

The Talk And Cobden Review • Serving Union County Since 1849

Volume 179, Number 5

**Items of interest
from throughout
the Union County area,
from social media
and beyond...**

(continued on page 2)

Anna park project continues

As a new year gets underway, progress continues to be seen at a major project which is underway at the Anna City Park. The project, which started in 2025, includes the construction of a new concessions building, ball fields and other improvements.

The commissioners approved the appointment of Harry Brockus to a post on the Southern Seven Health Department board. Brockus is CEO of Deaconess Illinois Union County Hospital in Anna. He fills a post created by the resignation of Marshall Griffin.

The low temperature for the month was 8, which was recorded Dec. 14 and 15. The average low was 29.

Precipitation for the month included 1.16 inches of rain. The most rain in a 24-hour period was 0.46 of an inch, which was recorded Dec. 18. One inch of snow was recorded Dec. 2



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Illinois awarded \$193 million to expand rural healthcare access

Amid federal budget cuts to rural healthcare, Illinois plans steward funds to support the state’s rural healthcare infrastructure and drive sustainable change in underserved rural communities

Illinois has been awarded \$193,418,216 million per year for five years through the \$50 billion federal Rural Healthcare Transformation Program, RHTP, fund, which will be utilized to expand equitable access to healthcare and to eliminate barriers to care that many residents of rural communities face. All 50 states applied for the RHTP funding, and a total of \$10 billion will be available each year over five years, beginning in fiscal year 2026.

While the funding will provide support to improve healthcare access in rural Illinois communities, it will be far from enough to counteract the cuts imposed to the Medicaid program through various provisions in the Trump Administration’s budget bill, state officials said. According to an estimate from KFF, the Trump Administration’s budget bill is expected to cut \$137 billion from rural healthcare providers nationally, nearly three times the \$50 billion allocated in the fund.

The Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, HFS, in strategic partnership with its sister agencies and interested parties, utilized the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid’s, CMS, five strategic goals from the RHTP Notice of Funding Opportunity, NOFO, to develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen Illinois’ rural healthcare system for the future. The plan outlines a vision built on three key categories of initiatives designed to incentivize health system transformation and create regional partnerships, increase the use of technology and mobile health services and expand the rural healthcare workforce within the state.

Specifically, Illinois’ application supports the following: Transforming Rural Healthcare Delivery: Incentivize hospital and health provider transformation initiatives, including the establishment of regional health care partnerships, service line transformation, population health management and value-based care.

Overcoming Geographic Barriers of Care: Create opportunities for individuals in rural settings to receive appropriate access to services, including specialty care, while remaining in their communities through the deployment of mobile and telehealth services and by strengthening emer-

Shawnee Community College grateful for support of food drive

Shawnee Community College is sharing a heartfelt thank you to everyone who donated to the second annual Feed the Need Campus Food Drive. The college reported that 10,750 individual items were donated to Bernie’s Place during the course of the drive. Bernie’s Place is the college’s food pantry. Among the items donated in Shawnee’s food drive were more than 20 Thanksgiving meals.

“This was a genuine community effort, and we are grateful to all who helped provide meals and snacks for our students on all of our campuses,” the college shared in a message posted on social media.

Shawnee was among the community colleges which participated in the second annual statewide Feed the Need Campus Food Drive and a contest which was part of the campaign. For the second straight year, Shawnee was among the top five community colleges in terms of the number of items which were collected.

Illinois community colleges once again worked together to address food insecurity on campuses across the state with a collective effort that doubled in size in its second year. The second annual Feed the Need Campus Food Drive collected nearly 180,000 individual non-perishable food items for local campus and community food banks. That number dwarfs last year’s total of nearly 91,000 food items collected. The Feed the Need Campus Food Drive started in 2024 to help combat food insecurity on college campuses and support students in need.

"Food insecurity affects students in every region of Illinois, and community colleges remain united in addressing this challenge. Through Feed The Need, we are demonstrating how a coordinated, statewide effort, powered by a little friendly competition, can make a real difference in supporting students and strengthening our campus communities," Illinois Community College Board executive director Brian Durham said in a news release.

