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– Todd Green,
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INSIDE THIS MONTH



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About the awards

Springfield Business Journal and United Community Bank are pleased to sponsor this year's "Best Places to Work," recognizing outstanding businesses in central Illinois.

Perhaps not surprisingly, two of them are family-owned businesses and the other followed in his father's footsteps in the same industry. All three company owners grew up in their respective industries and all say their employees are part of the family. The other common theme is that each gives back to the community in many different ways.

The program is open to any business in Sangamon or Morgan county with 35 or more employees. Many of the nominations were submitted by the employees themselves, in other cases someone who had worked closely with the company made the nomination.

A reception and awards ceremony will be held in January at United Community Bank's Montvale branch and Mayor J. Michael Houston will present awards to the three selectees. We appreciate United Community Bank's ongoing support that allows us to honor these worthwhile businesses.

Best Places to Work pages 22-27

Paul E. Adami, R. Lee Allen, James P. Baker, Michael Glenn Barton, Bruce A. Beeman, Joel A. Benoit, Stephen J. Bochenek, Herman G. Bodewes, Bruce S. Bonczyk, Gary L. Borah, James D. Broadway, Gary A. Brown, Creighton R. Castle, Michael C. Connelly, J. Randall Cox, Carl R. Draper, Denise M. Druhot, Michael M. Durr, William R. Enlow, James G. Fahey, Howard W. Feldman, Mark H. Ferguson, Gordon W. Gates, C. Clark Germann, Todd M. Goebel, Kelli Ellen Gordon, Edward R. Gower, Raylene DeWitte

Grishow, Thomas G. Hamill, Donald J. Hanrahan, William P. Hardy, Adrian E. Harless, Lisa Harms Hartzler, David A. Herman, Barry Hines, Lance T. Jones, John A. Kauerauf, Stephen R. Kaufmann, Michael T. Kokal, James M. Lestikow, Francis J. Lynch, Matthew J. Maddox, R. Mark Mifflin, Michael D. Morehead, James M. Morpheu, Stephen Scott Morrill, Cheryl S. Neal, James E. Neville, Theresa M. Powell, Frederick C. Prillaman, Andrew M. Ramage, Russell L. Reed, David R. Reid, Timothy S. Richards, J. William Roberts, David A. Rolf, Peggy J. Ryan, Frederick J. Schlosser, Charles R. Schmadeke, Amy K. Schmidt, Gary S. Schwab, Randall W. Segatto, Bernard G. Segatto, III, Gregory P. Sgro, Daniel R. Simmons, Zack Stamp, John E. Stevens, Robert A. Stuart, Jr., John L. Swartz, Stephen A. Tagge, Todd M. Turner, Robert E. Wagner, Stanley N. Wasser, R. Kurt Wilke, Thomas H. Wilson, Bradley B. Wilson, D. Peter Wise, Randall A. Wolter, Robert G. Wuller, Jr.

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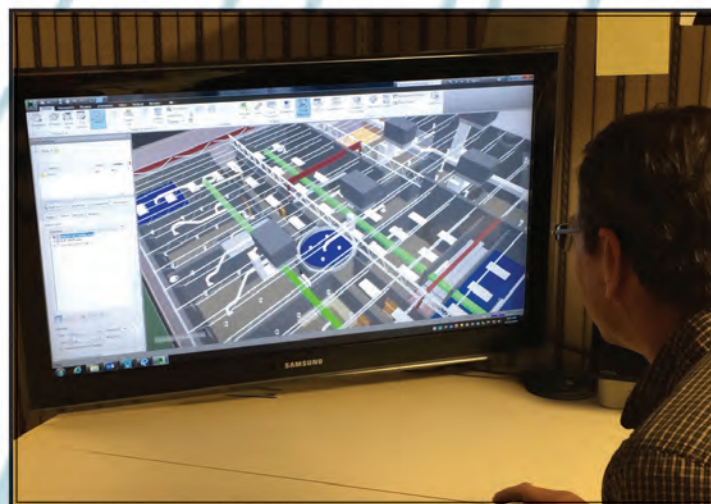
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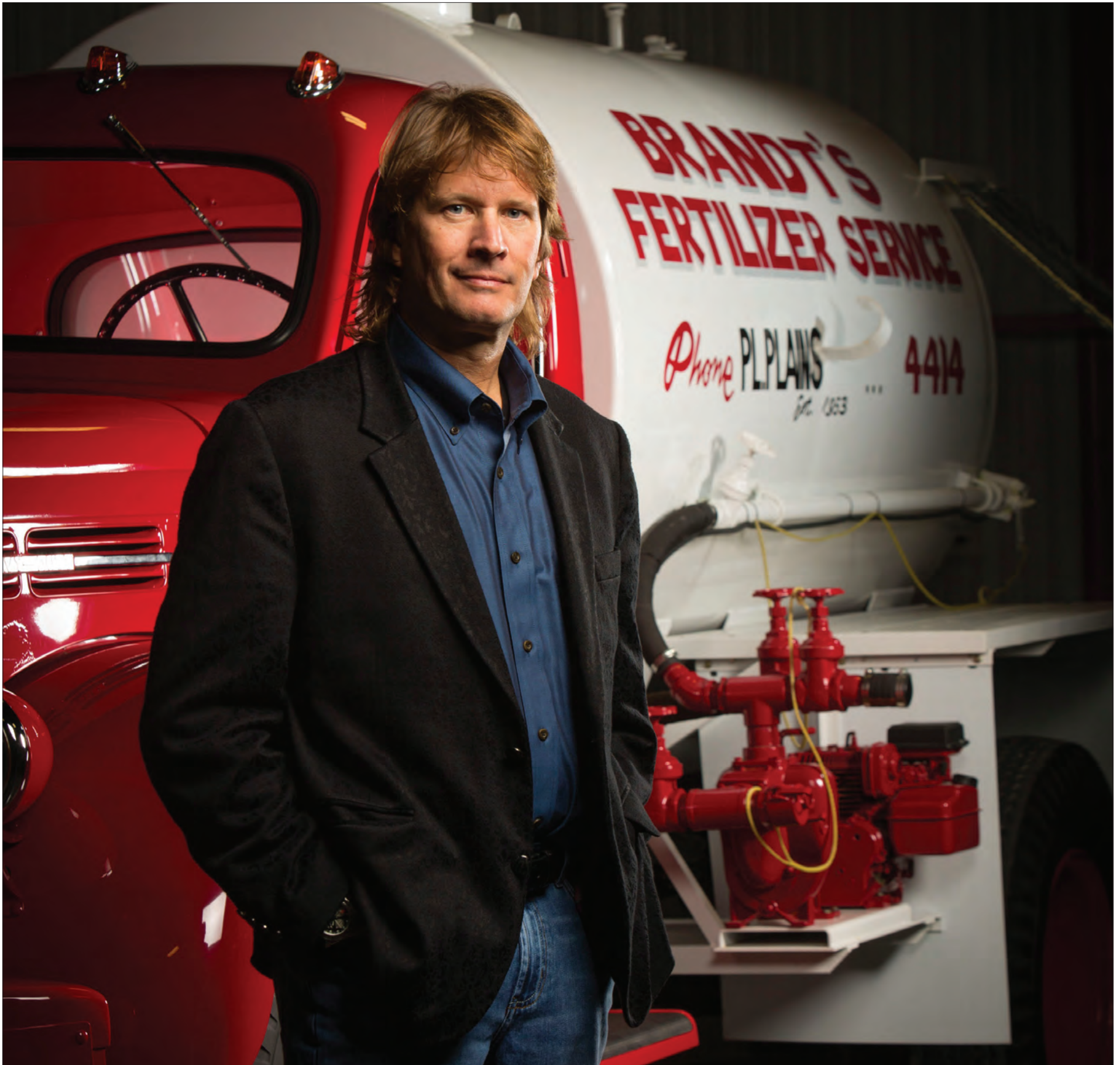


PHOTO BY TERRY FARMER

Meet Rick Brandt

President and CEO, Brandt Agricultural Products

By Scott Faingold

Brandt Agricultural Products was founded by Glen Brandt and his sister, Evelyn Brandt Thomas, in 1953. "I'm second generation," says president and CEO Rick Brandt, son of Glen. The company was originally from Pleasant Plains, where Rick grew up before leaving to earn his degree in economics from the University of South Florida in Tampa.

He returned to central Illinois after graduation with no clear plan in place, which was when his father offered him a position in the family business. "I had worked in the company as a kid, started mowing the grass when I was probably 11 or 12, and then took summer jobs and worked during vacations. When people ask how long I've been with the company I tell them 49 years," he laughs. He ended up taking a position as assistant to the company's then-current CEO, who took

early retirement after only a few years and recommended Rick to take over his position as head of the company, a daunting prospect for the 29-year-old.

"Let's say I was full of ideas and energy," Rick says now. "There were a lot of things I wanted to do with the company but to a large degree I spun my wheels at the beginning, I couldn't get a lot of things to go through. The old guard, if you will, was still here and I was the young whippersnapper that didn't know what I was doing and probably to some degree got the job because of who I was and hadn't been able to prove myself."

After a few years, Rick began to find his footing. The company started growing and making acquisitions. "It's been fast and furious for about the last 15 years," he says. Brandt Agricultural Products now has a

foothold in all 49 continental states. "Being in the Midwest, you couldn't really ask for a much better location geographically. This is the breadbasket so it's optimal for agriculture. As we've grown across the country and around the world, we use the strategy that we know farming, we know how to operate and work with growers and help them improve their crops and their yields and their income."

In addition, as they work with companies on the international front, they do their best to bring knowledge back to central Illinois for the growers here. The company is currently looking at an acquisition in Brazil as well as a company in Spain which will service their European and northern African markets for production and distribution, with production opportunities in China also on the horizon.

Rick says his management philosophy is simply "to get good people and give them the tools they need to do the best job they can do." It is also important to him that the work environment is a fun place to be. "Over the years, our company has turned from a working environment into more of a culture," he says. "We work hard all week and we might be colleagues but we are also, to a large degree, friends. Our NASCAR program fosters that. We take a lot of customers to races but we also take a lot of our employees and their families – most everything we do is family-oriented in the company. If we have a business dinner and we have some customers in town, some of the management team might go together, but we take our spouses too and make them part of it. It's really a family atmosphere." □

Decatur's Gin Mill a dream come true for owner

By Colin Patrick Brady



Nearly a year ago, Josh Irby, owner and chef at the Gin Mill restaurant in downtown Decatur had reached a personal crux. His options: continue to work for others under their mercurial whims or strike out on his own and claim ownership of a place of his own making where he had the final say in day-to-day operations. In January 2014, Irby, 43, decided upon the latter course and the Gin Mill broke ground two months later.

Built on a plot that has formerly housed such diverse businesses as a women's clothing store, a hobby shop, a beauty salon and most recently an event-planning facility, The Gin Mill, despite its brief tenure in a historical region of downtown Decatur, has quickly established itself as the city's must-dine destination. Word of mouth has people

coming in equal measure for not only the food but also the eccentric atmosphere, something The Gin Mill provides in spades.

The Gin Mill stands unique among downtown Decatur eateries – black is the watchword in much of the décor, though it is not a gloomy place. The large picture windows looking out onto Prairie Street are festooned with tall, black velvet drapes hung from a ceiling painted matte black. Above these dark curtains hang two wooden cases holding a collection of vintage beer cans – the spoils of Irby's Dalton City youth in the days before cable and Atari drew him away from catching snakes and collecting these very cans now so lovingly displayed in a restaurant of his very own.

As Irby puts it, there is no real rhyme or



Some examples of the outré decor in Decatur's Gin Mill.

PHOTOS BY COLIN PATRICK BRADY

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reason to the décor of The Gin Mill. It is eclectic, and for the tastes of some maybe even bizarre, but it works. The east wall, completely covered in black wallpaper, features what appears at a distance to be a fleur-de-lis pattern; however, upon closer inspection a gothic lacework design with x-rays of human skulls in the center becomes visible. Irby had espied the skull-studded design at a Philadelphia hotel and it so impressed him that he tracked down the manufacturer of the wallpaper in Toronto, ordering several square yards to adorn an entire side of his new place.

Aside from the aid of a few painters and contractors, Irby himself gutted and built The Gin Mill from scratch. Work began in earnest to remodel the building in March of 2014 and its first patrons were served in November. The entire west wall of the establishment features exposed brick. Irby reports that he personally spent three and a half weeks on scaffolding, claw and sledgehammer in hand, removing half-inch plaster which had likely been present on that wall since the building's construction over a century ago. Thankless work to be sure, but the result is well worth it in Irby's opinion. The west wall is sparse, not counting the mounted head of an American Bison (an eBay find). Hung upon the west wall's ceiling one also will notice a sight frequently posted and reposted on social media, the deer antler chandelier.

The bar area on the main level boasts an extravagant cornice which Irby personally traveled to Baltimore to procure after three failed attempts via eBay auction. It is a marvel, and well worth the cross-country trek to bring it to its new home on the low prairie. Easily 20 feet long with a mahogany backing, it displays a veritable menagerie of fantastical beast-heads, including gryphons

and lions.

Mirrors hung on the brick wall reflect not only the spacious seating but also those dishes most germane to Irby's personal proficiencies (by his own account). "LOBSTER BISQUE: EAT LATE HERE," the first mirror reads, etched in gold lettering – the bisque, per Irby, is a citywide favorite. The establishment is "FAMOUS FOR OUR DELMONICO CUT" according to a second mirror – Irby claims that all his steaks are hand-cut and at any given time USDA Prime Beef is available to order. A featured item of note unique to the Gin Mill and difficult to find elsewhere in the central Illinois area is a 20 oz. bone-in rib-eye. Seafood selections are fresh, and shipped in from Chicago three days a week. Trained at the Cordon Bleu School of the Cooking and Hospitality Institute of Chicago, chef Irby is eager to serve his quality fare to all comers.

Irby had put years into working for corporate interests before finally deciding to become his own boss in The Gin Mill, a personal gustatory fantasy now brought into reality. With his own self-authored menu along with interior design personally dictated (and in part constructed) by his own hand, patrons immediately sense that they have not stepped into a typical flair-on-the-wall prefabricated chain restaurant. Irby's heart, soul, ambition and talent are evident from floor to ceiling and most importantly in the dishes, which he serves up with aplomb, experience, and pride.

The Gin Mill is located at 124 E. Prairie, in downtown Decatur. Parking is ample in the lot behind the restaurant as well as in the front Prairie Street entrance. □

Colin Patrick Brady is a freelance writer residing in Decatur. He can be reached at colinpatrickbrady@hotmail.com.



