick is always looking to grow the business. Whether it's unique menu items, local beers or an amazing bourbon, we are always willing to be just a little different."

"Last year was a doozy," said Wanless. "But it is a good business, and we have made it through all of the economic crashes and have come out of it, even through all the difficulties." He took advantage of the time that the restaurant had to close to do some interior remodeling.

"I appreciate all of the loyal business customers and employees over the years. They have made this place great," he said. "And what also makes us great is the atmosphere at Westwoods. No one else has the character that we have."

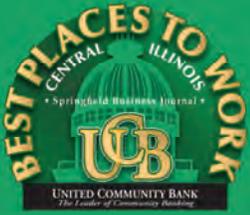


PHOTO BY TERRY FARMER

BJ Grand Salon



BJ Grand Salon & Spa has been a popular destination in Springfield for more than 40 years and currently operates out of two different locations, 3300 Robbins Road and 3055 Professional Drive. Customers have flocked to the salon to experience hair, makeup, body treatments, massages, nail treatments and custom facials. Clients can choose from six levels of experience, ranging from new talent salon stylists to creative directors. The company provides its staff with ongoing education, including learning the latest in techniques, services and trends.

“We try to provide a culture where we appreciate and assist every person working in the salon, at every point in their career,” said Gail Lorenzini, a co-owner of BJ Grand Salon along with her husband, John, and son, Nick. “The best part of being a part of the BJ work family is having so many people who are at every level in their career, whether a licensed professional just out of school, or a senior provider who has an established career, or one of our essential support staff of assistants, receptionists and management.”

Lorenzini is proud of what BJ Grand Salon offers its employees. “We provide a foundation of support when it’s most needed,” she said. “We cover the obligations of the everyday work challenges, like supplies, appointment booking, building maintenance - the often-unnoticed work that makes it possible for a top-level professional to come into their workplace and enjoy sharing their talent and positive spirit with their clients - knowing they can turn it off at the end of the day and go home to their family.”

As a leadership team that listens and responds, nothing has given the Lorenzini family more opportunities and challenges than the year 2020.

“During the periods of shutdown, we shared the concerns from both clients and workers, and found ways to keep our company and our team strong so we were prepared to come back and open the doors to serve our clients with trust for the safety of all of us,” said Lorenzini.

Numerous companies have struggled since the pandemic began, but according

to Lorenzini, BJ Grand Salon has been able to weather the storm and come back as strong as ever.

“Our best accomplishment in the past year was our ability to be flexible and provide a safe, stable workplace for 100% of our workforce to come back to when they were ready,” she said. “We were able to do this with no layoffs, or cuts in pay or hours. The peace of mind lets our team have the best of everything where they can keep the work-family balance the best it can be for each individual.”

BJ Grand Salon has a number of goals for the coming year. “We want to continue to build our menu of new and enhanced services - think hydrafacials and hair treatments - and bring national educational teams to our staff to bring back the excitement of being inspired by new ideas and high-level talent in our industry,” said Lorenzini. “It will be a year of opportunity to be stronger, more loving and caring with our friends, as well as being healthier and busier than ever and more appreciative of the little things.”

University of Illinois Springfield



PHOTO BY CLAYTON STALTER
*Photo was taken pre-COVID.

Employees at University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) are united in one mission: to provide a uniquely student-centered educational experience.

"Regardless of our individual roles, students come first. Having such a clear-cut purpose makes working at UIS fun and rewarding," said Jessie Burrell, director of marketing. "From an employee perspective, there's a place for everyone and every expertise. Our team includes talented groundskeepers, food service experts, brilliant faculty, visionary leaders and so many others leading the field of higher education. It's an exciting place to work, where you're always supported to grow and flourish!"

UIS just celebrated its 50th anniversary in academic year 2020-21. The college began as Sangamon State University in 1970 and transitioned into the University of Illinois system in 1995, spending 25 years as each institution.

Over the past year, UIS has celebrated a number of major accomplishments. *U.S. News & World Report* ranked UIS the number-one public regional university in Illinois and number four in the Midwest. This was the second year in a row for both rankings. The online bachelor's programs at UIS were ranked in the top 10% in the country.

Other accomplishments in 2020 include opening the Center for Lincoln Studies, a national base for scholarship, teaching and public history about Abraham Lincoln's life, leadership and legacy. The university also created and successfully implemented weekly COVID testing on campus, which provided peace of mind for the campus community and a rolling positivity rate well below the county-wide average. "This allowed us to continue providing face-to-face classes and a safe working environment, in alignment with local, state and national guidelines," said Burrell. "As a national leader in online education for more than 20 years, UIS assisted private higher ed institutions, community colleges and state agencies in their transition to remote learning."

In addition to the rewarding mission and connecting students to their goals, one of Burrell's favorite parts of working for UIS is the focus on employee well-being. "UIS prioritizes the wellness of employees with robust benefits, such as wonderful time off options to rest, relax and recharge," she said. "We also have many opportunities for personal and professional development. Since employee travel is now limited, the university made available an online

professional development catalog chock-full of webinars, synchronous trainings and recordings on myriad topics." UIS also places a high level of importance on employee recognition, including the Employee of the Month/Year program, University Scholar Award and Rising Stars program.

In spite of all the challenges over the past year, employees worked hard to create and launch new programs, and several will debut this fall. UIS is waiving fees and required testing for application for anyone who is considering pursuing their education goals. In addition, UIS has expanded the non-degree offerings for certifications and licensures to better serve the professional community, along with hosting community roundtables and webinars to improve access to health information and community engagement on many different topics.

UIS has a number of strong goals for the future, and despite the challenging times brought on by the pandemic, things are moving in an exciting direction. "The university is guided by our Strategic Compass, and we're always considering ways to better serve our students and community," said Burrell.



Prairie Cardiovascular



PHOTO BY TERRY FARMER

In 1979, Prairie Cardiovascular began treating patients with heart and vascular disease across Springfield and the surrounding communities. Founded by Dr. James Dove, the business philosophy of Prairie Cardiovascular centered around all physicians and colleagues being called to do “anything that wasn’t illegal, immoral or unethical” to ensure the highest quality care was afforded to their patients, according to marketing director Lori Harlan. Now, more than 40 years later, Prairie Cardiovascular still maintains a high level of care for its patients, and this dedication to being the best all starts with the employees.

In 2008, when Prairie Cardiovascular merged with Hospital Sisters Health System, that sense of accountability and pride in caring for patients and each other was further exemplified with the core values of respect, care, competence and joy. Ensuring that those core values are embodied in every interaction helps to foster a collaborative and team-based work environment. With eight full-time locations and 52 community clinics, Prairie Cardiovascular covers an expansive geography, but is intentional in trying to keep employees feeling close and connected.

“One of the factors that ensures Prairie Cardiovascular is a great place to work is being accessible to one another,” said Dr. John Scherschel, an electrophysiologist and president of Prairie Cardiovascular. “Taking care of nearly 200,000 patients a year requires tremendous support, and I am consistently amazed by the level of teamwork within our organization. Our colleagues take pride in what they do and the level of quality care we provide to our patients, and they take care of each other in the same manner.”

The past year has been difficult for most industries, but especially those in health care, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “To say it has been a challenging year would be an understatement. The pandemic changed our ability to see some of our patients in person, and we had to act quickly to ensure that they could reach us and we could continue to treat them,” said Scherschel, who said that everyone worked together to ensure that the staff was able to connect with patients through various telemedicine technologies.

“It is hard to accurately reflect how extraordinary it is to work with a team of people

who never shy away from challenges,” Scherschel said. “We have about 350 employees, and when things are rough, their first response is always: ‘How can I help?’ It is quite humbling.”

The pandemic has reshaped how patients are seeking care. Prairie Cardiovascular’s goals for the future focus on new ways to always be conveniently accessible to patients across central and southern Illinois.

The staff of Prairie Cardiovascular lives in the communities that they serve, and most of the new direction and strategies comes directly from them.

“Instilling that sense of home and community into the work they do with us helps to keep us closely connected to the needs of the patients and communities we serve,” said Scherschel, who said the best ideas come from employees, whether it’s online scheduling or educational programs with local first responders.

“By working in teams, by valuing every member of the team, and keeping respect, care, competence and joy at the center of all we do, I am confident Prairie Cardiovascular will continue to be a great place to work long into the future,” he said.

MB Heating & Cooling

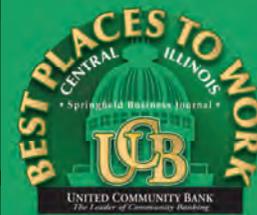


PHOTO BY TERRY FARMER

MB Heating & Cooling, 1555 W. Jefferson, has been serving the Springfield area for more than 30 years. John and Erin Wyss purchased the company in 2012. The client-focused HVAC and plumbing company has earned its clients' trust in heating and cooling service, installation and maintenance due to the exceptional services provided.

Being named one of the Best Places to Work in Springfield has everything to do with the guarantee that the company gives its employees.

"We have a strong commitment to employee development," said general manager Doug Gholson. "We concentrate on training and commit to helping our employees professionally and personally." Gholson noted the company has focused on developing an attractive benefits package for its employees, including adding an additional week of vacation, health insurance, paid dental and vision insurance and a company-matched IRA plan.