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NEW BUSINESS



David Usellis stopped in for a Pour Over coffee on Custom Cup's opening day. Usellis, who moved to Springfield from Chicago, said he is happy to see another new business downtown.

Custom Cup Coffee opens on E. Monroe

By Ginny Lee

Custom Cup Coffee had a soft opening at its new storefront at 321 E. Monroe St. downtown during Thanksgiving week. The shop went through 125 pounds of beans in the first week, and sales have steadily increased since then.

Brent and Kendra Boesdorfer of Custom Cup's microroastery specialize in small batch, roast-to-order coffee and educating coffee aficionados as to where their coffee beans are grown. Both are enthusiastic about sharing their expertise on the subtleties of tasting coffee.

The Boesdorfers roast single-origin coffee beans from Kenya, Colombia, Ethiopia and other coffee-producing countries. Light, medium and dark-roasted beans and freshly made coffee can always be found at the shop. A cup of coffee goes for \$2, and a custom-made Pour Over cup goes for \$3. Their dry process Ethiopian Pour Over is particularly flavorful. Whole beans are priced at \$7.50 for a 6-ounce bag and \$15 for a 12-ounce bag.

Custom Cup buys its beans from superior growing regions and chooses beans based on quality and environmental sustainability. There is only one middleman between the coffee growers and Custom Cup roastery.

Shoppers at the Old Capitol Farmers Market will remember Custom Cup from last year's market. The couple sold freshly roasted

coffee for \$1 per cup, as well as roasted coffee beans, and developed a following.

In the new shop their handsome red Diedrich coffee roaster sits right behind the handmade wood counter made locally by Roger Bachman. Bachman also created the pour-over stand. The Boesdorfers chose a made-to-order Diedrich roaster from Idaho because it uses indirect ceramic infrared heat, which makes for cleaner heat, Brent said, and because it is a family-run company with great customer loyalty.

Even the lids on the to-go coffee cups are custom-made by Viora in Seattle. With both a hole for smell and one for drinking, they are designed to enhance the flavor and smell of coffee.

Kendra Boesdorfer, who is usually behind the counter, says, "Our thing is having everything accessible, without being snooty."

The shop is full to the brim with coffee accoutrements and personality. Customers can take home a Custom Cup diner-style coffee mug for \$9 or a black Custom Cup T-shirt for \$22. Both items are produced by Miles Printing of Springfield. The shop also sells red ceramic coffee drippers by Hario, just like the Boesdorfers use in their shop, for \$30 each. Serious coffee drinkers may want to take home an elegant Buono drip kettle, also used in the shop, for \$54.

The shop is too small for seating so

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PHOTOS BY GINNY LEE



Brent and Kendra Boesdorfer with their Diedrich coffee roaster at Custom Cup Coffee at 321 E. Monroe St.

coffee is served in paper cups to go, but there will be outdoor seating when the weather is warmer.

The Boesdorfers have always appreciated good coffee. Kendra is from Kansas City, Missouri, so on visits there the two would stop at The Roasterie and revel in the café's fresh-roasted brew. After graduating from St. Louis University, they lived in the Soulard neighborhood of St. Louis. They discovered the nearby Sump Coffee shop, which fueled their interest in great coffee.

"Sump Coffee inspired us," Kendra said, "but our business is Brent's idea." In October of 2013 he began roasting green coffee beans at home with a Whirly-Pop popcorn maker after reading directions online. Just 14 months later, Custom Cup has a popular storefront downtown.

Custom Cup's roasted beans are also sold at The Market at Koke Mill, Country

Market, Hy-Vee and local farmers markets. The American Harvest restaurant serves Custom Cup's coffee. The Boesdorfers also deliver fresh-roasted beans straight to the doors of Springfield customers.

Custom Cup Coffee promises to be a haven for the connoisseur along with a fun place for anyone interested in good coffee. In keeping with the sustainability focus, their used coffee grounds go to Andy Heck and Gus Jones' organic farm, Prairie City Farm.

Hours currently are 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday and 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday. For more information, call 652-6154 or see www.customcupcoffee.com. □

Ginny Lee is a regular contributor to the Springfield Business Journal as a writer and photographer.

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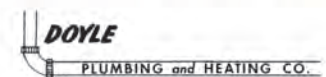
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Communicating the value of animals

By Eric Woods

Debbie Bonner has lived in Springfield for the past four years, after growing up in Columbus, Ohio. She sees positive and negative in both cities. "There are a lot of opportunities in Springfield that I would not have found in Columbus," she said. "But there is not a lot of variety in shopping and dining compared to Columbus. Maybe that is because of the size of the city." Bonner does see more restaurants opening and is curious about what will happen when the proposed outlet malls open.

Growing up, Bonner wanted to be a veterinarian. High school biology class ended that dream. Her first job was working for her father at his construction site at the age of 16. Her worst job, however, was selling mortgage insurance. "I am just not good at that. I had to hear 'no' from too many people. If I told people what I did, they would avoid eye contact for fear I was going to try to sell them something." Her first taste of working close to animals was during college when she worked in a pet supply store.

Bonner has been with the Animal Protective League (APL) for close to a year. She handles press releases, social media

outlets, flyers and marketing materials for special events. She also helps put together the special events and fundraisers. "We have a lot of family therapy things to help people learn to be better pet owners," she said. "The job can be frustrating and challenging, but it is extremely rewarding."

It is easy for those who work closely with animals to get caught up in the emotional aspect, according to Bonner. "You need to learn to insulate yourself from your emotions," she said. "Compassion fatigue can take its toll very fast."

The best advice Bonner ever received was to be at peace with herself. "You cannot go around pleasing everyone. You have to be comfortable with yourself before you can be successful," she said. Bonner has taken this guidance to heart most of her life, as she was very successful in school, graduating in the top 15 percent of her class at what she describes as a very competitive boarding school. She has also been able to not only work in an industry about which she was passionate growing up but has been able to use her degree. Along with her job with APL, Bonner is the promotions director and morning show co-host for

WNNS radio, where she has worked for several years now.

Looking ahead, Bonner hopes that people will begin thinking more globally and beyond specific borders. "As a species, can we evolve beyond the pettiness, come together and work for good? We need to tackle environmental, health and more global issues," she said. "It is not the message sent, but the message received that makes all the difference in the world."

The APL is going to be very busy in the near future. "We are working on the marketing plan for next year," she said. They are also looking for businesses to partner with the organization for upcoming events and growing those relationships. In five to 10 years they will be looking at major building changes, and having a large number of business relationships can only help them achieve this objective. Bonner will continue to be heavily involved with the goals of the APL for the foreseeable future. "As long as I enjoy what I am doing, I do not want to retire." □

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



Debbie Bonner

Title: Communications and Special Events Director, Animal Protective League
Education: B.A. in broadcast communication from Otterbein College
Family: Husband - Tom; Daughter - Elizabeth

Favorites -

Hobby: Cooking
Author: George R.R. Martin
Restaurant: Mimosa

Tidbits -

Loves horseback riding and hopes to go on a riding tour of Ireland or Scotland
Has six cats and three dogs
Sings and plays the keyboard



Going back to school was the best decision I ever made. It's taken me awhile, but I'm just about to reach my goal of a college degree. I'm not going to kid you. It's not easy. You need support. I found that support at Lincoln Land Community College. Online and evening classes really fit my schedule. People asked me, "How far along are you? Keep going! You're almost there!" I knew a lot of others had done it, and I could too. Is it your time? If so, Lincoln Land Community College is the place.

Spring semester begins Jan. 10.



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Professional Women's Calendar of Events

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Women Entrepreneurs of Central Illinois

WE-CI will hold its monthly meeting on Wednesday, January 14th, from 5:30-7:30 pm at Lake Pointe Grill, Program Topic: IDEA FEST. Bring your topics for future programs. Help provide our members with timely and relevant programs. The costs for the meeting is \$20 for members, \$10 for guests, and \$25 for walk-ins. Contact Cherrill Lewis at 622-0189 for more information or reservations@we-ci.org.

Illinois Women in Leadership (IWIL)

IWIL will hold its monthly luncheon from 11:30 to 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 15th at the Sangamo Club. Steve Thomas will be our speaker and he will discuss how to make the word a better place in spite of "weird" people. Part of his mission... Make work culture fun! The cost for members (early registration) is \$18. Non-members and walk-ins are \$23. Reservation forms are available at www.iwil.biz.

Association for Women in Communications

AWC will hold a lunch meeting on Wednesday, January 14 from 11:30-1 p.m. at the Sangamo Club. Victoria Ringer from Downtown Springfield, Inc. will discuss how they market the downtown area and share tips of the trade. Members are \$17, guests are \$22, students \$11. RSVP to programs@awcspringfield.org.



To have your event added to the Women's Calendar of Events, Please fax your information to (217) 753-2281 or e-mail to info@springfieldbusinessjournal.com





Enjoying the Ride...

If life is a highway for Rodney Pate, the journey wouldn't be complete without his caring wife, Linda. Rodney was unexpectedly surprised when he met his match at a friend's surprise party. The couple has been married for 26 years and enjoy living in Springfield close to their families and friends.

In her work life, Linda works as a receptionist at Heritage Health Nursing Home. Since she is the first and last person visitors see, she appreciates getting to know the families as they come to see their loved ones.

After working as a truck driver for eight years, Rodney started his own business, Pate Transportation. He is happy to have been in business for six years and as a small business owner, he has valued banking with First Bankers Trust Company.

When he needed a commercial loan for his first 18-wheeler, he was referred to Greg Curl and is happy to say, "Greg gave me a chance

when I don't think anyone else would have. He gets all the information he needs, but he puts you at ease. He's a great guy. I think the world of him!" As a customer for six years now he adds, "All the people there, all the tellers, they are really nice. They make you feel like you're a part of the little group!"

As someone who understands the importance of customer care, when Linda visits the bank she appreciates that, "You walk in the door and everybody immediately acknowledges you and says hi, which is really nice."

Looking to the future, the Pates are thinking of refinancing their home, and Rodney is pleased to say, "When I do that, I'm going to First Bankers Trust because they know me and trust me."

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Sebastian's Hideout and Stella Blue close doors

By Job Conger

"When you are a business owner, life is all about numbers," Chris Hanken said recently. "With Sebastian's it was a matter of numbers, and the numbers didn't work."

The demise of Sebastian's Hideout and Stella Blue (221 S. Fifth Street in downtown Springfield) marks the culmination of a series of events that began about five years ago, giving credence to rumors that had been circulating in recent months. "The doors will close on Dec. 20, but we expect the final disposition of the property to carry into the first quarter of 2015," explained co-owner Vic Lanzotti, "and that will be the end."

As of Dec. 15, according to Lanzotti, he and Hanken had met with an auction house, but had made no formal deal. The property may be sold as a whole – including the business, contents and name – or these elements could all be sold separately. "Until we close a deal with the auction house, we're considering any offer made by anyone," Lanzotti said.

The business had been actively listed for sale for the past five years. When a buyer came near to closing on a deal recently but backed out, it was the last straw. At that time, several other expenses were coming due, such as health department inspections and gaming licensing fees. "We didn't want to update all of that when there was little likelihood of our operating the restaurant and bar for another year," Lanzotti explained.

Lanzotti and Hanken have long wanted to go into business on the west side of Springfield, and they had increasingly found the cost of continuing with Sebastian's and Stella Blue to be an impediment to that goal. "It wasn't that we were unhappy downtown, or that the city of Springfield was being unfair to us," said Lanzotti. "There were never problems with our employees or our customers. It was a numbers thing. The numbers were not permitting us to act on strategic goals, so we decided to close." The pair report they have been in talks with a west side developer for about a year. "We have a small group of spots that we're looking at, but we could not commit to anything without closing one door so we could open a new one," said Lanzotti.

Hanken and Lanzotti also own Lake Pointe Grill, Mowie's Cue and Public House 29, which opened last September in Rochester, all of which will be accepting Sebastian's and Stella Blue gift certificates.

"We are working to find employment for all key people at Sebastian's," Hankin said. "Our key people have been offered positions at Lake Pointe Grill and Public House 29. If they want to pursue other directions we've let them know we will make phone calls on their behalf. Some of them have been with us for 12 years. These are good people." □

Job Conger can be reached at 544-6122 or writer@eosinc.com



Owners Vic Lanzotti and Chris Hanken closed Sebastian's on the 20th.

PHOTO BY JOB CONGER



LLCC Foundation Endowment Fund donor Ryan Murphy (cap in hand) and former teammates.

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Leading the Way

Fuhrmann Engineering looks at the big picture

By Job Conger

Gina Fuhrmann, P.E., filed papers that launched Fuhrmann Engineering Inc. (FEI) in 2002 and opened for business in 2003. "I left a terrific company, R.C. Engineers, that was about to close. The principals were getting ready to retire, with their golden parachutes, and the timing was right. What really drove me were the incentives offered to women-owned businesses. It certainly has been good for women-owned companies." Fuhrmann launched the company from her home's garage and her first employee was Michael D. Curtiss, PLS, who had worked with her at R.C. Today, he is vice president.

"We initially focused on civil design, engineering, land surveying and construction observation. Today we still offer those services," Fuhrmann explained. "Our first priority was always to establish



From front to back: Gina Fuhrmann, P.E., President, Fuhrmann Engineering, Inc., Jay Jessen, P.E., Senior Project Engineer, Michael D. Curtis, PLS, Vice President

our base and expand from there. We've been expanding ever since." Fuhrmann and team moved into their current home, formerly occupied by doctors' offices, in 2009. The site of the home base office of 2,300 square feet, includes smaller

adjacent structures on the property. Their Chicago office opened in 2010 and a Peoria office two years later. Today, the firm employs 39 at the home office and a total of 47 statewide. "We're always interested in another viable market niche that's different from everybody else," Fuhrmann explained. "We now do traffic counts throughout the state of Illinois. That's a perpetual project. We are looking to get into mechanical, electric and plumbing work."

The nationwide recession of 2008 brought a re-focus of company market strategy. "The private sector and land development was especially affected," said vice president Curtis. "We had to suck it up and keep moving. We really took a hit in 2008, 2009 and 2010. The recovery has been slow coming back, very slow."

"It was clear we had to look beyond



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Springfield, for continued growth," Fuhrmann said. "We began by opening an office in Chicago first and then Peoria. Major industries and agencies that we don't have here, they have up there."

According to senior project engineer Jay Jessen, P.E., "Cities have essentially the same needs, but some have more engineers than others and some have more money than others."

"It all boils down to who's got the money," Fuhrmann said. "Chicago's got all the money. Missouri has less money for municipal projects, and St. Louis dominates that market as well. Our 'roost' begins north of I-64 and goes up to Chicago."

Springfield has a high per-capita number of engineers. "We're the state capital," Fuhrman said. "We enjoy mingling with the right people at the right time. We have to play that game." Another factor in the firm's putting down roots where they germinated was the livability of Springfield. "All of us at this table were born and raised here," she said. "We're comfortable, we like living here."

An engineer magically transported from FEI in 2003 to the same firm in 2014 probably wouldn't know where to begin work. "All the bulk and bother of drawings on mylar sheets is history," Jessen explained. "We're 100 percent paperless. Everything is on CDs. The technology is constantly evolving."

"Everybody here has some kind of advanced education; even the technicians and survey crews," Curtis said. "We are literally on call. Twelve-hour days are common and the guys love it."

FEI is particularly happy to be part of the survey work for the Illinois high speed rail project as well as the new 50 mile Iliana Corridor that will connect Interstate 55 near Wilmington, Illinois, to Interstate 65 near Lowell, Indiana. Completion of Phase II of that project was announced Dec. 10 this year. The firm is also involved with surveying for a joint-venture team that is contracted for the Chicago Tollway.

"Some of these projects are so large that one firm couldn't take it on. As a team, we check each others' work and contribute fresh outside expertise that makes for greater success," Curtis said. "Rather than giving the entire contract to one firm, the approach allows more firms to be engaged. We employ local surveyors better acquainted with the territory when we engage a project as a team," he said. "We come in to design the intersections. Everybody works."

"More expansion of municipal work is our goal for 2015," Jessen explained, "maintenance and repairing sewers and infrastructure in central Illinois." The Springfield office is focusing on developments 45 to 60 miles around Springfield.

Fuhrmann added, "Always a goal for us is acquiring other companies and picking up niche markets that we don't already have. We're always out there looking, and that's one reason for our success. The complacent company is the company that's on the wane." □

Job Conger can be reached at 544-6122 or writer@eosinc.com

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An engineering firm with a difference

By Teresa Paul



Lori Quigg, president and CEO of Quigg Engineering

PHOTO COURTESY OF QUIGG ENGINEERING

Quigg Engineering was started in Jacksonville, Illinois in 2006 by Lori Quigg (professional engineer, president and CEO) and Rebecca Stocker (vice president and administrative principal). The firm has since moved its main office to Springfield.

Engineering is a predominantly male-oriented field but Quigg's goal in starting her own engineering firm was to provide good quality work in a timely fashion within budget.

"The most important thing is to take care of the client," Quigg said. Her father had taught her honest work for honest pay and this is the philosophy behind Quigg Engineering.

Quigg began her career with the Illinois Department of Transportation and after

eight years there she spent another eight working for engineering consultants before starting her own company.

In the following eight and half years, Quigg Engineering has grown from two women to a staff of 60 people, all in the face of a struggling economy.

Quigg had admired Stocker's work as a retail manager of Maurice's, a clothing store in Jacksonville, and asked Stocker to join her.

"The first year we started we did not have any business yet," Stocker said. "Lori pursued the entire state of Illinois, IDOT and consultants. I had a day off during the week and spent that day helping her with portfolios and with her schedule in Jacksonville before she could travel." Stocker continued in her position at Maurice's until 2007.

"Lori knew who to contact and how to promote our services," Stocker said. "We proved to have great quality, pride in our employees and the work we do."

"In the beginning we all wore a lot of hats," Stocker said. "Since then we have added employees and our positions are more defined. We have been very fortunate to find the right people for the right positions."

"I have to give credit to the state of Illinois for our growth and the success of our company," Quigg said.



Box culvert drainage project by Quigg Engineering.

PHOTO COURTESY OF QUIGG ENGINEERING

"The Illinois Department of Transportation and the state of Illinois have been more proactive in the promotion and help of women and minorities than other states in the country," Quigg said. "They are very proactive for disadvantaged

business enterprises whether it is female owned or minority owned businesses. Their percentages in terms of goals are high compared to other states. That has helped us tremendously."

"We would like to continue our growth

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Quigg employees inspect a super structure span bridge.

PHOTO COURTESY OF QUIGG ENGINEERING

on the aggressive side if we can," Quigg said.

Quigg Engineering has offices in Springfield, Jacksonville, east Peoria, Bolingbrook in Illinois as well as offices in Iowa and Florida.

The main work of Quigg Engineering is civil engineering but their services also include survey work, environmental and local construction inspections as well as work for municipalities.

"We serve local municipalities like Sherman that we are trying to approve, designing state routes, county routes, interchanges and intersections, surveys and plat work," Quigg said. "We do surveys for individuals and homeowners as well."

"We will do construction inspection for the high speed rail in Springfield," Quigg said. "We do a great deal of interstate design work for the city of Springfield with traffic signal upgrades. We will be doing environmental permitting and environmental reports."

Quigg Engineering dedicated some survey work to the Lincoln Tomb and was thanked with a plaque for the work done for the project for the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's burial.

"These are exciting things that keep work interesting and give us a sense of pride," Quigg said.

"We are well-rounded," Quigg said. "We design bridges, pump stations and conduct hydraulic reports to analyze the drainage. I have a very well rounded group of individuals. God has blessed us in that regard to have the success that we have had and the strength of our teams."

"We also have contracts where we help other minority firms and contractors," Quigg said. "We do specialty classes for erosion control and pavement design. We also conduct classes with the Native American tribes out west."

"We do work on the high speed rail throughout Illinois which is exciting," Quigg said. "The high speed rail will be coming through Springfield shortly. In the next two years IDOT will be constructing high speed rail in Springfield and we will be working with them on the project."

Helping the younger generation

"Our company wants to inspire the younger generation to become engineers," Quigg said. "There is a real need for them right now. There are not a lot of civil engineers graduating at this time. Increasing the awareness to the field of science to our youth and to women is important."

"Engineers work in infrastructure and making sure that everything is in place for

people to go to work. It is an important factor of the state and the community to have a strong infrastructure. Our staff at our company is strong and we are on the lookout for new people," she continued.

In 2011 Quigg Engineering was voted the IDOT Engineering Firm of the Year for the state of Illinois.

Quigg said her company wants to inspire the youth to get involved in the math and the science so they can become engineers. Quigg Engineering hires interns and seasonal help during the summers when they have construction inspections.

"We do our share of exposing others to the field of engineering," Quigg said. "Even though the economy is at a downturn, consultants are on the lookout for civil engineers. Even in a rough economy there still needs to be work on the infrastructure."

"There is a stigma out there that most engineers are male," Quigg said. "But if a woman out there wants to be challenged and is decent in math and science, I would definitely promote engineering because my career has been very rewarding." While engineering does remain a mostly male-dominated field, according to Quigg, "the men are very good to work with, work for and to be a part of that industry. With as proactive as Illinois is in opening the field to women, there is more opportunity for females. I have an environmentalist that is female and a couple of engineers that are female."

"I have three children," Quigg said. "I was allowed stability because I was good at what I did to be able to work between school hours. For a while I actually worked out of my house. To me, this industry is friendly to a flexible schedule."

"I think Quigg Engineering is more passionate especially about our employees - more than a male owned firm," Stocker said. "We listen better. With us being women, it encourages other women engineers to seek us out."

"We have done a lot of internships," Stocker said. "Having employees work from home, we appreciate them but it enables us to have expertise around the state and not just in Springfield to make those connections outside the office building that maybe we would not be able to do if they had to come to Springfield every day." □

Teresa Paul is a personal lines account manager in the Taylorville office for Dansig Insurance. She can be reached at 217-565-9535 or teresadawn1970@yahoo.com