Gholson said, "MB Heating & Cooling is a clear example of growing a small family business in the community." The business started with just two people and has now grown to over 35 employees. The company encourages personal

growth and budgets more than \$80,000 a year for training.

"Our commitment to training is a testament to our desire to have the best, most knowledgeable employees," said Gholson. He also noted the team environment at the company. "Co-workers often trade times to work in order to help with family events, and in times of need, MB has stepped up to pay employees that were unable to work during illness." For Gholson, the best part of working for MB Heating & Cooling is solving the problems of its customers, as every day is different. He also enjoys getting to know everyone's families.

MB Heating & Cooling has been busy outside the office as well. For the past two years, the company has hosted Camp Out for Homeless Veterans to raise money for Fifth Street Renaissance. Other charities that MB Heating & Cooling supports include Sparc and the Market on the Hill project in Mt. Pulaski. Altogether, MB Heating & Cooling supports dozens of organizations every year through volunteerism, monetary donations and in-kind gifts. There is a high level of employee participation, which shows that charitable commitment plays a fundamental role in the company's values.

"MB is a great place to work and will continue to grow as it is committed to serving the people in the community," said Gholson.

Despite a pandemic that hurt businesses all over the world, MB Heating & Cooling still achieved several major accomplishments in 2020.

"We were able to not only maintain our staffing levels during the pandemic but were also able to add staff members in the service department and electrical department," said Gholson. "Our solar department recently installed one of the largest solar arrays in Springfield."

In addition, when employees began to have scheduling conflicts last spring due to schools switching to remote learning, the company hired a tutor to work with the children of employees and converted a space in the building into a tutoring center.

Looking toward the future, MB Heating & Cooling hopes to increase education on indoor air quality to show people the benefits of clean air.

"We want to expand our plumbing, electrical and solar departments while increasing our role in community involvement," said Gholson. "Finally, we want to make MB the employer of choice in central Illinois."



United Community Bank's Best Places to Work in Central Illinois

United Community Bank is pleased to bring our community the Best Places to Work awards program. Since 2008, in partnership with the Springfield Business Journal, UCB has presented over forty companies with this honor and hundreds more have been nominated by their employees. Enclosed on these pages is a look back at a decade of distinction.

2021



NOTE: Photo taken prior to COVID-19 Pandemic

2020



2019



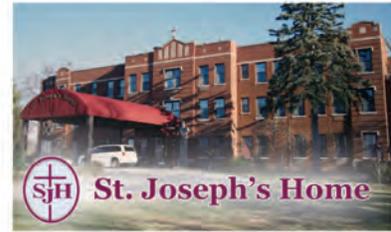
2018



2017



2016



2015



2014



2013



2012



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BRANDT and Hello Beverages launch new partnership

By Karen Ackerman Witter

A partnership between BRANDT, a Springfield-based global agricultural company, and hellowater, a consumer beverage company, may initially seem surprising. However, it is in keeping with BRANDT's entrepreneurial spirit and based on patented BRANDT technology. Together, these companies will launch a new beverage product in March that supports immune defense and elimination of toxins from the body.

BRANDT iHammer is a subsidiary created as a joint venture in 2014. It is dedicated to agronomic research and product development with the intent to develop new technologies that help plants use water and nutrients more efficiently and, in turn, help customers achieve agronomic results. Research conducted by iHammer led to a technology patent with implications for the human body. Because manufacturing products for human consumption is not in BRANDT's wheelhouse, the company sought a business partner to bring the technology to market. By working with Serra Ventures, an early-stage venture capital company in Champaign, Hello Beverages emerged as the ideal partner.

Rusty Jones of Springfield and Tom Bushkie of Chicago formed Hello Beverages in 2016 with the intent to inspire better health by creating healthy beverages. Avoiding sugar, drinking more water and consuming more fiber are consistently at the heart of healthy eating. In 2017, the duo launched hellowater, a fiber-infused beverage designed with those goals in mind. ("Goodbye sugar, hello water," Oct. 2019).

Hellowater is a member of Innovate Springfield, and executive director Katie Davison says Jones takes advantage of any conversation, engagement opportunity or workshop that comes his way. "Hellowater's great team, combined experience and diverse strengths in leadership made them a desirable partner," said Davison.

This is not simply one more beverage product with additives to help boost health, but a fundamentally different product that incorporates CYTO PLUS™ technology, which creates a shield for the body's defense system while accelerating the elimination of toxins from the body.

Dr. Arthur Nonomura, chief science officer for BRANDT iHammer, developed the technology. Nonomura has worked alongside many prominent biochemists and was a research fellow at University of California San Francisco School of Medicine, one of the world's top medical research universities. He founded iHammer after working



(Left to right) Rick Brandt, CEO of BRANDT; Sierra Brandt of BRANDT Racing; Justin Allgaier, driver of #7 hellowater Chevy Camaro fueled by BRANDT; Rusty Jones, chief strategy officer and co-founder of hellowater. Not pictured: Tom Bushkie, CEO and co-founder of hellowater, Dr. Arthur Nonomura, chief science officer for BRANDT.

PHOTO BY HAROLD HINSON PHOTOGRAPHY

many years as a scientist at Dow Chemical.

Nonomura and his wife started a 2,000-acre farm, which he says became his "superstructure for discovery," focused on understanding metabolism. His understanding of plant metabolism was the key to the connection with BRANDT, and that research led to the development of CYTO PLUS™.

Cytochrome P450 enzymes are the most abundant enzymes in the human body. They are essential for the detoxification of foreign chemicals, metabolism of many medications and critical to the body's internal defense system. There are thousands of clinical studies related to Cytochrome 450, as the foundation for development of new drugs. CYTO PLUS™ is not a new chemical, but rather a patented technology. It is a combination of natural products that fortifies the enzyme process.

"It builds on the architecture of the enzyme complex to make the body's chemical defense system recognize and process out xenobiotics (toxins)," says Nonomura. Essentially, it acts as a shield to fortify the internal defense system.

"My father, who started this business, was the quintessential entrepreneur," says Rick Brandt, president and CEO of BRANDT. "And, he never hesitated to pursue a good opportunity when he saw it. I think we have a great opportunity with Tom and Rusty at hellowater to create a whole new beverage category from a technology that we've been perfecting for years."

Karl Barnhart, executive vice president and chief marketing officer for BRANDT, describes this partnership as a connection of like-minded people and companies.

Nonomura, who is based in Phoenix, says BRANDT has always been committed to the highest quality in chemistry and the manufacturing of high-quality chemicals. He says hellowater has "rock-solid core values, just like BRANDT."

Initially, the product will be available directly to consumers through hellowater, and other marketing strategies are being finalized. Thanks to BRANDT's long-standing relationship with NASCAR, there will be a marketing blitz through NASCAR in partnership with JR Motorsports. A hellowater NASCAR Xfinity car will debut on the track later this year.

Barnhart says this partnership is a win-win. BRANDT gets to see a new technology come to life. Hellowater will bring a new product to market. JR Motorsports gets a new partner. Nonomura and Jones are optimistic this will be a blockbuster with far-reaching implications that enable people to be healthier. **SBJ**

Karen Ackerman Witter enjoys writing about interesting people, organizations and ideas. She has a background in the biological sciences and was intrigued to learn more about the science behind this partnership.



A kitchen remodel by Buraski Builders. People are eating at home more and deciding now is the time for updates and improved functionality.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BURASKI BUILDERS

Pandemic leads to a boom in home remodeling

By Lana Shovlin

In the not-so-distant past, many people relied on their home as a place that resembled something more of a pitstop than an oasis where they chose to spend the majority of their free time. Between work, school, recitals and practices of all kinds, families considered themselves lucky if they were able to coordinate their schedules enough to allow time to gather around the table to share a quick meal. Until recently, spending large chunks of time at home hasn't been something that our on-the-go culture has prioritized, but when COVID hit last spring, families were suddenly spending more time at home than they ever dreamed possible.

Faced with a global pandemic and nowhere to go, people were suddenly forced to find ways to merge their living space with their working, playing and learning spaces. In light of these

unexpected situations, the demand for home remodeling skyrocketed as people tried to adapt their houses to accommodate this new reality.

"I guess what's really surprised me is how we've stayed so incredibly busy during COVID," says Aaron Acree, owner and construction manager of Michael von Behren Builder, Inc. "Initially, I thought we might slow down. Everywhere you looked, restaurants and businesses were closing their doors, but the exact opposite happened to us. In fact, 2020 was probably a record year for us."

Heather Sobieski, co-owner of Buraski Builders, agrees with Acree. "Initially, when COVID hit, I decided to shut everything down. I stayed in the office the first week and it was pretty quiet, but by the second week, I was answering the phone like crazy. People were calling nonstop with

remodeling projects. I thought for sure that clients would stop calling or cancel already scheduled projects, but it went in the exact opposite direction."

As far as the type of remodeling requests the builders have been getting throughout the pandemic, Acree said that when it was warmer, von Behren Builder's clients focused more on outdoor living remodels and construction.

"People were spending so much more time at home than ever before. They wanted to be able to enjoy nature and stay socially distanced from each other, and one of the safest ways for them to do that was to have us build decks, patios and add screened-in porch additions onto their homes," he said. Now that the weather has gotten colder, Acree says that they've seen an increase in kitchen and bathroom remodels. "I think that people

Continued on pg. 20 ▶



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2020 was a record-setting year for Michael von Behren Builder as clients tackled both interior and exterior projects to improve their living space.
PHOTO BY ABBY JEAN PHOTOGRAPHY

are finally getting around to updating rooms that they may have been wanting to change for a while, but the outlook is completely different than it was prior to COVID. Before the pandemic, customers maybe wanted one thing updated, but now it's like, 'Okay, I want this new stove, and I need you to build me an entirely new kitchen to go with it.'

Likewise, Buraski Builders is getting its fair share of calls from clients requesting additions. Sobieski says that they haven't noticed any specific projects that are more popular than others, but like Acree, says people are tackling projects that they may have been putting off.

"The remodel requests that we are getting now seem to be more personal than they used to be," she said. "It's not like everybody's seeing other people redo a bathroom and then suddenly they want a new bathroom, too. Instead, they are really focused on the personal spaces in their homes that they've wanted to improve for a while."

Despite the positive impact all of this

remodeling has had on construction companies, there is a downside to the recent boom in home improvement. Since the pandemic, lumber and other types of building materials have become significantly more expensive and much harder to find. In fact, some items that used to be readily in stock and accessible to builders are now taking upwards of 10 weeks to arrive.

"There is a high demand for materials right now, but lumber companies are going through the same thing everyone else is. They might have reduced their workforce because of COVID guidelines and sometimes they have to shut down," says Sobieski. "The other thing is, last fall we had hurricanes and wildfires all over the country. Experts predicted that this spring lumber prices would go down, and I just kept thinking that couldn't possibly be right." According to the National Association of Home Builders, lumber prices have increased 130% since April 2020, which has increased the cost of building a single-family home by around

\$16,000.

Looking ahead, it's hard to say what the future of home remodeling and construction will look like. With people spending more time at home, some experts predict we might see a decrease in developments with open floor plans and opt for homes with more closed off and separate living spaces, which would ensure a certain level of privacy if the need should arise.

"I haven't seen that yet," said Sobieski, "but no matter how big your house is, if everyone is working and schooling from the same place in their home, it sometimes feels like there is nowhere to go. That's not functional or sustainable for anyone. I think that we are really starting to think differently about our use of space." SBJ

Lana Shovlin is a freelance writer from Springfield who has been working from home along with her husband and three children since March, resulting in a basement remodeling project to create a space for virtual schooling.

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HOME BUILDERS AND REMODELERS

Sources: The builders and remodelers. Listed by number of full time employees.

	NAME/ADDRESS	PHONE	WEBSITE / EMAIL	#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	buraski.com buraskibuilders@yahoo.com	27	Jason Buraski Heather Sobieski Frank Buraski Barbara Buraski	50%	50%	1981
2	Michael von Behren Builder, Inc. 3537 S. Douglas Ave. Springfield, IL 62704	217-698-8484	mvbbuilder.com aaron@mvbbuilder.com	24	Aaron Acree Jodi Acree	50%	50%	1982
3	Zinn Construction, LLC 1323 Hawthorne Chase Sherman, IL 62684	217-496-3112	zinnconstruction.com phil@zinnconstruction.com	16	Phil Zinn	50%	50%	2003
4	Bobby Shaw Building and Remodeling 2466 Glencoe Springfield, IL 62704	217-546-3973 217-306-1410	bobbyshawmaintenance.com bobby@bsmaint.com	13	Bobby Shaw	90%	10%	1987
5	Moughan Builders, Inc. 3140 Cockrell Lane Springfield, IL 62711	217-899-5484	moughanbuilders.com jim@moughanbuilders.com	12	James E. Moughan David P. Moughan	10%	90%	1992
5	Griffitts Construction Co., Inc. 1501 N. Dirksen Parkway Springfield, IL 62702	217-522-1431	griffitts.net griffitts@griffitts.net	12	Harry Griffitts Vicky Griffitts-Runyon	95%	5%	1953
5	Creasey Construction of Illinois 3450 S. Park Ave. Springfield, IL 62704	217-546-1277	creaseyconstruction.com creaseyconst@comcast.net	12	Jan Creasey Lisa Creasey	90%	10%	1983
6	DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen 3730 Wabash Ave. Springfield, IL 62711	217-529-9300	dreammakerspringfield.com ctrampe@dreammakerspringfield.com	11	Curt and Deb Trampe	95%	5%	1998



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HOME BUILDERS AND REMODELERS

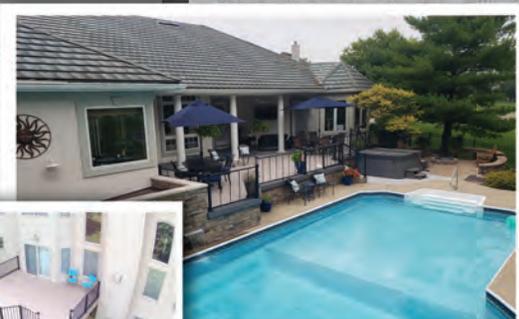
Sources: The builders and remodelers. Listed by number of full time employees.

	NAME/ADDRESS	PHONE	WEBSITE / EMAIL	#OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES	PARTNERS/PRINCIPALS	% REMODEL RENOVATION	% NEW HOME CONSTRUCTION	YEAR EST'D
7	Craig Ladage Builders, Inc. 14915 Kennedy Road Auburn, IL 62615	217-438-9206	clbuilders@royell.org	9	Craig Ladage Debbie Ladage	40%	60%	1977
8	All-C Construction, Inc. P.O. Box 9737 Springfield, IL 62791	217-787-1900	allcconstruction.com allcconstruction@att.net	6	Frank Conder Paula Conder	30%	70%	1999
9	Coady Construction Co., Inc. 143 Circle Drive Springfield, IL 62703	217-502-0602	adamcoadyconstruction.com coadyconstruction@comcast.net	5	Adam Coady	20%	80%	2006
9	D & S Builders 30 White Road Glenarm, IL 62536	217-529-6288	todd@d-sbuilders.com dan@d-sbuilders.com	5	Todd Dudley Dan Schrage	30%	70%	1995
9	Stites Development, Inc. 125 E. Main St. Rochester, IL 62563	217-498-1472	stitesdevelopmentinc.com j.stites@comcast.net	5	John H. Stites, Jr.	5%	95%	1976
9	Roth Homes 350 Williams Lane Chatham, IL 62629	217-483-6086	rothhomesinc.net	5	Terry Roth	25%	75%	1984
10	Timber Creek Home Sales, Inc. 2800 Via Rosso, Suite 1 Springfield, IL 62703	217-585-8900	timbercreekliving.com	4	Douglas Daniels	0%	100%	1999
10	Ryan Homes & Development 3149 Hedley Road Springfield, IL 62704	217-523-3976	homesanddevelopment.com ryanhomes.springfield@gmail.com	4	Mike Ryan Paula Ryan	20%	80%	1974
11	Paula Ryan Design 3149 Hedley Road Springfield, IL 62704	217-341-4501	paularyandesign.com paularyan2321@gmail.com	1	Paula Ryan	80%	n/a	2010

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2021 real estate outlook

A hot housing market, but challenges for first-time home buyers

By Holly Whisler

“One astonishing development of 2020 has been the hot housing market as consumers eyed record-low mortgage rates and reconsidered what a home should be in a new economy with flexible work-from-home schedules,” said Lawrence Yun, chief economist and senior vice president of research at the National Association of REALTORS’® second annual Real Estate Forecast Summit: Post-Election Outlook.

According to NAR, 2020 home sales will reach 5.52 million, the highest annual mark since 2006, with the median home price setting a record high of \$293,000.

Yun reported results of a survey of more than 20 top U.S. economic and housing experts that predicted the post-pandemic economic rebound, improving job conditions and stable interest rates will continue in 2021.

The virtual event held in December provided a year-end review and outlook on the post-election real estate market and economy to over 10,000 viewers. A three-person panel discussed national trends in the residential real estate market: John Burns, founder of John Burns Real Estate Consulting; Danielle Hale, chief economist for realtor.com; and Ali Wolf, chief economist with Meyers Research.

The panelists all agreed that this is a seller’s market. Homes are selling quickly, multiple offers are not uncommon and there is an inventory shortage even greater than prior to the pandemic. Danielle Hale said that there is a lack of sellers everywhere, but this is not a new development. It is also not expected to change since potential sellers have a unique incentive to stay home, stay away from others and reduce the risk of being exposed to COVID-19. In spite of the pandemic keeping some sellers out of the market, Hale said, “Housing sales are at a record pace, which is a testament to the seller’s ability to transact safely.”

Hale pointed to housing growth rates and home sale prices increasing in suburban areas, as compared to urban areas. Ali-Wolf said that the suburbs were popular pre-pandemic and now that working from home is the new normal, it has added fuel to the fire as far as housing sales. The share



The house at 2800 Richardson Drive in Springfield was sold by The Jane Hay Sales & Staging Team the first day it was on the market. Sangamon County is one of many areas nationwide experiencing an inventory shortage of single-family homes, which the National Association of REALTORS predicts will continue throughout 2021.

of the U.S. workforce working from home is projected to be 18% in 2021, down from 21% in 2020. Wolf stated that the ability to migrate to suburban areas where land and homes are less expensive is the number-one reason why people say they are buying bigger homes. However, Wolf said, “It is key to note that real estate is doing well in both urban and suburban markets.”