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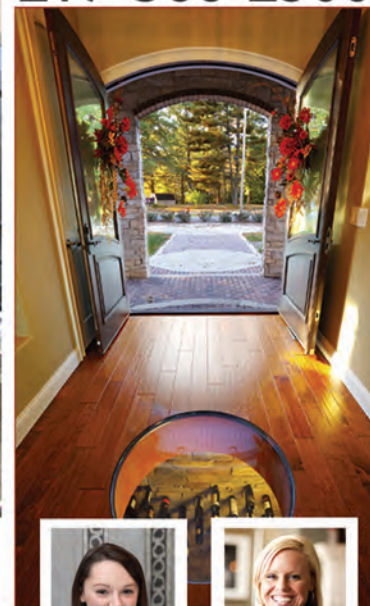
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1	Hanson Professional Services Inc. 1525 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-788-2450 217-788=2503 hanson-inc.com marketing@hanson-inc.com	57	166	Sergio Pecori, P.E., CEO; John Coombe, P.E., S.E., COO; Robert Cusick, P.E., S.E., CTO; Jo Ellen Keim, CFO, CPA	IL High-Speed Rail Chicago to St. Louis program Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement; Springfield Rail Improvements Project, Springfield's Capitol Ave. streetscape, IL Tollway Interstate 90 (Jane Addams Memorial Tollway) widening and reconstruction, Kennedy Expressway reconstruction in Chicago, Indianapolis International Airport runway and taxiway rehab., U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' worldwide railroad and roadway contract, tactical video capture systems for U.S. Marine Corps bases worldwide, commissioning for Duke University's Keohane Quad, Alaska Railroad Corp.'s Northern Rail Extension Project, U.S. Dept. of State, Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) prof. commissioning (Cx) services on diplomatic facilities projects worldwide.	1954
2	Crawford, Murphy & Tilly Inc. 2750 W. Washington St. Springfield, IL 62702	217-787-8050 217-787=4183 cmtengr.com raustin@cmtengr.com	45	127	Dan Meckes, P.E., pres., CEO; Michael Doerfler, P.E., sr. vice pres., COO; Lou Dixon, P.E., sr. vice pres.	St. Louis Park Over the Highway; CWLP Clearwell and Pump Station; Springfield Metro Sanitary District Plant Expansions, Memorial Hospital Expansion; UIS Student Union; World Sports Park, Indianapolis; Branson, MO Historic Streetscape; New Mississippi River Bridge Approach and 170 Interchange, St. Louis; Morgan Street Revitalization and Tied Arch Bridge, Rockford; Illinois Tollway Interstate 90 Expansion; New Passenger Terminal, Dubuque Regional Airport, IA; Update of Unified Airfield Design Manual for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Airfield Rehabilitation Reagan National Washington Airport; Improvements at numerous civilian and military facilities nationwide.	1946
3	Hurst-Rosche Engineers, Inc. 601 N. Bruns Lane, Suite B Springfield, IL 62702	217-787-1199 217-793=1199 hurst-rosche.com	23	53	James Roth, P.E., pres.; David Pool, AIA, RLA, vice pres.; David Kimmle, P.E., treasurer; Mark Reitz, P.E., secretary	Illinois: UIS; WIU; Central Counties Clinic; John Deere Road reconstruction, Moline; Co. Hwy. 20 over I-74 bridge, Champaign; Champaign Co. Park District; Springfield Housing Authority; Vermilion Co. Housing Authority; Bloomington Housing Authority; Ill. Community College building expansion; New Waterloo High School.	1937
4	Hutchison Engineering Inc. 1801 W. Lafayette Ave. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-7164 217-243=0468 hutchisoneng.com ghutchison@hutchisoneng.com	21	59	Gary L. Hutchison, pres.; Michael V. Meier, exec. v. pres.	Illinois: Macomb Bypass - Phase II McDonough County; I-80 Reconstruction - Phase I & II, Henry and Rocky Island Counties; I-57 / IL 50 Interchange - Phase III, Kankakee County; U.S. 50 Expressway - Phase I, Lawrence and Richland Counties; U.S. 30 Phase I, Kane and Kendall Counties; I-155 / I-74 Interchange Phase III, Tazewell County.	1945
5	Benton & Associates, Inc. 1970 West Lafayette Ave. Jacksonville, IL 62650	217-245-4146 217-245=4149 bentonassociates.com info@bentonassociates.com	14	40	Reginald H. Benton, P.E., S.E.; Jamie L. Headen, P.E.; William J. Sleeman, P.E.	Illinois: Jacksonville WTP Study, New Jacksonville WTP, Taylorville Water System improvements, New Taylorville WTP, US 67 Jerseyville Bypass, SNAWS rural water, Round Prairie rural water, Beardstown Sanitary District WWTP improvements, Jacksonville WWTP CSO, various IDOT projects, I-64 bridges - St. Clair County, I-55 Bridges - Madison County, McDonough County Transit Facility.	1970
6	Quigg Engineering Inc. 2351 S. Dirksen Pkwy. Springfield, IL 62703	217-670-0563 217-679=2204 quiggengineering.com lquigg@quiggengineering.com	13	30	Lori L. Quigg, P.E., pres.; Rebecca L. Stocker, vice pres.	IL 116 near Media - Ph III, I-90 from South Beloit Toll Plaza to Rockton Road - Ph III, I-55 and I-74 around Bloomington - Ph III, US 34 from Sandwich to Plano - Survey and Traffic Studies, I-55 & I-72 near Springfield - Ph II, I-255 & Horseshoe Lake Road - Ph II MOT, Various Survey projects with the tollway, Survey for City of Champaign, Signal Design for City of Mokena and along Harlem Ave in Palos, various Traffic Studies for District 1, Supportive Services for Technical Assistance to DBE Contractors, NPDES for IDOT and City of Belleville, Environmental Assessments for Southern Illinois Fiberoptics, Environmental assessments for high-speed rail from Chicago to STL.	2006
7	Fuhrmann Engineering, Inc. 2852 S. 11th St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-529-5577 217-529=5575 www.fuhrmann-eng.com gfuhrmann@fuhrmann-eng.com	12	39	Gina Marie Cianferri-Fuhrmann, P.E.; Michael Dean Curtis, P.L.S.; Peter Wagner, P.E., P.L.S.	Jefferson Crossing Commercial Development; IDOT Various Bicycle Projects and Pedestrian Accomodations; IDOT Phase I and Phase II design services for the replacement of US 51 over Sugar Creek in Normal, Illinois; IDOT Phase II construction services for the High Speed Rail corridor from St. Louis to Dwight, Illinois; ISHTA Phase II for proposed roadway reconstruction, MOT for I-90 Jane Addams Memorial; Centennial Park	2002
8	Hampton, Lenzini & Renwick Inc. 3085 Stevenson Drive, Suite 201 Springfield, IL 62703	217-546-3400 217-546=8116 hlrengineering.com hlrspfld@hlreng.com	8	15	Steven W. Megginson, P.E., S.E.; Michael D. Cima, P.E., S.E.	Illinois: Kane County bridge inspection and bridge management system, IDoT- D9 & D3 bridge replacements, IDOT - Cedar St. bridge evaluation, U.S. 61 bridge evaluation at Cairo, Kendall County - Eldamain Road over Fox River Phase I, Sangamon Valley trail designs, Tazewell County Manito Road over the Makinaw River Phase I & II, Will County - Briggs St. bridge.	1993
8	Cummins Engineering Corporation 615 S. Fifth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-726-8570 217-523=2312 cumminsengineering.com mike@cumminsengineering.com	8	14	Michael D. Cummins P.E., S.E., pres.; Kimberly S. Cummins, P.E.; Philip L. Koerberlein P.E.; Nicholas A. Ketchum	Restoration of the Vachel Lindsay Bridge, Sangamon Valley Trail from Centennial Park to Stuart Park in Springfield. Veterans Parkway Resurfacing, Veterans Parkway Intersection improvements (dual turn lanes) at Old Jacksonville Road and Southwest Plaza Drive, Interstate 55 Bridge Improvements near Lincoln, Sangamon County bridges on Old Jacksonville Road, Farmingdale Road, Waverly Road, Black Diamond Road, Roadway Improvements to Pleasant Plains Road and Waverly Road	1998
9	WHKS & Co. 7018 Kingsmill Court Springfield, IL 62711	217-483-9457 217-483=9458 whks.com springfield@whks.com	7	32	Fouad K. Daoud, P.E., S.E., pres., CEO; Rick G. Engstrom, C.E.T., vice pres.; Michael A. Zelinskas, P.E., vice pres.; William K. Angerman, P.E., vice pres.; Scott D. Sanford, P.E., S.E., vice pres.	Illinois: I-72 resurfacing from Chatham Rd. to Morgan County Line in Springfield, Old McCluggage truss bridge repair in Peoria, Safe Routes to School project for Illiopolis, US 20 over the Mississippi River Approaches and Local Road Improvements, IBEW Union Hall in Springfield - civil & structural, IL Route 10 over Prairie Creek bridge replacement in Logan Co., Farmington Road re-alignment in West Peoria, Pawnee Road bridge rehab, IL 84 over the Apple River bridge replacement - phase I and II, Seismic analysis for the I-70 tri-level interchange analysis near St. Louis, Cedar Street gusset plate strengthening in Peoria, Historic truss relocation in Bureau Co.	1948
9	HDR Engineering, Inc. 5201 S. Sixth St. Road Springfield, IL 62703-5143	217-585-8300 217-585=1890 hdrinc.com springfieldinfo@hdrinc.com	7	27	Matthew Cochran, Marketing; Lawrence Bellinger, Real Estate Services Section Manager	Land Acquisition, Utility Relocation, and Encroachments, including the current Chicago to St. Louis High Speed Rail Project; Freshwater and Marine Fisheries Production and Research Facilities, including Armstrong State Fish Hatchery, North Carolina; Wells Dam Hatchery, Washington State; and NOAA Cooperative Oxford Laboratory, Maryland.	1984
10	Andrews Engineering Inc. 3300 Ginger Creek Drive Springfield, IL 62711	217-787-2334 217-787=9495 andrews-eng.com marketing@andrews-eng.com	5	38	Kenneth W. Liss L.P.G pres., Douglas W. Mauntel P.E. exec. vice-pres., Bradley J. Hunsberger, L.P.G. vice-pres.	IDOT-Statewide Hazardous Contractor; IDOT-High Speed Rail corridor Carlinville to Dwight (construction inspection, health & safety, environmental); US Dept. of Veteran Affairs; US D.O.E.; multi-state landfill design, remediation compliance; Utility Ash management; RCRA, CERCLA, TSCA permits/corrective action.	1974
10	Allen Henderson & Associates, Inc. 907 S. Fourth St Springfield, IL 62703	217-544-8033 217-544-3965 markh@ahaengineers.com ahaengineers.com	5	11	Mark Henderson, P.E., S.E.; Christopher Kohlrus, P.E.; Gene Arnold, P.E., S.E	Chatham Road over Jacksonville Branch Creek, Springfield, IL; IL 116 over Kickapoo Creek, Union Pacific Railroad, and Kickapoo Creek Road, Peoria, IL; IL Route 4 over Polecat Creek, Chatham, IL; Drainage Improvements at Wabash Avenue and I-72, Springfield, IL; Concord Road over US 67/IL 104, Morgan County, IL; Curved Girder Bridge carrying IL 26 over Coffee Creek, Putnam County, IL; Central Illinois Community Blood Center, Springfield, IL; IA Fitness - White Oaks Mall, Springfield, IL; White Oaks Mall Renovation, Springfield, IL; Legacy Pointe Outlet Mall, Springfield, IL; Blessed Sacrament School Addition, Springfield, IL; Iowa Christian Academy Athletic Center, West Des Moines, IA; John Wayne Birthplace Museum, Winterset, IA; Holiday Inn Exhibition Center, Des Moines, IA; Des Moines Public Schools Aviation Facility, Des Moines, Iowa.	1976
11	Coombe - Bloxdorf, P.C. 755 South Grand Ave. W. Springfield, IL 62704	217-544-8477 217-544=8483 coombebloxdorf.com mcbdorff@coombebloxdorf.com	4	17	Mary Coombe Bloxdorf, P.E., S.E.; William Coombe, P.L.S.; Fred Coombe, P.E., S.E.	Civil/Structural Design: UIS Public Safety Building; Civil Design: Lincoln Challenge Academy, Rantoul; Mill Creek Estates Phase II, Kreston Place Subdivision, Gailey Eye Care Clinic, Springfield YMCA, Meadowbrook Road Extension Structural Design: Lincoln Tomb Receiving Vault Rehabilitation, UIUC Baseball Facilities addition, Galesburg Main Street and Seminary Overpass Structures and East Main Retaining Walls, US 34 over Henderson Creek and Il 94 over US 34 Bridge Structures	1992
12	Professional Service Industries, Inc. (PSI) 480 North St., Springfield, IL 62704	217-544-6663 217-544=6148 psiusa.com bill.pongracz@psiusa.com	3	17	William Pongracz, P.E., vice pres.; James Gerloff, P.E., branch manager	Springfield Metro Sanitary District Spring Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant, Enbridge SAX Crude Oil Pipeline, Springfield Clinic First North and Parking Ramp, St. John's Main Surgery and Patient Tower Renovation, Clinton Nuclear Power Station-Dry Cask Storage, Memorial Medical Center for Learning and Innovation, CWLP Dallman Unit 4 Coal Power Plant, Springfield High Speed Rail	1961
12	TRC Worldwide Engineering, Inc. 3200 Pleasant Run Springfield, IL 62711	217-793-2299 217-793=3311 trcww.com whuff@trcww.com	3	7	Winston Huff, CPD, LEED AP BD+C, Senior Project Manager; Robert Boellner PE, vice pres.	University of Illinois Champaign/Urbana - various projects including Housing Life Safety Improvements, Burrill Hall Laboratory Renovations, Veterinary Medicine Building Renovations, Advanced Experimental Research Building, Eastern Illinois University various projects including a new building for Center for Clean Energy Research and Education, University of Illinois in Springfield various projects including Student Housing renovations, Cooling tower replacement, Sangamon Auditorium lighting controls, Illinois State University Capen Auditorium, OLOL Replacement Hospital, Lafayette, LA, New TESCO Stores in Turkey, UK and Poland, Parking structures for Martin Army Community Hospital Fort Benning, GA and VA Hospital, Dallas, TX	1985
13	Finley Engineering 3015 Stanton Ave. Springfield, IL 62703	217-529-9362 217-529=9184 fecinc.com a.lowe@fecinc.com	2	16	Michael Boehne, CEO; Jeffrey Swan, vice pres.	Providing telecom related solutions to various market segments, including energy, municipalities and private entities.	1953
13	Martin Engineering Company 3223 S. Meadowbrook Road Springfield, IL 62711	217-698-8900 217-698=8922 martinengineeringco.com mecmail@martinengineeringco.com	2	14	Philip G. Martin, P.E., pres.; Steven R. Walker, P.L.S., vice pres.	Illinois: Springfield: Hy-Vee Grocery Store, The Outlets at Springfield, Maple Grove sanitary sewer project, Piper Glen 11th Addition, Oak Park Estates 2nd Phase, New Calvary Church at 2nd and Hazel Dell, Centennial Pointe Phase 1, Timber Creek 6th Phase, Springfield Technology Park, Savannah Pointe 4th Phase, Wabash Place, Centennial Park Place 5th Phase, CarMax, Barker Park; Chatham: Ironbridge Estates; Lincoln: The Christian Village expansion; Milford School District: New High School	1982
13	Greene & Bradford Inc. 3501 Constitution Drive Springfield, IL 62711	217-793-8844 217-793=6227 greeneandbradford.com mail@greeneandbradford.com	2	13	Joe Greene, pres.	Illinois: City of Taylorville, storm sewer project 12" to 84" sewers; IDOT, district 3, hydraulic study; South Sangamon Water Commission, water main transmission design; Village of Pawnee, water main replacement program; Buffalo Dawson Mechanicsburg sewer commission, 3 sanitary sewer pump stations.	1972
14	Environmental Management, Inc. 1154 N. Bradfordton Road Springfield, IL 62711	217-726-9468 217-726=9472 environmentalmanagementinc.net mkeebler@environmentalmanagementinc.net	1	10	Michael R. Keebler, P.E.; Julie Keebler, President	Illinois: Love's Truck Plaza, Lincoln Salem Crossing subdivision, Curry Ice and Coal, Prairie Crossing Retail, Site investigation/remediation at leaking underground storage tank sites; Phase I and II ESAs in IL and MO for largest independent gasoline retailer and Brownfields, Cairo, IL Wetlands Project	1997
14	Rapps Engineering & Applied Science, Inc. 821 S. Durkin Drive Springfield, IL 62704	217-787-2118 217-787=6641 rapps.net tlendy@rapps.net	1	7	Michael W. Rapps, P.E., pres.; Terry A. Lendy, vice pres. Operations; Marc J. Anderson, P.L.S.	Illinois: Newton Ameren power station - Jasper County, statewide landfill permits, Brownfields, LUST remediation, surveys, mining permits, hydro-geologic modeling investigations and research, real estate assessments, wetlands, water supply investigations, mold and asbestos investigations, construction inspection, NPDES permitting.	1978
15	Patrick Engineering Inc. 300 W. Edwards St., Suite 200 Springfield, IL 62704	217-391-3500 217-391=3501 patrickco.com cburger@patrickco.com	DND	13	Dan Dietzler, P.E., pres.; Jeff Schuh, P.E., senior vice pres.; Chris Burger, P.E., vice pres.; Paul Lopez, P.E., vice pres.	Amtrak site modifications; Veterans Admin metering project; Smart Energy Design Assistance Center energy efficiency studies throughout Illinois; Solar Energy assessments; Livingston County wind farm evaluations; FutureGen Alliance carbon dioxide sequester project siting and environmental assistance; Edison Mission Energy Wind Farm construction assistance; Poweron powerplant rail and infrastructure upgrades; Tazewell County landfill evaluation and design; ICG coal mine infrastructure design and subsidence monitoring.	1979



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Springfield Clinic



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Naples Municipal Airport, Naples, Florida



Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, Ontario, Canada



Jeff Sommers, president and principal architect of Square Root Architecture + Design, and his wife, Michele Sommers, who is the director of operations.

PHOTO BY MARANDA POTTERF

Building for the future

Square Root Architecture goes green, prefab for housing

By Gabe House

Jeff Sommers, the president and principal architect of Square Root Architecture, specializes in energy-efficient residential structures built in a prefabricated fashion.

He is also a realist.

"If anyone tells you it doesn't cost more to build green, then punch them in the face and walk away," Sommers said. "It doesn't have to be 50 percent more, but it costs more. Better quality always does, and that's why we try to control that cost by building offsite with modular. We can reinvest those savings in better insulation, windows and doors. Or better mechanicals."

The ultimate goal, Sommers explained, is not necessarily to save a great deal of money in the construction budget, but rather to build a better product with better materials that will perform better in the long run.

"The construction industry in the United States is at least 30 to 40 years behind where a lot of other nations in the world are, so we've got a lot of catching up to do," Sommers said. "All these homes I'm building are basically case studies and arguments for building a better way."

Sommers and his wife, Michele, who is also the operations director for Square Root Architecture, moved from Chicago to Springfield last July in order to raise their children near family. Since Sommers had worked nearly 20 years in Chicago, the majority of his work still resides there as well, necessitating commutes by train.

"We are trying to go after a few projects down here (in Springfield)," Sommers said. "I'm hoping in 2015 to have some projects being built here. I think there's actually a huge opportunity down here."

Sommers just has to change some perspectives to get that done. People are often skeptical of prefabricated housing, Sommers said, as it can have a negative



C3Prefab v3.0 is a next generation design in the suite of high-performance homes by Square Root Architecture + Design.

connotation. The notion of essentially building a home in a factory on an assembly line can seem a bit odd at first thought, but it's not a new idea. In fact, Sommers said, it's practically the norm in some foreign countries and has been for decades.

"In places like Sweden, I think they build between 90 and 95 percent of their homes as prefab," Sommers said. "Ironically, if you get something built onsite there, they look at you funny."

"It's mind-boggling to me that most manufacturing of anything out there, whether it's an iPhone or a car, is done in a quality-controlled, systematic process ... but we continue to build homes in this archaic way. We go to Home Depot and throw all these disparate pieces together."

Prefabricated housing has a number of benefits. The timeline can be drastically decreased due to the highly structured process. While the onsite contractors are busy excavating, doing concrete work and preparing the foundation, the home's

pieces – Sommers compares them to Tetris pieces – are being built in a quality-controlled factory setting to exact specifications.

Those specifications are often predicated on energy-usage estimates compiled by third-party energy modelers Sommers hires for several reasons. These models allow for proper mechanical systems to be put in place. An overly large furnace is just as inefficient as an undersized one. The usage estimates are also compared with real-world utility company rates, and once the home is complete those estimates are tested. This is perhaps the most important aspect as this data is what Sommers uses to apply for numerous certifications, from Energy Star for energy savings to the American Lung Association for indoor air quality.