The solution to boosting the inventory shortage is an increase in new construction, but this is not a quick fix, according to John Burns. Burns explained that prior to the pandemic, contractors were building near the urban cores where job growth existed, but with more people working from home due to COVID protocols, the demand for new construction has shifted to suburban areas where the cost of living is more affordable. He said it will take time for new construction to catch up to demand, although builders are optimistic. Housing starts of 1.5 million are predicted for 2021 and 1.59 million in 2022.

One demographic that might not be faring so well is the first-time home buyer. Hale said home prices have been increasing

by double-digit percentages since August. The annual median home price is predicted to increase by 8% in 2021 and by 5.5% in 2022. While low mortgage rates are helpful, the biggest hurdle for first-time home buyers is not affording the monthly payment itself, but just getting in the door – as home prices increase, the down payment and closing costs increase as well. Hale mentioned that one idea is to allow tax credits to be used for closing costs, and a current proposal at the federal level to forgive student loan debit would help boost the buying power of many first-time home buyers, but those are still conceptual ideas.

Despite the challenges for first-time home buyers and other buyers facing limited inventory, the housing market remains strong and shows no signs of slowing down in the coming year. **SBJ**

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Sources: The real estate agencies; Illinois Realtors website (illinoisrealtor.org). Ranked by number of licensed agents.

	NAME / ADDRESS	PHONE	WEBSITE/EMAIL	MANAGING PARTNER(S)/ OWNER(S)	NUMBER OF LICENSED AGENTS	YEAR EST'D
1	The Real Estate Group, Inc. 3701 W. Wabash Ave. Springfield, IL 62711	217-787-7000	thegroup.com info@thegroup.com	Michael J. Buscher Managing Broker 32 individual broker/owners	156	1997
2	Keller Williams Capital 3171 Robbins Road Springfield, IL 62704	217-303-8445	kw.com info@kw.com	John Kerstein Designated Managing Broker	90	2016
3	Re/Max Professionals 2475 W. Monroe St. Springfield, IL 62704	217-787-7215	viewspringfieldhomes.com mikeo@remax.net	Michael D. Oldenettel, Managing Broker Al and Linda Young, Owners	80	1986
4	Coldwell Banker Springfield 4205 W. Wabash Ave. Springfield, IL 62711	217-547-6655	coldwellhomes.com	Diane Davenport Tinsley Managing Broker	27	2000
5	Century 21 Real Estate Associates 2030 Timberbrook Springfield, IL 62702	217-789-7200	realestateassociates.c21.com kgraham367@aol.com	Kevin Graham	15	2004
6	Campo Realty, Inc. 610 Sixth St. Pawnee, IL 62558	217-625-4663	camporealty.com nick@camporealty.com	Nicholas Campo Designated Managing Broker	10	2001
7	Kennedy Real Estate LLC 400 W. Market, P.O. Box 764 Taylorville, IL 62568	217-824-8888	kennedyrealestatellc.com info@kennedyrealestatellc.com	Helen Kennedy Managing Broker	8	2011
7	Re/Max Results Plus 1046 W. Morton Ave. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-9613	jacksonvilleillinois-homes.com	Scott Eoff, Managing Broker Judy Eoff, Owner	8	1996
7	Craggs REALTORS, Inc. 650 N. Webster, P.O. Box 109 Taylorville, IL 62568	217-824-8131	craggsrealtors.com steve@craggsrealtors.com	Stephen B. Craggs	8	2011
8	Welcome Home Realty 211 N. Main St. Chatham, IL 62629	217-483-5501	welcomhomerealtyil.com welcomhomerealtymail@gmail.com	Jen Chance	6	2015
9	Curvey Real Estate, Inc. 611 Springfield Road P.O. Box 677 Taylorville, IL 62568	217-824-4996	curveyrealestate.com curvey@ctitech.com	Bernard A. Curvey, Owner/Broker Joe Curvey, Managing Broker	5	1985
10	Snelling-Chevalier Real Estate, Inc. 621 Seventh St. Pawnee, IL 62558	217-625-2411	snelling-chevalier.com gail@family-net.net	Gail Chevalier Zini Managing Broker	4	1986
11	Grojean Real Estate 360 W. State St. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-4151	grojeanagency.com cgrojean@grojeanagency.net	Charles Grojean	3	1947
11	Steve Hills, REALTORS 900 S. Main St. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-9589	stevehillsrealtors.com hills@jllnc.net	Dianne Steinberg	3	1965
11	Blane Real Estate, Inc. 121 E. Douglas St. Petersburg, IL 62675	217-652-7521	blaneinpetersburgil.com blaneinpetersburgil@yahoo.com	Judy Blane-Olesen Peter Olesen	3	1950
12	Do Realty 600 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-391-3636	BPO@dorealty.net	Stephanie L. Do President/Broker	2	2002

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We're number one!

By Carey Smith

What is it about Springfield that led *Business Insider* to declare it the number-one place to live after the end of the pandemic? The article, which was widely shared last summer, highlighted several Midwestern cities as desirable places to live, and Springfield, Illinois, topped the list.

Ryan McCrady, CEO of the Springfield Sangamon Growth Alliance (SSGA), states that the number one ranking is "a great testament to what our community has to offer, not just to businesses, but also to residents." A variety of metrics measuring educational, economic and demographic data were used to determine rankings, with Springfield's low unemployment rate and the number of jobs capable of being performed remotely the shining stars on the list.

Cost of living played a part in Springfield's ranking, as did affordable housing. As McCrady notes, "When we compare ourselves to other metro areas in the Midwest, our cost of living is significantly less. It is 14% cheaper than Kansas City, 11% less than Indianapolis, 34% cheaper than Nashville and 42% cheaper than Chicago." McCrady also pointed out that Springfield's air passenger service, as well as its train passenger service, complements its placement to nearby metro areas.

The SSGA launched a new marketing campaign in late 2020 called Thrive in SPI, showcasing the non-measurable aspects of Springfield that we commonly refer to as quality of life. This not only helps people decide if Springfield is the right place for them, but also helps businesses gauge whether they will be able to attract top-quality talent, should they choose to relocate here.

Julie Davis, a Realtor with The Real Estate Group who specializes in corporate relocations, notes there are a wide variety of factors that make Springfield an attractive place to call home, including a cultural richness not often found in communities Springfield's size. For instance, the medical industry attracts a variety of people from all around the world.

"They bring their own cultures and interests, and that gives us an amazing blend," says Davis. "It gives us a community that is open and embraces people of all cultures. You can



Julie Davis, a Realtor with The Real Estate Group, works with many home buyers who are relocating to Springfield from other parts of the country. PHOTO BY NORMA ZUNIGA

come here and feel welcome and connected to the community very quickly. That's a big positive for many people."

Davis also notes the variety of religious faiths with places of worship, the private and public school opportunities, including secondary education, and the number of sports offered for both children and adults.

Like McCrady, Davis points to Springfield's central location as a boon. Though there are not beaches or mountains, nothing else is lacking. And for those, Davis says, "Hop on a plane and be on the beach in Florida by afternoon. Fly to Denver and ski that same night. Being in the middle of the Midwest helps you get anywhere you want to go." Of course, Chicago and St. Louis are both within easy driving or rail distance. The Springfield area, McCrady notes, also has "great parks, trails, the lake, hiking and biking opportunities."

Springfield has a vibrant arts scene, from

performances at the Hoogland Center for the Arts, the Muni Opera, UIS, the Legacy Theatre, the Illinois Symphony Orchestra and more, to festivals, parades and shows downtown nearly every weekend between April and October. The DIY arts scene is such that any amateur artist can quickly become a part of the community.

McCrady says the feedback he gets from people entering our community mainly centers on how welcoming it feels and how friendly people are, which leads to quickly feeling at home.

Davis agrees, "Most important of all is the people. Midwesterners are very open people, open to other points of view. They may feel strongly about what they think, but they are respectful. That's a pretty amazing place to be."

For more information on the Thrive in SPI campaign, visit www.thriveinspi.org. 

Carey Smith is thankful to live in Springfield.



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The ins and outs of appraisals

By Cinda Ackerman Klickna

Many appraisers will tell you that everybody thinks their house is worth more than it is. However, an appraisal might be worth the cost, even if it values the property at less than the owner hoped. Appraisers caution that the appraisal only indicates the value of a property on a particular day using specific data; yet, having a sense of the property's value may be helpful. Several independent appraisers in Springfield weighed in on the process of an appraisal and the rules, as well as a few myths about the work.

Randy Phillips has been in the business for 25 years, focusing on residential appraisals, and says, "Every appraisal has a purpose." John Williams, also a residential appraiser for 22 years, says, "That is the first question I ask – why is the appraisal being done?" Is it to determine if the current taxes are too high? Is the owner wanting to sell on his own? Is the appraisal needed for a divorce or estate settlement? Or is the appraisal part of a mortgage or refinancing plan?