"When you do an energy model you get a Home Energy Rating System (HERS) score on a level that's about 50 percent better than what the energy code requires," Sommers said. "The basic home scores at a HERS

rating of 100, and energy star qualifications start at 70-75. Ours usually score between 30 and 50 on the scale."

In addition to a positive impact on the environment through more efficient utility and resource usage, Sommers' homes are often rife with opportunities for grants and tax breaks at both the state and federal levels.

"A typical solar system for us is a two-panel solar thermal system for producing hot water and, surprisingly, hot water is a big culprit of energy usage in a home, so if you can offset that, you're doing good," Sommers said. "That system costs about \$12,000 but if you apply a 30 percent grant to it along with a 30 percent tax credit, the return on investment is pretty palatable for most people."

Dollars saved, Sommers said, is often a much greater incentive to clients than an altruistic, eco-friendly approach. That they almost always go hand-in-hand is a bonus.

A large hurdle, though, is financing. Reconciling client wish lists with the pragmatic business of dollars and cents – often controlled by financial institutions that are reticent to look at grants and tax breaks as part of the bottom line of a loan – is a tricky affair. And it's primarily what is holding Sommers back at the moment, at least in the Springfield area.

But he has a good idea of where to start. "What's interesting is the need downtown for residential housing. It's been proven by a number of studies that we need upwards of 500 to 1,000 residential units downtown. We are trying to take advantage of that. Why not build to a higher standard? So that's what we're working toward." □

Gabe House works in the lending department at United Community Bank. He can be reached at 217-787-3000 or ghouse@ucbbank.com.

Engineering a strong career

By Eric Woods



Christy Crites

Title: Senior Engineer - Water Resources, Crawford, Murphy and Tilly
Education: M.S. in Civil Engineering from Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Family: Husband – Jeremy; Children – Leo and Alex

Favorites –

Hobby: Cooking
Restaurant: Magic Kitchen
Sports team: Chicago Bears and Cubs

Tidbits –

Loves the *Bourne* movie series
Enjoys going on wine tours in southern Illinois
Collects cooking utensils

Christy Crites loves the sense of community that comes with living in Springfield. “It is a big town with a small-town feel,” she said. Having grown up in DuQuoin, Crites is familiar with small towns. “You always see a familiar face wherever you go. It is an incredibly comfortable place to live and raise a family.”

One area Crites wants to see the city improve upon is the number of activities for children. “It is getting better with the Hoogland but compared to the bigger cities we need more to do,” she said. Crites would also like to see the city get its infrastructure in place, especially as it relates to the schools. “With the perception of problems with the schools, it is hard to convince people to live in Springfield.”

Initially, Crites wanted to be a teacher. At age 17, she landed her first job selling tickets at the DuQuoin State Fair. She also worked as a restaurant hostess, but realized very early that a hospitality career was not for her. As she began college, Crites

planned to become a chemistry teacher. “My best friend talked me into engineering, so I took some classes,” she said. Crites always enjoyed math and science courses along with the application side. “I am not sure if I would have liked the theoretical and lab side of it.” When she received her bachelor’s degree, there were only three women graduating in mechanical engineering.

Growing up, Crites was heavily influenced by her father, who was a machinist. “He taught me not to be limited by my surroundings,” she said. “Nothing limits you. Always excel and do your best, and you can be anything you want.”

Crites began at Crawford, Murphy and Tilly more than 18 years ago as an engineer. Today she serves as a client liaison for the Springfield Metro Sanitary District. “Wastewater is very busy,” she said. One major endeavor that Crites currently oversees is the Sugar Creek construction project. “We started the design in 2007 and

are getting the last piece set up to finish by 2017 or 2018. This is a huge investment in a series of projects, and we are very proud.” Marketing activities and business development are other areas in which Crites is involved.

For those hoping to become engineers, Crites stresses taking the core math and science courses. She also welcomes anyone who wants to learn about the industry to come talk to her. “We always have people come by to talk with us about engineering,” she said. “I wish I’d had that opportunity. Schools are doing a better job now about talking to people about the industry.”

Crites is proud to have found a good balance between career and family life. “Being a mom is the best job I could have. Being the best mom means getting to do what I love at work as well,” she said. Crites is proud of the fact that her children actually understand what she does for a living. “Many 17- or 18-year-olds cannot say what their parents do. My son wants to work at

Crawford, Murphy and Tilly.”

Looking ahead, Crites wonders about the impact of the energy crisis and how technology will change over the next 25 years. “It is hard to fathom what the world will look like,” she says. One thing she does know is that in 10 years she will be an empty-nester, which will open more opportunities to travel. Next year her family will vacation at Yellowstone and Glacier National Park.

Crites plans to retire in her early 60s. “There needs to be opportunities for the next generation,” she said. Crites hopes to do some tutoring and introduce younger people to the engineering industry. “There are a lot of opportunities for kids, but they do not necessarily see it. Most people get into engineering because they have family already in it. I want to open opportunities for others.” □

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



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Sources: The architectural firms.
(Ranked by number of local registered architects.)

	COMPANY NAME ADDRESS CITY, STATE, ZIP	PHONE (-) FAX (=) WEBSITE (www.) EMAIL	NUMBER OF LOCAL REGISTERED ARCHITECTS	NUMBER OF LOCAL FULL-TIME/ EMPLOYEES	PRINCIPALS	NOTABLE PROJECTS	YEAR EST'D
1	FWAI Architects Inc. 1 NW Old Capitol Plaza Springfield, IL 62701	217-528-3661 217-528=4717 fwai.com admin@fwai.com	4	13	Carl Fischer, Paul Wheeler	Springfield, Ill.: Ronald McDonald House; Blessed Sacrament School Expansion, Central Illinois Community Blood Center, LLC A. Lincoln Commons, University of Illinois Springfield – various projects, H. D. Smith Corporate Campus, Sangamon County Building, Camp Lincoln – CSMS & Allied Trades, Crowne Plaza Hotel, INB Branches, St. Joseph's Home Dementia Wing, The Hope Institute – Learning Center & Master Planning, Memorial Medical Center – various clinics, Springfield Clinic – various clinics; Urbana/Champaign, Ill.: UIUC English Building Renovations, UIUC McKinley Health Center Remodel, UIUC Assembly Hall Remodel & Addition; Waukegan, Ill.: Regional Corporate Data Center; Texas: Corporate Data Center.	1976
1	Graham & Hyde Architects, Inc. 1010 Clocktower Drive Springfield, IL 62704	217-787-9380 217-793=6465 grahamandhyde.com info@grahamandhyde.com	4	6	Thomas J. Hyde, Jamie Cosgriff, Kevin Handy, Mike Zellers	Springfield, Ill.: Vachel Lindsay Elementary School; St. Agnes Church; Hoogland Center for the Arts; First United Methodist Church; Blessed Sacrament Church; Carrollton Bank; St. John's Lutheran Church expansion; Christ the King Parish Center; Cathedral of Immaculate Conception renovation; Ridgely Elementary School; Ball Charter Elementary School; Cherry Hills Baptist Church; Ben-Gil Elementary School, Gillespie, IL; Panhandle Elementary School addition, Raymond, IL; Ball-Chatham Community Schools additions and renovations; Campus improvements, Benedictine University.	1968
1	Steckel-Parker Architects, Inc. 2941 Happy Landing Drive Springfield, IL 62711	217-793-6444 217-793=5434 steckelparker.com dave@steckelparker.com	4	5	David E. Steckel	Springfield, Ill.: Brandt Consolidated offices, IL Primary Health Care Association, Central IL Kidney & Dialysis Association offices, United Community Bank - multiple facilities, Town & Country Bank - Wabash & Dirksen facilities, Group Home at The Hope Institute, Pepsi Distribution Center, West Central Bank remodeling - Beardstown, Military facilities - Sparta & Marseilles.	1964
2	Evan Lloyd Associates Inc. 1630 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-789-7011 217-789=7101 evanlloydarchitects.com tsmith@evanlloyd.com	3	15	Timothy B. Smith, Gregory T. Frazier	Springfield, Ill.: PCCC renovation and expansion, Engrained Brewery, Obed & Isaac's, Wm. Van's Coffee Shop, new Prairie State Bank, new Friar Tuck, County Market, The Outlets of Springfield, new Sangamon County Health Department, Connor Co. new distribution facility, new Illinois State Police Federal Credit Union, State Capitol renovation, Waterways Building renovation, 4th Dist. Appellate Court, McGladrey & Pullen building renovation; Jacksonville, Ill.: New Pathway Services facility, Sherman, Ill.: New Illini Bank and Community Center. Maryville, IL: First Baptist Church additions; Eldorado, IL: Legence Bank corporate office building.	1969
2	Melotte Morse Leonatti Parker, Ltd. 213 1/2 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62701	217-789-9515 217-789=9518 mmlpltd.com architect@mmlpltd.com	3	10	Ralls C. Melotte, David J. Leonatti, T. David Parker	Illinois: Shelby County Court House Restoration and Environmental Consulting, Shelbyville; New Matheny/Withrow Elementary School, Springfield, Fifth Street Renaissance Veterans' Shelter; 1st Presbyterian Church Renovation & Geothermal Upgrade, Jacksonville and New Elevator/Towers, Petersburg and Jacksonville; Urban Park mold remediation / renovation of 24 apartments, Champaign; Multiple Schools Upgrades, Springfield District 186; Hathaway Homes, Taylorville and Stonington; Glenwood Elementary School additions, Chatham.	1978
2	J.H. Petty and Associates, Ltd. Architects 2920 Chatham Road, Suite B Springfield, IL 62704	217-787-2844 217-787=2855 jhp@jhpa.biz	3	8	Joseph H. Petty	Jr/high school addition for Virginia CUSD No. 64; admin addition for Thompsonville CUSD No. 174; Sangamon County Farm Bureau Headquarters; County Market Store, Pittsfield, Ill.; Remodel of Illinois Municipal League; Mid America Advertising Office Building; Cass County Court House Addition, Virginia, Ill.; Re-roof Pike County Court House, Pittsfield, Ill.; Classroom addition for West Lincoln Broadwell Middle School, Lincoln, Ill.	1994
3	Allied Design Consultants, Inc. 405 1/2 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62701	217-522-3355 217-522=5570 alliedarch.com alliedsn@fgi.net	2	7	Bruce M. Bollero, Todd R. Hannah	Illinois: John F. Kennedey Middle School, Spring Valley; Public Library, Rushville; New Berlin Elementary School, New Berlin; Eureka School assitions; ISU, LLCC, UIS and SIU renovation projects; Security Bank renovations and new construction; Casey-Westfield High School addition and renovations; Springfield School District 186 renovation projects.	1984
3	Ferry & Associates Architects 217 S. Seventh St. Springfield, IL 62701	217-522-4100 217-522=4122 ferryarchitects.com bferry@ferryarchitects.com	2	5	Donald E. Ferry, Bruce S. Ferry	Springfield, Ill.: Lewis Memorial Christian Village, various projects; Hickory Point Village, 47 bed and additional 17 bed additions; Washington Christian Village study; Springfield Developmental Center, interior renovation; PNC Bank, interior/exterior remodeling; Henson Robinson Zoo, new quarantine building; Old State Capitol, drum restoration; Howlett Building, historic plaster repair in Hall of Flags; Illinois Hospital Association, interior renovations.	1961
3	Walton & Associates Architects, P.C. 1227 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-544-5888 217-544=1851 waltonarchitects.com don@thewaltongroup.com	2	5	Don R. Walton, David McDow	Springfield, Ill.: Erin's Pavilion, Southwind Park, Springfield Park District; Jacksonville, Ill.: Illinois College - misc. projects; Georgetown, Ill.: First United Methodist Church, master planning; Danville, Ill.: Danville Area Community College - Mary Miller addition and remodeling, Hoopeston Classroom Facility, Campus Architect; Lakeview College of Nursing addition and remodeling, Lakeview College of Nursing, Charleston and Danville.	1990
3	Renaissance Architects Inc. 201 E. Adams St., Suite 1B Springfield, IL 62701	217-753-1585 217-753=1593 renarc@renarc.net	2	5	Larry C. Quenette	Lincoln Depot Restoration and Adaptive Reuse, Springfield, IL; McDonough Power Cooperative Office and Warehouse Addition and Renovations, Macomb, IL; Adams Place Mixed Use Redevelopment, Quenette Development, LLC, Springfield, IL; Upgrade Elevators, Illinois State Police Central Headquarters for Capital Development Board, Springfield, IL; Community Integrated Group Homes, Elm City Center, Jacksonville, IL; Exterior Door Repair & Replacement, Phase 1 & 2, University of Illinois Springfield, IL.	1986
3	John Shafer & Associates 1230 S. Sixth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-744-9036 217-744=9039 shafer-arch.com john@shafer-arch.com	2	4	John Shafer	LLCC Taylorville, Illinois Education Association, Midwest Technical Institute, various locations, Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, Terry Farmer Photography, Illinois Baptist State Association, Yellowstone Shopping Center, Shelter Insurance State Headquarters, Novanis Building, Illinois Association of School Administrators, Gone for Good Document Destruction, Springfield Clinic Administrative Offices, Illinois Times	1992
3	Prather Tucker Associates Inc. 1111 S. Eighth St. Springfield, IL 62703	217-789-4800 217-789=4844 prathertucker.com mtucker@prathertucker.com	2	4	William L. Prather, Mark K. Tucker	Springfield, Ill.: Panther Creek Country Club, Panther Den renovations, new fitness facility and swimming pool upgrades and expansion; Illini Country Club, new Pro Shop and men's locker room addition, new half way house, new pool bath house, new fitness center and food service facility; Springfield School District 186, various elementary and middle school renovations; Southwest Plaza, various tenant lease space improvements and façade renovations; IBEW, new union hall and training facility; Milford, Ill.: New Junior / Senior High School; Taylorville, Ill.: Midland Bank addition.	2003



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Designing Springfield for the future

By Eric Woods



Jim Alberts has spent his whole life in the Springfield area. He enjoys the numerous opportunities to do many different things within a close area. “You do not have to travel far for theater, music, a little bit of everything,” he said. “It is a good place to live.”

There are only a few issues Alberts truly sees with Springfield, and one is the unchangeable terrain of central Illinois. “It is pretty flat land. There are no hills around,” he said. The economy is also an issue that Alberts feels touches the area locally. “Economy is a driving factor. It affects school funding and other different areas.”

Alberts has long wanted to be in the architecture field. As a child he wanted to be a landscape architect, and one of his two bachelor’s degrees was earned in the area of interior design. He has been with FWAI since 2000, starting off as an intern before taking on the role of principal and interior designer in 2002.