A homeowner can request an appraisal for many reasons, but if the purpose is a mortgage or refinancing application through a lender, the lender determines which appraiser will be used. A standard residential appraisal costs between \$400-\$500.

The actual home visit takes much less time than the report the appraiser must complete. The visit will include taking measurements of the exterior of the home, reviewing the size of the property and the condition of the house, such as the foundation, roof and windows. Then, an interior review will be conducted, including taking measurements and pictures of rooms and looking at conditions, such as the type of flooring and trim work. A typical visit will be completed in an hour or so, although if the property sits on large acreage or is a business, the onsite visit could take much longer.

However, the onsite visit is just the start of what the full appraisal entails. The report must present all the data of the square footage and condition of the property and provide comparables, similar properties in the area that help determine the value of the property being evaluated. The value given



to a property must be documented with facts. Greg Kienzler of Kienzler Appraisal Service explains that it is essential to know the surrounding area, what issues impact property values and the sale price for other similar structures.

A commercial appraisal follows much of the same process, although it may include a review of the income-producing aspect of a business, determining past income and the income potential for a new owner.

There are several common myths surrounding appraisals. Many homeowners think that the appraised value determines what their house will sell for, but that isn't necessarily the case. The appraisal is a value made on a particular day using data that could change.

Williams says, "An appraisal is impartial; we are paid to be unbiased. We are focused on being correct and making sure we back up our determination with facts."

Another myth is that an appraiser will submit the finding to the tax assessor and if the property is appraised at a higher amount than the assessed valuation, the owner's taxes may be increased. However, appraisers do not do this. Likewise, a homeowner is responsible for sending an appraisal to the county to contest taxes.

Michael Elder, Elder Valuation Services,

explains, "It is up to the property owner to submit an appeal to the county." Property owners can protest their taxes through the county assessor's office if they feel their taxes are out of line, but appraisers do not turn in data to the county.

Appraisers must be licensed and are under scrutiny for all the reports they complete. By federal law, banks are required to review 10% of all appraisal reports completed for lending purposes, such as a mortgage application. These rules have only become more stringent since the 2008 mortgage meltdown. Appraisers must follow uniform data reporting, adhere to a code of ethics, such as not discussing certain items with others, and complete continuing education hours every two years.

However, the appraisers interviewed identified several positive aspects of their job, including setting their own hours, meeting people and seeing different types of houses and businesses.

Barry Taft, owner of Taft Appraisal, has been in the business for 32 years. He says, "Every day is different, and properties are always interesting." SBJ

Cinda Ackerman Klickna recently had her home appraised and was pleased with the work.

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Jane Hay, The Real Estate Group, was the listing agent for 9785 Oak Grove Road in Loami. The 2,106-square-foot house with three bedrooms and three bathrooms sold for \$460,000.

Residential real estate market sets records

By Holly Whisler

"I saw more buying than I've ever seen in my life," said Realtor Jane Hay regarding the 2020 residential real estate market in Springfield. Hay, a partner and broker with The Real Estate Group and owner of Jane Hay Sales & Staging Team, has been in real estate since 2008 but said she's never seen anything quite like last year's real estate market.

Deb Sarsany, a broker and partner with The Real Estate Group who has been in the business for over 25 years, said, "Last year was my biggest year ever."

Who could have predicted that in the midst of a pandemic, high unemployment and job insecurity that homes priced at \$500,000 and up would be selling faster than ever before? Sarsany said this is atypical, as homes in the upper bracket usually stay on the market longer and have a smaller pool of

potential buyers. But with such low interest rates, buyers now have more purchasing power than in previous years.

The most expensive homes sold in Springfield and the surrounding area in 2020 ranged from list prices of \$699,900 to more than \$1 million. Five of these houses were on the market for no more than nine days, and another five sales were entered in the MLS for comparative purposes only, meaning a buyer was already lined up before the house officially hit the market.

Kyle Killebrew, a broker and partner at The Real Estate Group, has been in real estate for 15 years and said 2020 was definitely not what he expected. He and his team had just moved into a larger office about the time the stay-at-home order went into effect.

"Everything closed up, and it was like we

didn't even need an office anymore," he said. Fortunately, "the year was also unexpected in a good way" as sales increased, matching the pace of dropping interest rates.

Jared Williams, a land broker with LandGuys, LLC, has been in real estate for three years and specializes in recreational land, farms, and homes on acreage. Williams listed a \$1.1 million home in Pleasant Plains that had five bedrooms, eight bathrooms, a four-car garage and a custom-built barn with an indoor riding arena. This unique property is situated on 25 acres and ended up only being on the market for 56 days.

Williams said the home's online presentation of video and pictures showcased it well and generated a great deal of interest and competition among buyers. A nearby property, also priced over the \$1 million mark that

had been on the market for over a year, also received a buyer as a result.

Competition was so strong last year that homes were listing for more than usual. Hay said homes that were priced right could anticipate receiving at least asking price, potentially multiple offers and contracts written for more than asking price. In some cases last year, homes brought \$7,000-\$8,000 over asking price, according to Hay.

This unique market changed the art of the sale, according to Killebrew. He said it's no longer about "getting a good deal by shaving \$10,000 off the price, now it's about making the seller happy by meeting their terms and knowing how to win in a multiple offer situation." He emphasized the important of having an agent who understands how to satisfy all parties while doing the best for their client. It's very disappointing for a buyer to lose the property of their dreams, especially when there's not ample inventory to provide other options.

This is the downside to a hot market – running low on inventory. Sarsany said her eight-member team collectively has 50 buyers, not enough homes to show them and only a



(Top) The three bedroom, five bathroom home at 17 Linden Lane has 4,196 square feet and sold for \$725,000. (Bottom) 5 The Elms has 5,461 square feet with three bedrooms and five bathrooms and sold for \$650,000. Deb Sarsany, The Real Estate Group, was the listing agent for both properties.

handful in the upper bracket. Buyers are ready to purchase, but the inventory is not there. Killebrew predicts this will be a battle that agents will face for the next couple of years.

Although it's a seller's market, some potential sellers may hesitate to list their homes because of concerns about exposure to COVID-19, while others may have postponed moving to a retirement community and selling their house since the risk of contracting COVID is much higher in a communal setting. In addition, an increasing number of people are working from home while their kids are learning from home – which makes it nearly impossible to show the property.

Sarsany describes the current market as "weird and challenging." She usually tells her clients to wait for the tulips to come up and more homes will become available. However, she's not sure that will be the case this year. She recommends anyone considering selling to seize the moment. "You are never going to get a better offer than you will now." **SBJ**

Holly Whisler is a freelance writer from Springfield who previously worked in the real estate industry.

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

	NAME / ADDRESS	PHONE WEBSITE / EMAIL	NUMBER CERTIFIED APPRAISERS	OWNER/ PRESIDENT	% COMMERCIAL % RESIDENTIAL	YEAR EST'D
1	Taft Appraisal, Inc. 2815 Wabash Ave., Suite 205A Springfield, IL 62704	217-787-5533 barrytaft@aol.com taftappraisalinc.com	4	Barry Taft	90% 10%	1989
2	Williams Appraisals 881 Meadowbrook Road Springfield, IL 62711	217-793-9234 john.williams50@comcast.net	2	John Williams	0% 100%	1993
2	Field Level Agriculture, Inc. 2815 Old Jacksonville Road Suite 204 Springfield, IL 62704	217-498-9660 fieldlevelag.com seth@fieldlevelag.com	2	Seth M. Baker	98% 2%	1996
3	Green Appraisal Service 3624 Wexford Drive Springfield, IL 62704	217-698-1277 greenappraisalservice@comcast.net greenappraisalservice.com	1	Angela K. Chiaro	0% 100%	1994
3	Kienzler Appraisal Service 410 South Grand Ave. West Springfield, IL 62704	217-525-6050 greg@apraze1.com	1	Gregory Kienzler, SRA	95% 5%	1973
3	Michael J. Call Appraisal Service 837 South Grand Ave. West Springfield, IL 62704	217-741-9790 217-747-0252 callappraisals@comcast.net callappraisals.com	1	Michael J. Call	0% 100%	1987
3	Phillips Appraisal, Inc. 6305 Wind Tree Road Springfield, IL 62712	217-529-7351 217-341-5999 rjp01@comcast.net phillipsappraisal.com	1	Randall J. Phillips, SRA	0% 100%	2000
3	Elder Valuation Services 3000 Professional Drive Suite 200 Springfield, IL 62703	217-414-2201 michael.elder@eldervaluationservices.com eldervaluationservices.com	1	Michael D. Elder, MAI	100% 0%	2013



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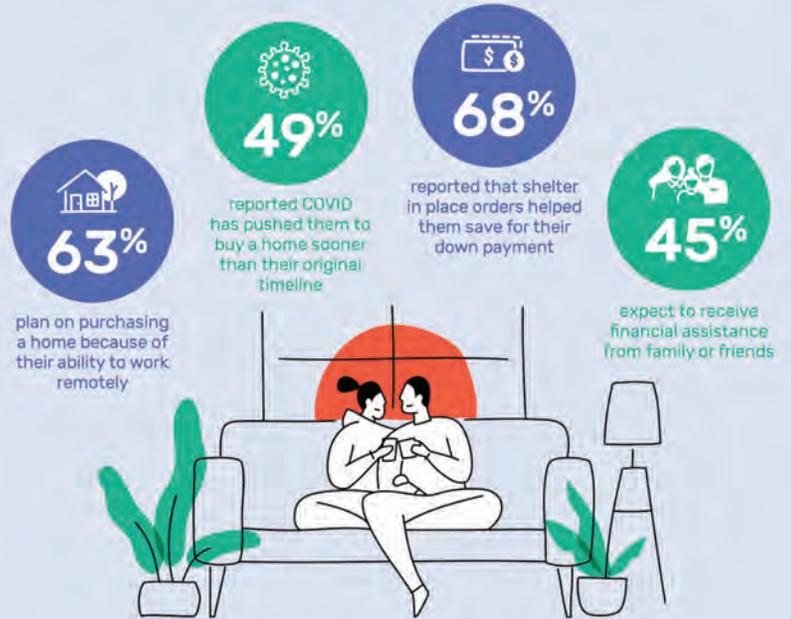
Millennials buying earlier due to COVID-19

Tired of their current living situation, the pandemic has prompted more Millennial buyers to accelerate their plans to buy a home, according to a realtor.com and HarrisX survey. Nearly half of Millennial survey respondents said COVID-19 pushed them to buy a home sooner than their original timeline. Other findings: they are expecting and are ready for a competitive market; they are taking full advantage of virtual home search techniques and nearly half want to move within their current city. Read more highlights from the survey at bit.ly/Millennial_Home_Buyer.

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Ask an attorney: Is facial recognition software legal?

By Sarah Delano Pavlik

Q: After buying two Google Nest cameras with a facial recognition feature and struggling to get them to work, I was told that this feature advertised as a selling point is illegal to use in Illinois – only illegal in Illinois, nowhere else in the world. Is that correct?

A: The applicable Illinois law is the Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act (the “Act”) which became effective on Oct. 3, 2008 – a lifetime ago in the world of technology. It was the first state biometric legislation in the United States. The Act applies to “biometric identifiers” defined as “a retina or iris scan, fingerprint, voiceprint or scan of hand or face geometry.” The Google facial recognition feature is a “scan of face geometry.”

The General Assembly stated its rationale in the Act itself by finding all of the following:

- (a) The use of biometrics is growing in the business and security screening sectors and appears to promise streamlined financial transactions and security screenings.
- (b) Major national corporations have selected the City of Chicago and other locations in this State as pilot testing sites for new applications of biometric-facilitated financial transactions, including finger-scan technologies at grocery stores, gas stations, and school cafeterias.
- (c) Biometrics are unlike other unique identifiers that are used to access finances or other sensitive information. For example, Social Security numbers, when compromised, can be changed. Biometrics, however, are biologically unique to the individual; therefore, once compromised, the individual has no recourse, is at heightened risk for identity theft, and is likely to withdraw from biometric-facilitated transactions.
- (d) An overwhelming majority of members of

the public are wary of the use of biometrics when such information is tied to finances and other personal information.

(e) Despite limited state law regulating the collection, use, safeguarding, and storage of biometrics, many members of the public are deterred from partaking in biometric identifier-facilitated transactions.

(f) The full ramifications of biometric technology are not fully known.

(g) The public welfare, security, and safety will be served by regulating the collection, use, safeguarding, handling, storage, retention, and destruction of biometric identifiers and information.

The Act provides: “No private entity may collect, capture, purchase, receive through trade, or otherwise obtain a person’s or a customer’s biometric identifier or biometric information, unless it first:

(1) informs the subject or the subject’s legally authorized representative in writing that a biometric identifier or biometric information is being collected or stored;

(2) informs the subject or the subject’s legally authorized representative in writing of the specific purpose and length of term for which a biometric identifier or biometric information is being collected, stored, and used; and

(3) receives a written release executed by the subject of the biometric identifier or biometric information or the subject’s legally authorized representative.

The Act also governs storage and retention of biometric identifiers that are legally collected.

Facebook recently settled a class-action lawsuit based on the Act for \$650 million. Plaintiffs claimed that Facebook violated the Act by using

its face-matching software to suggest names to be tagged in a picture. Illinois Facebook users who joined the suit will each receive around \$340. U.S. District Judge James Donato said, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, “This is real money that Facebook is paying to compensate them for the tangible privacy harms that they suffered.”

Lawsuits are also pending in Illinois against Microsoft, Amazon, Alphabet (Google), and Clearview AI. The complaint against Clearview was filed by the American Civil Liberties Union. Clearview is a New York-based tech company that calls its product the “world’s best facial recognition technology combined with the world’s largest database of headshots.” Clearview claims it has the legal right to gather and use the photos because they are public information. The company also says it will only provide its services to law enforcement agencies.

In 2016 and 2018, Facebook backed amendments to the Act, along with the Illinois Chamber of Commerce Technology Council (of which Facebook was a member), but none of them passed.

Other states have followed with their own biometric protection laws. Prior to 2018, only Illinois, Texas and Washington had such statutes. Now, California, New York, Arkansas, Oregon and Louisiana also have biometrics security laws, and many other states are considering legislation.

The law in this area will continue to evolve, and could eventually be replaced by a federal law. In the meantime, the Illinois Act continues to apply, and lawsuits will continue to be brought against companies that violate the Act. **SBJ**

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Women of Influence alumni spotlight: Karen Conn

By Carey Smith

"I was humbled," remembers Karen Conn, of the experience of being acknowledged as a woman of influence in 2011. "It was a huge honor." Conn recalls that after the event, she sat around with six female acquaintances, all of whom were women in management or executive roles. A night of sharing experiences over cocktails was an uplifting bonding event like no other. Ten years later, this same group of women meets monthly and now calls themselves GGSD, short for Girls Get Shit Done. Notes Conn, "With our group, we build each other up."

Conn began her career in 1986 working with Conn's Catering, eventually becoming the primary owner. She and her husband, Court, began their preservation efforts with the Inn at 835, converting a historic apartment building into a luxurious bed and breakfast with modern amenities. "That was our first historic renovation project together," notes Conn. "We fit hand-in-glove in that, so we kept going. We both appreciate Springfield's architectural history, especially in dilapidated areas, to see if we can bring back not only the home, but the area."

This preservation success led to renovating several properties into vibrant businesses, including Obed and Isaac's, Wm. Van's Coffeehouse and Widow at Windsor Antiques, which later became Merchant House, all clustered along Jackson Street between Sixth and Seventh streets in downtown Springfield. Conn notes that she's always been a huge history buff and familiar with renovation, as her parents worked on home remodeling projects throughout her childhood.

Appreciating inner city neighborhoods, the origins of Springfield, is what drives her preservation efforts. "I feel like we've lost the identity of who we are in Springfield when we don't preserve our history. You can't appreciate the future unless you're aware of the past," she said.

Conn's success is proof that a love of preservation and serial entrepreneurship are a good match. She states that many business ideas have come from her love of reading.

"I read a lot and I become interested, and it becomes a hobby. We like to brew beer, and that's how Obed and Isaac's got started. I read about smoking meat and got a smoker, and then we have Li'l Willy's." Li'l Willy's Smokehouse BBQ opened last year in a former filling station at the corner of MacArthur Boulevard and South Grand Avenue, serving Wm. Van's coffee in addition to barbecue.

After renovating the iconic Cornerstone Build-

ing in Peoria, a church built in 1899, and opening another Obed and Isaac's there, Conn turned her attention to the Historic Gillette Farm near Elkhart, Illinois. Now known as the Elkhart Hill Farm and Vineyard, Conn laughs, "I can actually do what I went to school for."

Having grown up working at her grandparents' farm on weekends and attending the University of Illinois for a year, focused on small-scale fruit and vegetable farming, Conn is putting her experience and education to good use. It may be hard work, but "if you do what you love, you don't feel like



Karen Conn now lives at the former Gillette Farm near Elkhart. Vegetables and eggs from the farm are used in the various Conn family restaurants.

you're working. It's rewarding. It's a big sense of self accomplishment," states Conn.

During their free time provided by the COVID pandemic, Conn and her family and friends put in 2,000 grapevines and expect to plant more in 2021. Going into their second year of vegetable production, Conn hopes to supply all the produce needs for their restaurants. They are currently looking into regulations for egg production, in order to supply their restaurants as well as sell farm-fresh eggs in a retail setting. Free-range turkeys and chickens are also in the plan.

Conn purchased a building in downtown Elkhart and is renovating it to open as General Mercantile, where she plans to sell eggs, produce,

honey, Illinois products and a sprinkling of antiques from Merchant House. The former retail store downtown closed in December and the space is now being repurposed for event rental, to be known as Merchant House Urban Event Space.

Active in philanthropic work, Conn and her family have created a nonprofit, Conn Family Community Works, that supports historic preservation, care for veterans, animal rights and education for children. "Those are the areas we focus on and try to give back to."

Conn says she works hard to carry on the Conn family name with the integrity and high standards taught to her by her father-in-law 30 years ago, "carrying the company on, growing and leading, and giving back to our community. I just want to make sure the Conn name stands for community, quality and preservation. I strive very hard for that."