Along with interior design, FWAI Architects, Inc., provides services in architecture, planning, and historic restoration. The firm began in 1976 and has continued growing through the present

day. In his current role, Alberts handles all interior design projects that come into the office. Jobs from a wide variety of industries come across his desk, including health care, corporations and education. “I handle programming, space planning and design,” he said. “We also have to make sure it meets code. There are a lot of building codes out there.”

Alberts is very proud of the recent renovation at Ronald McDonald House, and has been at the forefront of several other big projects in the area, including HD Smith, Blessed Sacrament School, Memorial Medical Center and Springfield Clinic. There is no specific busy season, as Alberts admits that work is consistent, even through the holidays. “We are busy all the time,” he said. “Every day and every project is a little different. It can be challenging with schedules, especially on fast-paced projects.”

FWAI is not only focused on Springfield. The firm has numerous projects all over the country, including one in Texas for HD Smith. As it relates to the out-of-state projects, Alberts admits that his involvement includes some travel while conference calls

and emails also play a big role. “Blue Cross Blue Shield is a big client. We have projects for them in Illinois, New Mexico, Texas and Montana,” he said.

Those wanting to delve into the field of architecture and interior design need to have a passion for the work, according to Alberts. “It is not always as glamorous as you see on television,” he said. “But it can be very rewarding at the same time.”

Alberts does not like to look too far ahead into the future and instead lives one day at a time. “I do not worry too much about the future,” he said. “Everything works out the way it is supposed to.” Alberts feels he still will be working in 10 years while remaining invested in the community. He is currently on the board of directors for Leadership Springfield and is heavily involved with Westside Christian Church.

“As long as you are happy with what you are doing, it is a good thing,” he said. Alberts is very family-oriented and loves being involved in the lives of his eight nieces and nephews. □

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

Jim Alberts

Title: Principal and Interior Designer, FWAI Architects, Inc.

Education: B.A. in management from University of Illinois Springfield; B.S. in interior design from Southern Illinois University

Family: Not married, no children

Favorites -

Hobby: Cooking

Movie: *National Treasure*

Restaurant: Saputo's

Tidbits -

Collects Dickens Village figurines

Wants to travel to Italy

Favorite subject in school was English

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Todd Green, owner of Green Family Stores, is shown here outside his office at the Green Mazda dealership on South Sixth Street.

PHOTOS BY GINNY LEE

Todd Green believes in giving back to his community, to his customers and to his employees. In particular, he truly cares about the people who work for him. If you make an investment in your employees, it pays off. "I'm pretty fortunate," said Green. "I have really great people working for me."

"My staff is very loyal," he continued. Earl Lyons, parts manager, has been with Green Family Stores since 1983.

General manager Tim Nice has been with the company six years. "This is an easy place to work," he said. "Todd stays out of our way and lets us do our duties."

Green empowers his employees to make decisions. It's working. "I wouldn't be sitting here if I wasn't doing something right," he said.

Green Family Stores owns or has part ownership in 11 dealerships, including dealerships in Davenport, Iowa;

Jacksonville; Moline; Peoria and five in the Springfield area. The company employs about 590 employees; about 310 work in the Springfield stores.

Green was born into the car business. He was born in 1959 on the day the first Chevy Corvair was released. His dad owned a Chevy dealership in Monmouth. His philosophy was: It's not about the cars, it's about the people. That philosophy has stayed with Todd.

In 1983, he purchased his first Toyota store in Springfield. "That's where it started," said Green. Up until 2005, the Green family focused on dealerships. The company started Green Family Insurance in 2013 and purchased The Gold Center, Illinois Certified Testing and The Club at the Strand in Naples, Florida in 2014.

Future plans include acquiring more stores and building new ones. He also plans

on purchasing several more golf course communities. Green said people often ask him if he wants to own every store in town. "If you do a great job with your customers, why wouldn't you?" said Green.

Green started the Green Family Charitable Foundation and every month writes checks to local not-for-profit organizations. He writes an average of five checks a month, depending on the needs of the community.

Among the organizations he supports are: The Matthew Project, Catholic Charities, Salvation Army, Sparc, Boys and Girls Club, St. John's Hospital and youth football. "It gives me a lot of pleasure," said Green.

During the course of preparing this story, Todd Green casually asked our reporter to name their favorite charity. The reporter's choice was the Animal Protective League. At the end of the interview, Green

handed our writer a sizeable check made out to the APL.

Rachael Buraski, director of marketing, said Green also calls the schools every year to see how many kids need coats. "He doesn't want any kid to be cold," she said. "If he sees a cold kid, he takes care of them." This year he purchased almost 800 coats.

Buraski said the company's number one priority is to take great care of the customer before and after the sale. To do this, you need happy employees who genuinely love what they do.

Twenty-six-year-old service advisor Colin Liss has been with the Green Family Stores for six years. He came in one day with his mom, Susan, who wanted to buy a car. One of the sales people asked him if he would like to work there.

"It seemed like a good fit," said Liss, who loves the work environment. "Everyone is



Mike Quimby and part of his staff at Green Hyundai at 1200 S. Dirksen Parkway. Green Hyundai has more annual sales than any other Hyundai dealer in the central U.S.



The westernmost Green auto dealership on Wabash Avenue is Green Nissan at 4801 Wabash.

treated really well.

"The guy in that office is extremely generous," he continued. The other day Liss was doing an oil change for a regular customer and asked how she was doing. She said not very good. She was filling out a stack of cards. It turned out she had lost someone in a car accident. Liss gave her a \$50 gift card to Bella Milano and took \$50 off her bill.

"I would never be able to do that if I did not have people above me empowering me," said Liss.

"It's truly about the employees," said Green. From going to Cardinals games to taking the technicians out to dinner, he wants his employees to feel as if they are part of something great.

"Employees have to trust in each other," said Green. He doesn't micromanage;

everyone is free to do their job. "We all trust each other to be honorable."

Every year the company hosts an employee holiday party with food, drinks and prizes. Employees have the chance to win prizes or cash ranging from \$25 to \$500. "In 2013, we gave away more than \$250,000 in cash and prizes," said Buraski.

Among other programs offered to employees are the chance to buy a computer

at a discount and a quit smoking program that pays them \$1,000 if, at the end of one year, they have quit smoking. There is also an onsite workout facility.

Green said his favorite day of the week is Monday because he can't wait to get back to work. Building relationships within the community and interacting with customers and his employees are his golf game.

"We are central Illinois," said Green. □



CountyMarket



Chatham store manager Shannon McAuley and part of his County Market crew.

PHOTOS BY GINNY LEE

The key to Niemann Foods' success is its associate owners. Everyone is family, and this tone is set by Rich Niemann, Sr., company chairman. Niemann Foods, parent company to County Market, is a third-generation, independently operated, family-owned business.

"We would not be able to do what we do without our dedicated associate owners," said Rich Niemann, Jr., president and CEO. "That's what sets us apart," he said.

While the company has been sharing profits with its associates for 60 years, it formally became an ESOP company 17 or 18 years ago. ESOP stands for employee stock ownership plan. "This is the best thing we ever did," said Niemann.

Gerry Kettler, director of consumer affairs, was humbled for County Market to be

recognized as one of the Best Places to Work in Springfield. "We work hard every day," he said. "Our team delivers for our customers. We appreciate that."

Springfield is central to the company's business. It opened its first County Market store here in 1986 on Veterans Parkway. Its newest store at Second and Carpenter is typical of the stores the company is building today.

The Second and Carpenter store was designed to meet changing customer tastes and needs. "We've been through a tough period," said Niemann. Families are worried about how to feed their families but at the same time want new recipes and products. "Our associates provide that knowledge."

Niemann Foods owns 105 retail stores. County Market stores are only one part

of the company's business empire. It also owns Save-A-Lot grocery stores, Harvest Market convenience stores, Pet Supplies Place stores and Ace Hardware stores. It is planning to open new locations in Decatur and Champaign next year.

The company employs slightly more than 5,000 associates; about 950 work in the Springfield area. It operates 11 stores in Springfield and the surrounding area that includes Auburn, Chatham, Girard, Petersburg and Sherman. There are four County Market stores and a Save-A-Lot store in Springfield.

"Retail is very detail-oriented," said Niemann. "It gives younger people the chance to get their legs under them." Associates have the opportunity to stay and advance within the company as long as they

are willing to take on responsibility. "It's our responsibility to provide jobs for entry-level persons," he said.

The grocery business is always in a state of evolution. "It's not the same as it was 30 years ago," said Niemann. "We have to be on top of that." The associates know what the customers' needs are and they tell the company how to meet those needs. "We want to make people happy," he said.

"We appreciate our Springfield customers," continued Niemann. "This is a great area to do business." The company has a lot invested here.

Niemann Foods believes in giving back to the community and established the Niemann Foods Foundation. This year the Springfield stores filled over 4,000 bags with groceries during the Fall Harvest promotion to donate



The Chatham County Market store has been in business for the past seven years.



Store manager Shannon McAuley is a large part of why Chatham's County Market is a Best Place to Work, according to employees.

to the Salvation Army. "It's important to be involved in the community you do business in," said Niemann.

Niemann and Kettler acknowledge that this award reflects largely on the associates. "It's all about them," said Niemann. "We're only as good as the last customer at the check stand." It is the associates who have constant interaction with the customers; everything revolves around customer service.

Amy Johnson works at the Chatham County Market. As she wrote on her nomination form, she loves that Niemann

Foods still dedicates itself to providing the "family-owned grocery store" feel, not only to customers, but to associates as well.

As she wrote, associates are welcomed into a fair and friendly atmosphere which promotes the opportunity for personal growth. One great opportunity offered to associates is the chance to be an owner. Profit-sharing gives the associates a say in the company. The associates are a family – a team – who work together to provide excellent service to each other, the company and customers.

The company has an annual get-together

in Springfield for its associate owners. "Everyone comes in for a day and we share information about the year before," said Niemann. Associates are recognized for years of service and an award is given out for top customer service provider. "There's a lot of camaraderie."

"We have many associates who have been with Niemann Foods since we entered the Springfield market," said Kettler. "Some of the people who work in our Springfield-area stores have been with the company long before we opened a store in Springfield."

"We give out a lot of 30-, 35- and 40-year awards," said Niemann. On the opposite end of the scale, the company has a lot of high school and college students who work for a season and then go away to school. "We have a variety of long- and short-term employees."

The stores send out a weekly email that recognizes special contributions by associates. "It's a great spot to be recognized," said Niemann.

"If we take care of our associates, they take care of our customers," he added. □



A portion of the Springfield Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company staff under the company motto.

PHOTOS BY GINNY LEE

John Faloon, president of Springfield Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company, understands hard work. He started out driving a beer truck when he was 18 years old. He comes in at 4 a.m. when the route drivers start their day. "It's important to create a work environment where the route drivers see management is here to support them," he said.

Route supervisor Larry Patterson has been with the company for 29 years. He ran a route for 15 years. The company has taken good care of him. "They're pretty good people to work for," he said.

This commitment is why employees nominated Springfield Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company as one of the Best Places to Work

in Springfield. Faloon was quite taken aback at the nomination. "I am so humbled," he said. "It's such an honor."

Faloon is quick to point out the importance of his employees. "This is very physical work," he said. "It takes the efforts of a whole team to do this. It's really exciting."

A fourth-generation, family-owned business, the company has been in the Vecchie family since 1941 and currently employs 75 people. Faloon started working here as a bulk manager and took over the reins about 12 years ago.

"We're nothing more than stewards of something created before us," said Faloon. "It's our job to get the next generation ready."

His son is a route driver.

Executive assistant Eileen White has been with the company for 10 years. "There are so many things to love about working here," she said. "It's hard to begin." She loves learning the business and being involved in business decisions. Employees are not just assigned a task to do. "Everyone is down to earth," she said. She's proud to work here. "It's a great product."

Monica Gibson has been the office coordinator for eight years. "I like working here because it's locally owned," she said. "I enjoy the people I work with. Everyone's close and we all know each other. It's like family."

The company outgrew its Cook Street

facility and moved into a brand new one on Singer Avenue two years ago. "It was important for us and the community to stay on the east side," said Faloon. Everybody is proud of the new facility. When people walk through it, they comment that it's the cleanest place they've ever seen. If someone sees a piece of paper lying on the floor, they pick it up.

He acknowledges that it's not the building; it's the people. He strives to create a friendly atmosphere for his employees. The staff is very close-knit. "Everyone treats each other with respect," said Faloon. The employees are proud to be associated with Pepsi.

The company fosters an open-door policy from the corner office to the warehouse



The Pepsi building at 1900 Singer Ave. is two years old.



John Faloon started at Pepsi driving a truck and is now CEO of the Springfield operation.

receiving office. Everyone is more than just an employee; they are treated as part of what makes this company successful.

Office associate Kimberly Dowllar has been with the company two years. Coming from a big corporation, it was a change to come work where everyone was warm and welcoming and you know who you work for. "I hit the jackpot," she said.

Three employees have been with the company for 38 years: Alan Bernahl, route supervisor; Ivan Fink, service technician; and Kevin Geist, warehouseman. Together the management team has more than 100

years of experience. "It's unheard of to have people with that tenure," said Faloon.

The company promotes employee health and wellness. There is a workout room that is open to employees and their spouses. "It gets used a lot," said Faloon, who admits he was initially nervous about making that kind of investment. The company also offers free flu shots and health screenings.

The company's major focus is on its employees and their families. Family members are always welcome. "The kids get really excited," said Faloon. "If you care about your people, they'll care about you.

Everyone at Pepsi is family."

The company sponsors little league teams, softball teams and other types of youth athletics. "If someone's kid is on a ball team, it becomes a Pepsi team," said Faloon. "It's important to me if it's important to them."

His wife, Shawn, puts together baby baskets for new moms. Each basket contains children's books, baby bibs and overalls embroidered with the Pepsi logo.

Faloon believes in giving back to the community. "We've been here for four generations," he said. "We're not going to pack up and move." Each week he receives

a folder filled with donation requests. While he can't help everyone, he tries to help as many as he can.

His favorite program is Sangamon CEO, a business training program for high school seniors. "I love it," said Faloon. "It is the greatest program." He sees it as a great thing for the community. One day he hopes to see a graduate of the program establish a business in Springfield and have it be named Best Place to Work.

Pride, passion and performance are the qualities that set the Springfield Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company apart. □



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

2008 AIG American General

AIG offers an assortment of unique benefits such as a mentoring program, paid volunteer time, a subsidized on-site cafeteria, tuition reimbursement and more. AIG also encourages the overall health and wellness of its employees with a comprehensive fitness program.



2008 Crawford, Murphy & Tilly, Inc.

CMT is focused on the Continuous Improvement Initiative, a company-wide quality improvement program, that encourages employees in all units to work together for a more efficient work process. As Continuous Improvement Initiative projects are completed, teams are recognized and rewarded by management.

2008 H. D. Smith Wholesale Drug Company

H.D. Smith continues to grow as one of the nation's largest full-line, full-service wholesale drug companies serving retail, hospital, and institutional pharmacies. The company's philosophy remains centered around staying close to the employees and retaining a small, family-oriented company culture.



2009 Hanson Professional Services, Inc.

Hanson is committed to a culture that helps their employees develop personally and professionally. Training, mentoring, coaching and sharing are all hallmarks of Hanson's employee-owned philosophy. Their focus on people means they offer flexible work arrangements, encourage open communication, and foster a team-oriented environment.

2009 Horace Mann

In return for the dedication employees show to the community, clients, and coworkers, Horace Mann offers numerous benefits, including tuition reimbursement, a flexible work week, and a company wellness program. Horace Mann has also implemented a variety of employee recognition programs.

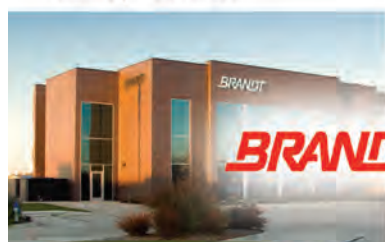


2009 Sikich LLP

Sikich offices are "open door" facilities where top level management strives to always be inviting and encouraging. Their diverse and friendly environment fosters learning, creativity, and the passion to grow as a professional. Decisions are frequently made in a team setting where the views and ideas of both management and staff are given consideration.

2009 Springfield Electric Supply Company

Springfield Electric offers employees the chance to work in a team environment with great people who are dedicated to satisfying customers' needs. Springfield Electric encourages community involvement; employees volunteer with a number of charitable organizations, mentor school children, and provide Christmas gifts for needy families.



2010 Brandt Consolidated

The Brandt culture supports real people core values and rewards forward thinking in an environment that feels more like an extended family than a corporation. Brandt is committed to promoting communication, self expression, and encouraging employees to reach their fullest potential.

2010 Lincoln Land Community College

Lincoln Land Community College (LLCC) considers its employees as its greatest asset. LLCC offers a tuition reimbursement program that extends to immediate family and a unique "sick bank" for employees requiring additional time off. While LLCC offers competitive employee benefits, staff members feel most rewarded by the educational opportunities provided for students.



2010 Orthopedic Center of Illinois

OCI is dedicated to making all employees feel like part of the family by fostering a team based work environment in a state of the art facility. They offer flexible scheduling and employee recognition programs. OCI strives to offer employees a rewarding place to work by allowing them opportunities to give back to the community through many charitable organizations.

2011 BJ Salons Inc.

At BJ Salons, they feel education is the secret to their success. Owners, John and Gail Lorenzini, make company paid education and training a top priority to ensure all employees stay current in the latest trends and techniques. BJ Salon is also dedicated to helping their employees achieve a work-life balance by offering flexible work arrangements.





2011 M.J. Kellner Foodservice

Bill and Julie Kellner, owners of M.J. Kellner Foodservice, embrace the philosophy of treating employees like family. They make sure that every decision is made with the big picture in mind so that employees are looked after while keeping the business strong. The company recognizes and rewards employees by acknowledging birthdays, holding holiday parties and monthly company luncheons.

2011 Springfield Clinic

Springfield Clinic is in the business of caring for people, patients and employees alike. Their Commitment to Quality (CTQ) encourages employees to go above and beyond to enhance the patient experience. Springfield Clinic places a high priority on employee recognition. Employees are recognized with monthly "Employee Excellence Awards" and an "Employee of the Year Award".



2012 Express Employment Professionals

Express Employment Professionals values community involvement by establishing a philanthropic committee which designates funds to a variety of causes through the corporate giving program. This enables employees to help communities, organizations and individuals succeed on both an international and local level.

2012 & 2013 St. John's Hospital

St. John's Hospital believes that the power of people makes the difference in patient care. They strive to create a warm, family-oriented work atmosphere in order to provide the best possible care for patients. St. John's Hospital also provides the staff with the latest tools to deliver excellent care in professional and nurturing work environment.



2012 Systemax Corporation

Systemax prides itself on its reputation for quality, dependability, and knowledgeable service. The staff is encouraged to work with management daily to create a better customer experience. Systemax promotes a professional and fun work environment to encourage employee commitment to excellent customer service one solution at a time.

2013 Kerber, Eck & Braechel LLP

Kerber, Eck & Braeckel operates under 21 partners and principal owners and includes more than 130 professionals. Although KEB focuses primarily on public accounting and management consultant services, it offers a wide range of other products to its clients including, but not limited to, information technology, retirement planning and even investment planning services.



2013 Sacred Heart-Griffin

Sacred Heart-Griffin's inception came from the merger of Sacred Heart Academy and Griffin High in 1988. In that time, much has changed. The school has expanded with classroom additions, facility renovation and even a new multipurpose athletics stadium. But the core principle, the marrying of academic pursuit with a literal religious adherence, remains the same.

2012 & 2013 St. John's Hospital

St. John's Hospital believes that the power of people makes the difference in patient care. They strive to create a warm, family-oriented work atmosphere in order to provide the best possible care for patients. St. John's Hospital also provides the staff with the latest tools to deliver excellent care in professional and nurturing work environment.



2014 Levi, Ray & Shoup, Inc.

Levi, Ray & Shoup (LRS) cares deeply for the community, but also for its employees. They donate to a different charity each week and regularly give employees appreciation gifts. LRS has a full, on-site gym for its employees and their families to use that is accessible 24 hours a day and even cater parties for employees to spend time together outside of the workplace.

2014 Prairie Eye Center

At Prairie Eye Center employees are given time off to donate eye services to charity and to assist low-income patients at SIU School of Medicine. They are also encouraged to support each other through hardships and celebrate with each other in times of prosperity. They offer their staff a multitude of benefits to make Prairie Eye Center a unique and fulfilling work experience.



2014 The Real Estate Group

The brokers at The Real Estate Group take the complicated task of purchasing a home and make it easy for the home buyer. They also donate time and resources to the community, volunteering with Springfield Sharefest to help local schools in need. The Group offers its employees flexible hours, a mentoring program, and a fun, light-hearted environment.

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Loami Macomb Palmyra, MO Pawnee Pittsfield Quincy Roodhouse Springfield Winchester
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BEST PLACES TO WORK



Josh Collins, Director of Business and Community Development for the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce and Chris Hembrough, President and CEO of the Chamber.

PHOTO BY GINNY LEE

'Guardedly optimistic' A 2015 economic outlook

By David A. Kelm

Way back in June 2009, the National Bureau of Economic Research declared the "Great Recession" over. The NBER may have failed to anticipate the Galapagos tortoise-like pace of the U.S. economy emerging from the economic downturn, but there does appear to finally be a light at the end of the long dark tunnel for Springfield and surrounding areas, at least according to a number of local business leaders. As Vice President Joe Biden might put it, the economic outlook for 2015 can be defined in one word: "guarded optimism."

As the greater metropolitan Springfield area dives headfirst into 2015, Lincoln's hometown has seen some hard-fought reductions in unemployment. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Springfield's unemployment rate topped out in February 2010 at 9.8 percent. The most recent statistics find Springfield's unemployment rate at 6.1 percent.

Chris Hembrough, President and CEO of the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce, sees the dropping unemployment rate as a positive data point in a spectrum of bright spots for 2015. "Our members are guardedly optimistic about the next year," Chris said, coining a phrase while discussing the coming Springfield economy. "We started to see development, new leases, new construction and renovations pick up the pace in mid-2014 and we believe Springfield will continue to see a quickening in the market as we move forward."

The Chamber meets regularly with area employers to gauge the local economy and attempts to predict trends within the market and in the workforce. Some commentators and talking heads have wondered if the falling unemployment rate in Springfield and across the country is the result of lower-wage and lower-hour jobs opening up in

the post-recession, post-Affordable Care Act economy. "In our interviews with members and others, local CEOs and business owners are in need of highly skilled workers," explained Josh Collins, the Chamber's Director of Business and Community Development. "Employers in our area are looking for workers who are educated or specially trained – the need is out there." The Chamber also sees that in a recent workforce analysis, 21 percent of Springfield workers feel that they are "underemployed" for their education level and / or skill-set.

Hembrough and Collins both pointed to some potential game changers for Springfield in 2015. "Nobody knows, yet, what the change in administration will bring," noted Hembrough. "But if Bruce Rauner does, in fact, move some jobs back to Springfield that could be a nice shot in the arm." Collins also pointed out that Neighborhood Hope in East Springfield has reached critical mass and will likely see great strides in 2015. Bounded by South Grand and Cook, 11th Street and Martin Luther King, Neighborhood Hope is a land-banking partnership with the Springfield Project that "will likely see residential and commercial development move forward this coming year," Collins said.

Luckily for area developers and for those who are looking to break into the market, Springfield banks are sizing up 2015 and liking what they see. For a number of years, interest rates have been low, but with new regulations put in place after the recession hit and with people and businesses hanging onto cash with a carnival ride-like death grip, liquidity in the marketplace has congealed to gravy in recent years. The environment appears to be loosening a bit and area banks are hopeful that 2015 results in increased activity.

"We believe the environment to borrow for cars, homes and investments will remain favorable," said Eric Oswald, Senior Vice President of Commercial Lending for Prairie State Bank and Trust. Oswald, who is also the Central Regional Director for the American Business Club national organization, sees a number of factors coming together to benefit consumers and businesses in 2015. A major factor in loosening the wallets of consumers and increasing development in Springfield is the decline in energy costs. When filling up at the local gas station or paying the utility bill, consumers have seen energy prices dramatically fall in recent months and Oswald predicts "that energy prices will remain low throughout 2015 allowing for increased consumer spending."

Locally, the banking industry appears to be growing at a brisk pace, if building new branches is any indicator. A quick drive around Springfield finds new facilities being built faster than Sam Madonia can give away pumpkin pies before Thanksgiving. Prairie State Bank and Trust has also built a new facility on West Wabash as part of its effort to remain competitive. Oswald notes that local banks will continue to compete for individual and commercial business in 2015 with "deposit incentives, competitive loans and enhanced mobile banking services."

With a bit more money in Springfield's pockets and interest rates remaining low, the urge to buy that first home or make a move up will continue to climb in 2015. Julie Davis of the Julie Davis Team at the Real Estate Group sees Millennials further entering the real estate market

and providing needed growth in 2015. In case your generational parlance stopped at "Baby Boomer" or maybe "Gen X", a "Millennial" is someone who was born between 1981 and 2000. "Millennials will become a growing segment of the local real estate market in 2015," said Davis.

Aside from the new or second home buyers in 2015, and similar to the uptick in commercial development, residential developers will increase their stock of "spec" homes in 2015. "We are seeing many area builders expanding their inventory of "spec" homes rather than just building for a buyer," said Tom Frost, a member of the Julie Davis Team. Along with increased residential development, current homeowners will also see an "appreciation in their current home's value in 2015," continued Frost. Perhaps the only negative aspect of the coming year in area real estate is the potential of rising interest rates. Both Davis and Frost agree that Springfield could see rates rising to 5 percent by the end of 2015 or early 2016.

Emerging from the doldrums of the Great Recession and a sluggish recovery, it appears that Springfield may finally turn the corner in 2015. Neighborhood Hope, Downtown Springfield, the Medical District and outlying areas are all ripe for significant growth in the coming year. Commercial and residential development, prodded along with low interest rates, lower costs and positive employment figures look to make the 2015 Springfield economy the best in a long time. □

Dave Kelm is a Springfield-area attorney who can be reached at DavidAKelm@gmail.com.

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Cinemavision now available at HSHS St. John's Hospital

Imagine being able to watch your favorite movie during an MRI. This is now a reality for patients at HSHS St. John's Hospital with the new Cinemavision MRI video from Resonance Technology. These innovative goggles, accompanied with MRI safe headphones, immerse patients in a movie of their choice and ultimately help children remain calm during the noisy MRI scan. This will allow technicians to obtain better imaging results without the use of sedation or anesthesia. "MRIs can be very uncomfortable for many individuals. It can take a few hours to get a study completed. The ability to see a movie or a show can be a welcome distraction during the procedure," said Gurpreet Mander, MD, MBA, Chief Medical Officer at St. John's Hospital. "It may also help avoid the use of sedation or anesthesia in many cases."

The MRI goggles produce a video image similar to what a person would experience from a five-foot display set while standing 10 feet away. Children will have the option to view a pre-selected video or bring a favorite DVD from home to watch. Additionally, the MRI technician can communicate via a microphone with the child and also project a video image of himself or herself in the goggles so the child can see who is talking.

"Kids are more likely to hold still because they're watching a movie," said Jim Timpe, MS, RT, Director of Radiology Services at HSHS St. John's Hospital.

"The goggles relieve a lot of fear and claustrophobia some people associate with an MRI." The Cinemavision MRI video goggles will also be made available to adults who may suffer from claustrophobia during MRI examinations. "Adults will benefit from the goggles, too," Timpe said. "And sometimes MRIs can trigger episodes for veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The goggles will now create a distraction for them."

SCI offers "Freedom from Smoking"

Simmons Cancer Institute (SCI) at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine is again offering "Freedom From Smoking," a program from the American Lung Association that is designed to help smokers break the nicotine habit. People who use the "Freedom From Smoking" program, are six times more likely to be smoke-free one year later than those who quit on their own, according to the ALA. Current smokers interested in quitting are invited to the class. "We don't expect you to walk in the door and quit smoking immediately," said Kristi Lessen, outreach coordinator for SCI and class leader. Participants will attend eight scheduled classes from noon to 1 p.m. on Tuesdays, Jan. 13 through Feb. 24. National "Quit Day" is Tuesday, Feb. 3. An extra class is scheduled on Thursday, Feb. 5, for support and assistance. Participants must attend every class. Class size is limited to 10 individuals. "The classes provide a group setting to work through the quitting process. Research shows that the more time a smoker spends in a supportive

situation, the more likely they will achieve the goal to quit smoking," she said. Registration is \$50 per person to cover program materials. To register, call 217-545-7493 or register online at www.siumed.edu/cancer and click on the "Freedom From Smoking" link.