A handful of people come to mind when Conn considers her role models, but she says first and foremost, it is the group of women who have supported each other since the night she was recognized as a woman of influence in 2011. "On my bad days, they are there to give me encouragement and build me up," she said. **SBJ**

Carey Smith appreciates the partnership of organic produce and historic preservation.



Do you know someone who should be recognized as one of this year's Women of Influence, sponsored by Security Bank and Springfield Business Journal? The recipients will be profiled in the May issue of SBJ.

Nominations are not limited to the business community for this program. The area's reputation as an exemplary place to live, work and raise a family is dependent upon the day-to-day hard work and long-range foresight of each and every one of us. These women are significant for their valuable contributions in making Springfield the outstanding community that it is.

Visit www.springfieldbusinessjournal.com and submit a nomination by March 15 to have someone considered for recognition.

Habitat helps new and existing homeowners

By Janet Seitz

Since its founding in 1976, Habitat for Humanity International has built, renovated or repaired nearly 1 million houses in the U.S. while assisting more than 35 million people worldwide. In 1989, community leaders here in Springfield took up the initiative to build for those in need in Sangamon County.

"I have been with Habitat for seven years and love what I do," said Habitat for Humanity of Sangamon County executive director Colleen Stone. "Habitat's belief is for every man, woman and child in the world to have a safe and affordable place to call home. We fulfill our mission through the generosity of donors and the dedication of volunteers." Over the past 31 years, HFHSC has built or renovated 113 homes and 53 wheelchair ramps, plus assisted 50 low-income homeowners with home repairs.

As an approved affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International, HFHSC is directly responsible for all aspects of Habitat home building in the area, including fundraising, site selection, family selection and family support, construction and mortgage servicing. That calls for working partnerships with local businesses, churches, community groups and other individuals.

Greg Krutzinger owns a construction company and has volunteered with Habitat since 1995. "Greg supervises the blitz portion of our home build which turns 2x4s into a house, all in one week," said Stone.

"My involvement coincided with me joining First Presbyterian Church, which is a strong supporter of the Habitat mission," explained Krutzinger. "Over the years, I have served different roles in the building process, from volunteer to construction supervisor. Whatever part I have played in successive builds has been rewarding, with the knowledge of helping families achieve the goal of homeownership."

Additionally, Krutzinger said as a local builder he is able to support the ReStore by donating windows, doors and cabinets from remodeling projects.

"Over the years, I have become acquainted with many people in the community with varying degrees of construction skills from all walks of life. Some volunteers become involved for years and others only work on one specific build, but for the most part, all receive the satisfaction of accomplishment," he said.

Volunteers are helping to build a future for



Habitat volunteers take part in a blitz build. PHOTO COURTESY HFHSC

many people. "The Habitat story is all about the families in our programs," said Stone. "Last December, Kimeka moved into her Habitat home with her teenage son. Kimeka moved here from Chicago to provide a safe place to live for her son. She didn't have a job, so for 10 months, they lived in a shelter. From the shelter, she moved into an apartment provided by the Springfield Housing Authority. When Kimeka first applied to our homeownership program, she was denied due to her low credit score. She spent the next year improving her score and applied again. On her second try, she was approved."

In 2018, HFHSC started the Critical Home Repair program, which helps low-income homeowners with major home repairs. Initially, the plan was only to complete seven projects in the first year, but when the funds ran out, King's Daughters Organization was able to help with additional funding.

Stone said, "Judy applied to have her furnace replaced. When the contractor went to survey her needs, he called me to say that Judy's furnace was producing so much carbon monoxide that it was amazing it hadn't killed her. Very quickly her furnace was replaced, and her life was saved."

Stone said she feels honored to work with both volunteers and the families they help. "We have over 4,000 volunteers supporting our mission, 14 employees and six families currently in our program. Our program participants are

given a hand up, not a handout, and they are very proud to work side-by-side with volunteers building their future home."

Board member Deb Sarsany, a partner with The Real Estate Group, has volunteered for about 10 years with HFHSC. She currently serves as fundraising chair and helps secure lots for Habitat builds.

"It is heartwarming to see a community come together to support those less fortunate," Sarsany said. "Watching a family put in hours and hours of sweat equity to help build their own home is beyond rewarding. They prove that you don't have to have a lot of money – you just need the desire and the fire."

According to Stone, more volunteers are needed to help more than 6,000 families in Sangamon County who live in substandard housing and countless low-income homeowners who can't afford the major repairs needed for their home. HFHSC aims to build three new homes, 15 wheelchair ramps and assist with other critical home repairs this year.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities, regardless of skill level, contact executivedirector@habitatsangamon.com or call 217-523-2710. **SBJ**

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

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SIU School of Medicine receives major gift for Alzheimer's research

A major gift to SIU School of Medicine will transform the health care of people throughout Illinois and beyond. Dale and Deborah Smith recently donated a substantial financial gift to the Center for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders at SIU Medicine to expand research, enhance programming and improve care for people with Alzheimer's disease and assist their caregivers. The center will now be named the Dale and Deborah Smith Center for Alzheimer's Research and Treatment at SIU Medicine.

The center provides clinical care, research and community programs throughout Illinois. Since 1986, its employees have diagnosed, treated and educated Illinois families with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. In the past year, the center, along with its Memory and Aging Network, has served more than 4,000 patients and their families.

"This gift from Dale and Deborah Smith will continue to propel research at SIU that may translate into novel treatments and interventions for patients in the future," said Jerry Kruse, M.D., M.S.P.H., dean and provost at SIU School of Medicine. "It will also provide much needed clinical, educational and community support for those with Alzheimer's and their families."

Despite decades of pharmaceutical development and drug testing, Alzheimer's disease continues to be incurable, and prevention may hold the greatest hope for combating this disease. The research team at the Center for Alzheimer's Research and Treatment is focused on discovering ways to slow the progression.

Erin R. Hascup, Ph.D., serves as the center's director and associate professor in the Departments of Neurology and Pharmacology at SIU School of Medicine.

"What we want to do is understand the changes that are occurring across disease progression, including in the very early stages," she said. "Many have Alzheimer's for up to 30 years prior to cognitive decline, so we want to intervene earlier to slow or stop disease progression and improve patient outcomes and quality of life."

In addition to a better quality of life, early



Dr. Kevin Hascup works in one of the Alzheimer's research labs at SIU School of Medicine.

PHOTO COURTESY SIU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

and accurate diagnosis and timely intervention could save up to \$7.9 trillion in medical and health care costs, according to the Alzheimer's Association.

Currently, 5.7 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's. By 2050, this number is projected to rise to nearly 14 million. Illinois communities will continue to be impacted by various forms of dementia as the population ages, and the Smiths are eager to be a part of the solution locally and beyond.

"As longtime Springfield residents, we're proud of the impact the School of Medicine has had on the community," Dale Smith said. "The efforts of the Alzheimer's center inspired us to give and hopefully create a consciousness within the community around the breadth of research and patient care we have here. Alzheimer's is a terrible disease, and we hope our gift can help researchers at SIU Medicine produce better clinical outcomes that improve our community, one family at a time."

For example, the Hascup laboratory at SIU recently published data showing that

diabetes alters signals crossing between neurons in the hippocampus (where learning and memory functions are housed in the brain), called glutamate neurotransmission. The goal of this research is to determine the underlying neurotransmission-related mechanisms that lead to an increased risk for developing Alzheimer's disease in diabetic patients and explore both pharmacological (early treatment with a drug currently in clinical trials to treat diabetes) and non-pharmacological (altered ambient temperature, which has been shown to change insulin sensitivity) interventions. Researchers aim to improve disease outcomes through better overall health and delayed or prevented cognitive decline.

Gifts received by the Southern Illinois University Foundation support the growth of the School of Medicine, including its medical research efforts. Those interested in donating can do so at forwardfunder.siumed.edu/CART or by contacting the SIU School of Medicine Foundation Office at foundation@siumed.edu or 217-545-2955.

What happens when your good intentions cause harm?

Sometimes the best intentions create the impact you were trying to avoid

By Kristina Barbee

Years ago, while working on a large-scale project, I began to feel overwhelmed and overworked with all that was being asked of me. I confided in my boss at the time, who is also a good work friend, about how I was feeling about what was going on. In that moment, what I needed was somebody who understood where I was coming from to just listen.

My boss, not knowing that I just needed to let off some steam, took my concerns to my project manager and her boss, the program manager, in a private meeting that I wasn't aware of. What ensued afterward was several days of me repairing my relationship with my project manager who, understandably, was upset and felt ambushed by the meeting and concerns brought forward, especially since her boss got involved.

My boss's intent was to help me, but his actions instead caused harm. After cooler heads prevailed, my boss and I spoke, and he not only apologized for what transpired but also asked me what he could do better next time to avoid causing harm. From that conversation, he learned that the best way to be my leader during stressful times was to always ask me if I needed action taken or if I just needed someone to listen when bringing forward my concerns and stress.

Early in my career, while I was still very young and naive, the team that I

was on was tasked with a large project by our department vice president and his associate vice president. When it came time to present our project findings and recommendations, leadership showed up quite late, wasn't engaged, and afterward, didn't review materials or do anything with our recommendations. My entire team felt dismissed and disrespected.

During a follow up meeting with leadership, I spoke up about what occurred with the intention of explaining how their actions were disrespectful and hurtful to our team so that it wouldn't happen again. However, instead of clearly explaining what happened and how it made me and the team feel, my emotions took over. I yelled, shed many angry tears, and did everything but storm out, all in an attempt to express how disrespected we felt by their actions. It was not one of my prouder moments, and I'm quite lucky that all I got was a slap on the wrist.

While I wish that that meeting never happened, I chose to take time to reflect on that day. In doing so, I learned a very valuable lesson that has helped me in my personal life and career. Because of the choice to not run from the discomfort and shame I felt over what happened, I've been able to turn countless emotional and tough conversations into productive encounters with colleagues, once I remembered to take time to cool off

before speaking and made sure to find ways to clearly articulate my points without accusatory or inflammatory statements.

When harm is caused, a fatal error that is often made is to back away from what transpired and try to erase or hide it. In any work we do, whether that be our work as an employee or leader, or especially in our allyship work, we must fully own our mistakes, transparently apologize for them and find a lesson in the blunder. Stepping into our discomfort is the only way we can fully learn from the experience and repair any harm done.

No one is perfect, and no sensible boss or colleague will expect perfection. At some point, we will all say the wrong thing, overreact or handle a situation in a way that causes harm to others. What matters most is not how hard we stumble or how often, but how many times we learn from it and commit to doing better. The road to growth is paved with uneven terrain, and we all are bound to fall along the way. **SBJ**



Kristina Barbee is the founder and CEO of The CEO.Co, a leadership and career training company in Springfield that creates a workplace culture of excellence.

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MAKE IT YOUR MISSION TO TRY MISSION BBQ

By Thomas C. Pavlik



If you're the kind that's triggered by the national anthem, the military, law enforcement or the American flag, go get yourself some meat substitute and stop reading right now. But if you, like me, hold all those things precious, then this is the place for you.

Mission BBQ's tag line is "The American Way." Diners see that in the décor, which pays tribute to law enforcement and the military. More importantly, Mission BBQ has given back to first responders and the military to the tune of more than \$10 million since opening on Sept. 11, 2011. Now that's the real American way.

Mission BBQ is a chain that was formed 10 years ago by two friends who believe "there is nothing more American than BBQ. And nobody more American than the brave men and women who have sworn to protect and serve our communities and our country."

It's located on Wabash near the mall. You can't miss it – it's the place with the flagpole and the large Army truck parked right outside. Inside, the owners have done their best to make it feel like an old-time barbeque pit, even though it's brand-new construction.

Mission BBQ offers only counter service. We visited right at 11 a.m. and the line was immediately 15 people long; it just kept going from there. COVID protocols were observed, including in the open kitchen where we could see the staff hard at work. Orders were ready very quickly. Staff circulated, cleared tables and checked in on all parties – which was a nice touch.

The menu is just about what you would expect from a barbeque joint. For those who might be there against their will with no appreciation of barbeque, you can select salmon (\$10.49) or the garden salad (\$4.99, with meat an additional \$3.50). I was surprised that there was no beer – although I wouldn't consume on a work day, nothing compliments good barbeque like an ice-cold beer.

Two of us went for the three-meat sampler (\$16.04) which we turned into a combo, consisting of a drink and one side, for an additional \$3.75. Our third diner ordered the two-meat sampler (\$10.69). Midway through the meal, an acquaintance of one of my guests showed up and broke bread with us – he had a





A pulled pork sandwich with Maggie's mac and cheese. In the background is the Turkey Meat Market with green beans and a side of cornbread.

PHOTOS BY STACIE LEWIS

half slab of ribs (\$11.99).

Each table has six different types of barbeque sauce, covering most major barbeque genres. A spicy barbeque sauce was also available near the drink area, but we only learned that later in the lunch – and it wasn't really all that hot. We all agreed that Mission BBQ would be better served by the inclusion of a truly spicy sauce, and that there was too much focus on the sweet side of the spectrum.

Orders are served on metal mess hall-style trays covered in butcher paper, and each entrée comes with a piece of cornbread. Sides include fries, cheesy potatoes, green beans and bacon, and mac-n-cheese.

The collective consensus is that everything was excellent. Two of us ordered the brisket "moist" (slightly fattier) and one got it "lean." Either way, it had just the right amount of smoke and was nice and tender. So, too, with the pulled pork – which had some burnt ends just to add

texture. I thought that the real winner was the sausage – available regular or with jalapeno and cheese. My friend who ordered the chicken commented that he was surprised it was actually tender and juicy, as described on the menu. Although I didn't partake, the most fulsome compliments were for the green beans and bacon – they were a crowd pleaser. My new friend who had the ribs was pleased with his selection. He said they were fall-off-the-bone tender and had great flavor.

Prices are a little high – especially considering that sides don't come with the entrée-sized portions. Lunch for the three of us was just under \$60. Still, we all plan on returning.

Perhaps one of the neatest parts of our lunch was that at noon everyone stands to face the flag, places their hand over their heart and sings the national anthem. It was a fitting end for our lunch and left me warm inside on what was otherwise a bitterly cold day. Nicely done, Mission BBQ. SBJ

Restaurant information

Address: Address: 2401 Wabash Avenue, Suite B

Phone: 217-275-5610

Web: www.mission-bbq.com

Hours: Monday – Saturday 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Sunday 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Wheelchair Access: Yes

Credit Cards: Yes

Atmosphere: ★★★★★

Service: ★★★★★

Food: ★★★★★

Price: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

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New businesses

Sangamon County new business registrations, Jan.16 - Feb. 15, 2021

Not Perfect Clothing, 2521 Raleigh Road. 481-2449. Keon Day, Tanner Arzola, Delbert Todd.

Brandwatch, 208 S. LaSalle St., Unit 814, Chicago. 312-263-1414. Crimson Hexagon.

Eubanks Cleaning, 110 N. First St., Unit B, Riverton. 565-9875. Melody Grayce Eubanks.

This N That, 449 N. Walnut St. 441-4378. Lexie Limbaugh.

Doinall, LLC, 1328 E. Adams St. 923-8129. Randall R. Wyatt.

Oxalis Digital Marketing, 210 Plains Drive., Apt. 4, Chatham. 309-648-3891. Tabitha Land.

Iconic Photos by Brea, 108 N. Second St., Sherman. 989-820-1474. Brea Annette Luttrell.

Crosshairs Renovation, 3300 Sherman St. 361-7813. Jared Anthony Baker.

BDE Tree and Lawn, 1007 E. Washington St., Riverton. 801-3880. Dalton Stanlehy Floyd.

OTMTHEBRAND, 2708 S. Whittier Ave. 816-5323. Garland C. Schafer.

White's Cleaning Service, 1531 E. Keys Ave. 815-671-8240. Hanna Renee White, Gerald Wayne White Jr.

Affordable Pet Grooming, 2641½ S. Sixth St. 210-2002. Marshall Montgomery.

Alli Donaldson Makeup Artistry, 841 Loraine Ave. 416-8350. Allison E. Donaldson.

Kiron Wellness, 2536 Farragut Drive. 971-7647. Alicia M. Dirksen.

KDM Consulting, 41 Trailridge Lane. 773-243-9212. Natalie Ann Davila.

So Darling Screen Prints, 1616 Bilbridge Lane, Chatham. 660-233-3589. Meghan Hawkins.

Sparkle Cleaners, 278 Springcreek Drive. 670-7381. Shavette Rudder.

Greenbody Fitness, 1152 E. Reynolds St. 220-9533. Ronitta Stewart.

Dennis McCombs Trucking, 2608 S. Fourth St. 503-6909. Dennis McCombs.

Land of Lincoln Model Raceway, 2160 S. Sixth St. 553-3290. Bill Benedict.

Midwestern Energy Savings Program, 1836 S. Lowell Ave. 652-6533. Route 66 Solar, LLC.

3M Remodeling, LLC, 1209 Pine Lane, Auburn. 860-9184. Kirk D. Monson Sr.

Teal Tulips Company, 418 Dewberry Trail, Chatham. 816-1982. Corey Moore.

Lasley Innovations! 1113 N. MacArthur Blvd. 481-5170. Isaac A. Lasley.

Nightie Lux, 3309 Robbins Road, Suite 989. 503-0191. Tyona Glenn.

Oh Snap! 3535 E. Cook St. 416-3044. Gwendolyn Janine Williams.

Green Tobacco Clothing, 2125 S. Whittier. 678-668-5212. Jehu Hunt.

Just 2 Chicks Hair Studio, 215 Bruns Lane. 621-8556. Cindy L. Surber, Dana M. Range.

Horne Fam Customs, 2413 E. Elm St. 441-5602. Lakendra Huggins.

KSKI Distribution, 1608 Windycrest Drive. 415-5638. Jeffery Jordon Kowalewski.

MacGregor's Farms, 12625 Tebbe Road, New Berlin. 341-6416. James Austin Crosier.

That is not the Move! 1925 Holly Drive. 381-5257. Tariae Kincaid.

B & C Customs, 1325 Stanton Airport Road, Riverton. 572-0627. Jordan Alex Lyons.

LOL Raceway, 1908 S. College St. 502-2336. David Allen Fugate.

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