\$400,000 gift funds new SIU programs to raise awareness of developmentally disabled

A \$400,000 endowment from the Donnelly Family Trust will allow Southern Illinois University School of Medicine to establish several programs to ultimately benefit the developmentally disabled. Proceeds from the endowment will be used to develop methods to raise awareness and educate the medical community about how to interact with and care for patients with developmental disabilities. The late George and Victoria Donnelly established the Donnelly Family Trust in recognition of their only child, Timothy, now 58, who has developmental disabilities. The Donnellys became advocates for the DD population, and George served on numerous committees in Jacksonville to improve the quality of life for people with developmental disabilities. He died in 2013. Victoria died in 2008. George's sister, Pat Cross, said that Tim's parents struggled and sacrificed to raise Tim. "Tim was hard to handle and self-abusive, but he received good care. It's important for young doctors and medical students to understand how to handle people with developmental disabilities." Rob Cross, cousin of Tim Donnelly, added that the Donnellys worked

to save enough money to care for Tim and establish the endowment to assist organizations that help people with DD. "This is a great relationship. We are proud to work with SIU," Rob Cross said. "Uncle George would be proud, too." The endowment will be used to create three programs at SIU School of Medicine. Dr. Jeffrey Bennett, professor in the Department of Psychiatry, was named the Donnelly Family Professor in Developmental Disabilities. It is the first endowed professorship in the psychiatry department.


Mental Health Centers of Central Illinois sets goal for holiday fundraising appeal


Mental Health Centers of Central Illinois launched its annual holiday fundraiser on Dec. 1 to help the people it serves who struggle with mental illness. The nonprofit agency, one of seven affiliates of Memorial Health System, has set a \$10,000 fundraising goal for its appeal, which runs through the end of the year. The theme of the campaign is Lend a Hand. Heal a Heart. "Our community has been so supportive of our work to make a difference in the lives of some 9,000 people from central Illinois who are dealing with behavioral health issues or developmental disabilities," said Jan Gambach, president of Mental Health Centers and administrator of behavioral health for Memorial Health System. "This campaign highlights several stories of success and how their continued support helps people to regain wellness and independence in their lives." Interested donors can visit MHCCI.org. □

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Rachel Hinkle

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PHOTOGRAPHY

The Springfield Home Staging Company

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"I was in property management for a long, long time," says Springfield Home Staging Company owner Rachel Hinkle. "Part of property leasing is to stage your property so when people walk in they're excited to make it their home – but never in my wildest dreams did I think of that as a business in and of itself." That perspective changed recently when a friend was lamenting the difficulties she was having selling her

home. Hinkle offered to take a look and make suggestions for how to improve the presentation of the space. Her friend's place sold within 10 days. Soon after, Hinkle and her husband were in the market for a home themselves and after looking at over 200 homes she realized there was a real need for home staging in the area. "The city is just full of homes that are not properly staged to market," says Hinkle,

who has received certification through the Home Staging Institute. Hinkle's own home had competing offers within its first day on the market. Her business, she says, is to provide "that wow factor where customers can envision and feel themselves at home, form that emotional attachment from the second they walk in." Visit www.thespringfieldhomestagingcompany.com for further information. □

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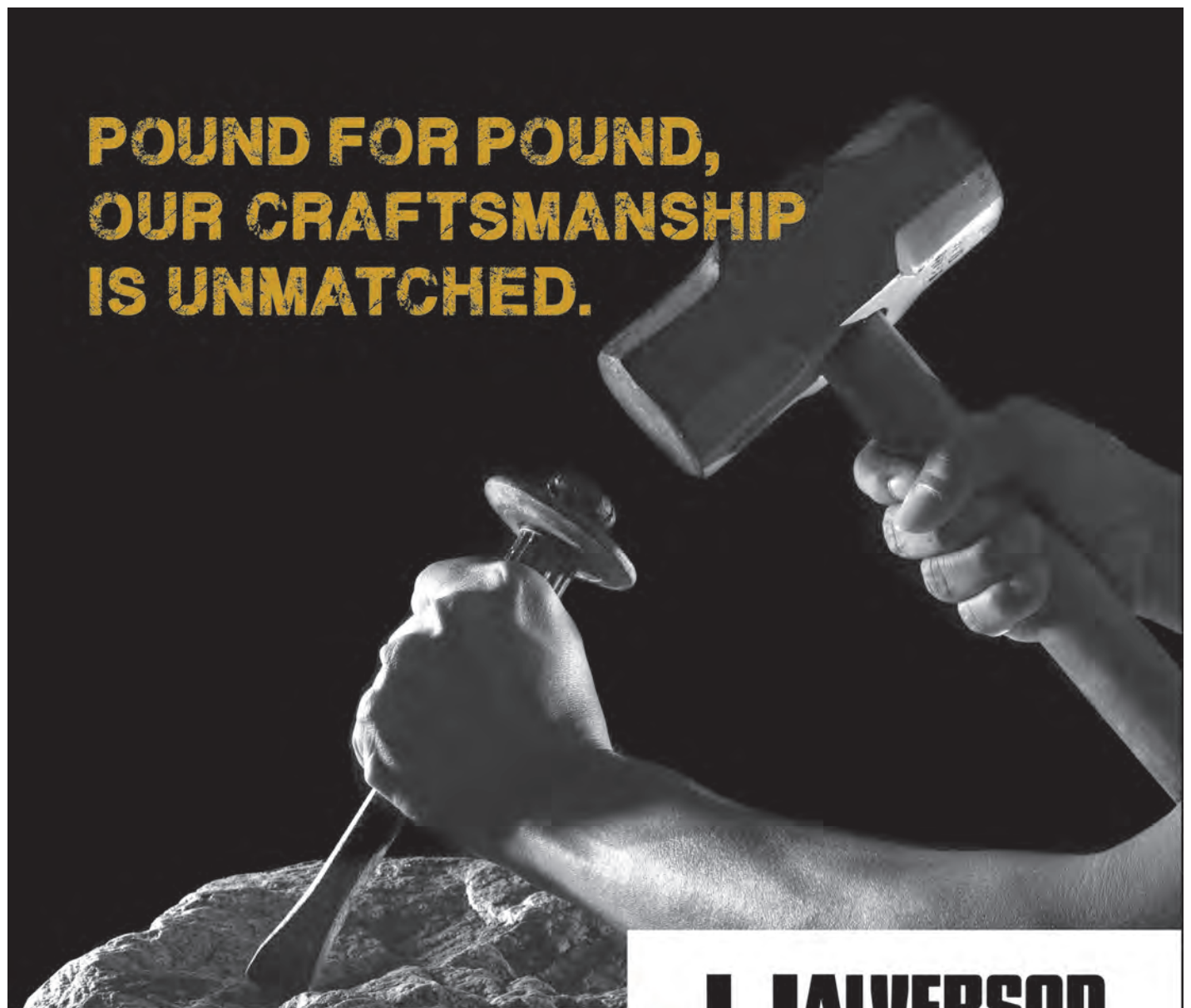
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III Tomassos Italian Bistro

By Thomas C. Pavlik, Jr.

III Tomassos has remained somewhat off my radar based solely on location. At least for a business lunch, heading out to Legacy Pointe isn't my first thought and, with development still in the early stages, it's not like I have clients or prospective clients in the area. That's an error on my part – III Tomassos is worth inserting into your lunch rotation list.

Tomassos is a bit quirky when it comes to décor. First, I found it a bit incongruous that there were TVs on the walls. Second, nothing here really screams "Italian bistro." Nonetheless, it's bright, airy and filled with vibrant colors. All in all, it is pleasing to the eye. There's plenty of seating at the bar if so inclined. We appreciated that diners can select somewhat "out of the way" tables when discretion is required.

My guests and I showed up at Tomassos on a dreary December day just before noon. We were pleasantly greeted and shown to our table. I'd say there were maybe 30 to 40 patrons (excluding one large group evidently out for a Christmas celebration) who spanned the spectrum from social to business diners. My table collectively recognized quite a few of our fellow diners.

Although the menu has most of the Italian classics we all know and love, surprisingly it offers up burgers and horseshoes (albeit with "signature" Italian cheese sauce). My guests and I opted to go the traditional route and forego these options. The rest of the menu is broken into pasta, pizza, "bistro



Patrons at the III Tomassos bar.

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fare" (sandwiches), and soups/salads. Tomassos has an entrée section, but it is not available after 4 p.m.

Notable items included the stuffed Italian "long hots" appetizer (peppers stuffed with sausage and ricotta, baked with house sauce and cheese - \$7.95), baked homemade "Mac n Cheese" (9.95), and the eggplant parmesan sandwich (\$7.95). Sandwiches and burgers are served with seasoned fries or cucumber salad. Each table is served a complimentary serving of bread with oil (additional servings \$3 each). We particularly appreciated the option of ordering the daily flatbread pizza special, which is served with a small side salad (\$9.25).

My guests and I opted to start with the Antipasto appetizer (\$15.95). It quickly appeared and was appropriately sized for the price. While good, there was nothing remarkable – then again, at least in my experience, antipasto plates aren't really a test of a kitchen's skills.

So, to put those skills to the test, we did our best to canvas the menu. From the Bistro fare section, we ordered the Combo (sausage and Italian beef with grilled peppers and onions, homemade marinara and fontina cheese - \$9.95); the Spaghetti with Garlic Butter and Fresh Herbs (\$10.95); and the Italian Deluxe pizza (\$14.95/\$17.95).

I was curious whether, given the different cooking times of our order,

our food would all be served together. Thankfully, Tomassos managed to avoid inflicting one of my pet peeves on our table – everything came out at the same time and in good shape.

The pizza had the perfect crust – crisp, but not burned, with just the right amount of bite. We all appreciated that Tomassos let the sauce shine by not going overboard with the cheese. Toppings were all fresh and first class. The Combo was reported as having the correct ratio of bread, protein, cheese and sauce. Initially somewhat skeptical of the cucumber salad, my guest found it to be a refreshing contrast to this classic Italian sandwich. Well done, Tomassos.

With such a simple pasta dish there's no chance of hiding any mistakes. Everything better be perfect. But for spaghetti that was a bit overcooked, Tomassos came close to perfect. The nuttiness of the Grana Padano cheese paired well with the pasta, while its slight sweetness enhanced the herbal notes. Blissfully, the dish wasn't overwhelmed with too much garlic. Someone in the kitchen gets it – hats off to the chef.

Service was friendly and efficient. My guests never felt rushed, but we were in and out in under an hour. All in all, Tomassos should be on your lunch rotation. □

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



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New Year's checklist

By Sarah Jane Delano Pavlik

2015. A new year for all of us to make a fresh start. As part of that fresh start, why not use a cold January day to check on matters that are easy to overlook during the year.

Insurance. Review all of your insurance – personal and business. How much life, car, homeowner's and liability insurance do you have for you (and your spouse) personally? Would the amount of life insurance be enough to provide for your family if you died suddenly? Who is the beneficiary? Have you named minor children as beneficiaries? If so, consider other options such as a trust for your children.

How much car insurance do you have? The minimum coverage in Illinois is \$20,000 for injury to one person in an accident, \$40,000 for injury to more than one person in an accident and \$15,000 for injury to the property of another person. These amounts are woefully inadequate. Twenty thousand dollars does not go very far if a person is hospitalized. On the other side, what if you are hit by someone with minimum coverage, you're injured and your new truck is totaled? You need to make sure you have enough "uninsured or under-insured motorist" coverage on your own policy to make up the difference.

What is your overall liability exposure? Do you live on land where you or other people hunt, ride four-wheelers or swim? What if someone is hurt? Check your homeowner's coverage for liability protection. You may want to add a personal umbrella policy for additional coverage. Umbrella policies are generally inexpensive and can provide significant additional coverage.

Review all of your business insurance. Do you have enough property insurance for your building and equipment? Do you have enough liability and workers' compensation insurance? Do you have key employees whose deaths would disrupt the business? If so, should you obtain life insurance on these employees?

Estate planning. Do you have a will? If so, how old is it? When is the last time you looked at it? We may all feel broke after the holidays, but we still have assets, and our wills need to indicate how those assets will pass at our deaths. In addition, every adult should have a financial power of attorney and a health care power of attorney. These documents allow your "agent" to handle your financial affairs and make medical decisions for you if you cannot do so. There is a new form for Illinois health care powers of attorney as of Jan. 1, 2015, but existing powers of attorney will continue to be effective.

Are you a business owner? Do you have a succession plan in place? Threshold questions include: (1) Who should own the business? (2) Who should run the business? (3) How should the new owners acquire the business, e.g., gift, purchase or both? Is the plan properly funded?

Corporate formalities. Many small

businesses are structured as corporations. Corporations must conduct an annual shareholders' meeting. The meeting may be an actual in-person meeting or a "paper meeting" in which everything is done by written consent. Either way, it is important that you properly document such "corporate formalities." Your failure to do so could be used as ammunition by those who might try to void the liability shield usually afforded by corporations to its shareholders (also known as "piercing the corporate veil"). Among other things, an annual meeting usually includes the shareholders electing the corporation's board of directors and acting on matters requiring shareholder approval.

Most corporations also simultaneously hold their annual meeting of the board of directors. Your failure to do so could be further ammunition in a creditor's attempts to pierce the corporate veil. At the meeting, the directors should elect officers for the upcoming year and approve or ratify all other items that require board approval. Also, (to an extent not previously done) the board should prepare minutes to specifically ratify extraordinary corporate events that occurred during the previous year.

A corporation must also file an annual report to the Secretary of State. Failure to file the annual report and to pay the annual fee could result in your corporation being involuntarily dissolved. (In that instance, the corporate liability shield may well be





ILLUSTRATION BY
REUBEN MUNOZ

lost.) Fixing this problem can be costly. Also, to the extent you do business in other states, you will want to make sure you are registered to do business there. Likewise, if you no longer do business in a particular state, now is the time to withdraw registration.

Business policies. Do you have an employee handbook? When is the last time you reviewed it? Does it have policies on email and social media? Do you have a disaster plan? Do key employees know how to implement it? What are your HR policies? Are you following the policies? These items can be tedious and easy to avoid, but you need to have policies in place and follow those policies. You will be happy that you did in the event of an employment lawsuit or other difficulties.

Vacation. When was the last time you took a vacation? Do your employees use their vacation days? In the stress of our everyday lives, it can seem impossible to get away. In the words of Nike, just do it. The benefits of vacation include better health, better productivity, less stress, better mental health, closer family ties, less burnout and new perspectives. Remember, on your death bed you won't wish you had spent more time at the office. □

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