Elgin Community College, ECC, took home the top spot in the second Feed the Need Campus Food Drive by collecting more than 34,000 individual non-perishable items and will receive a commemorative plaque given to each year’s winner.

ECC surpassed last year’s winner, John Wood Community College in Quincy, which was again among the top five donating schools, along with Illinois Eastern Community College, College of DuPage and Shawnee Community College. In all, more than half of all Illinois community colleges took part in this year’s Feed The Need Campus Food Drive contest.

“We are grateful for the commitment shown by every community college that has embraced our statewide Feed The Need Campaign. Their collective generosity is helping students thrive, and we look forward to seeing this initiative expand even further as more colleges join the effort,” Illinois Community College Board chair Dr. Sylvia Jenkins said.

Food insecurity remains a significant challenge for college students nationwide, with recent data showing that approximately 41 percent of students report food insecurity, meaning they lack consistent access to sufficient food, according to the 2023-2024 Student Basic Needs Survey by Temple University’s Hope Center. Other national analyses suggest that overall food insecurity prevalence among U.S. college students can exceed 40 percent, markedly higher than estimates for the general U.S. adult population.

Food insecurity continues to disproportionately affect students of color, with the latest Hope Center survey showing that 54 percent of Black or African American college students and 50 percent of Hispanic or Latino students experience food insecurity.

In Illinois, hunger remains

a serious statewide issue, affecting approximately 10.6 percent of residents, or around 1.3 million people, according to Feeding America.

The Feed the Need Campus Food Drive is part of a systemwide effort involving Illinois community colleges working together to support those facing hunger. Through a friendly competition, participating colleges rallied their students, faculty, and community partners to donate food for those struggling with food insecurity, both on campus and in the local communities.

The non-perishable food collected during the drive directly benefits many on-campus or community food pantries, ensuring that many have access to meals when they need them most.

The Illinois Community College Board is the state coordinating organization for the Illinois Community College System, which is the third largest in the country and the leading public workforce development trainer in the state.

Illinois community colleges serve over 600,000 residents each year in credit, noncredit, and continuing education courses. Illinois is home to 45 colleges in 39 community college districts, which provide high-quality, accessible, cost-effective educational opportunities to the entire state.

News Notes

(continued from page 1)

Dr. Kristin Shelby and Wendy Harris are scheduled to represent Shawnee Community College at an upcoming Higher Learning Commission conference in Chicago. They have been selected to give a presentation about the college’s accreditation journey at the conference, which is planned in March. The college also noted that Shelby has been selected into the commission’s Peer Review Corps and will serve as a Peer Reviewer.

Work continues on a new concession stand at Shawnee Community College near Ullin. A grand opening is planned when the project is completed.

A Gnome Roam activity continues through January and February at Giant City Park near Makanda. Visitors are invited to search the trails at Giant City State Park for hidden gnomes. Those who complete the challenge can earn a special Giant City Gnome Roam patch.

The special chronic wasting disease season and antlerless deer hunting continue Jan. 16-18 in Illinois.

A youth spring turkey special hunting area lottery is scheduled to open Jan. 20, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, IDNR, reports.

December warmer, drier than normal



December icicles
Icicles formed in rock outcroppings along Mountain Glen Road near Cobden in late December. The last month of 2025 ended with cold temperatures in the region.

Temperatures and precipitation were below normal during December in the Southern Illinois, Southeast Missouri and Western Kentucky region.

Temperatures

The National Weather Service office in Paducah reported in a December 2025 climate review that temperatures averaged below normal by 1 to 2 degrees.

The first half of the month was abnormally cold, with Paducah registering its fifth coldest Dec 1-15 period on record. The coldest temperatures occurred on the 14th and 15th, when lows fell into the upper single digits and low teens. Several record cold highs were also set on the 14th, when readings only reached the mid teens to low 20s.

A pattern change happened on the 17th, with above normal temperatures in place until a strong cold front plowed through on the night of the 28th. The warmest stretch was right around the Christmas

holiday, with highs reaching well into the 60s and even the 70s from the 23rd through 28th. Numerous record highs and warm lows were set during this period, including 60 degree low temperatures on Christmas Day at Paducah and Carbondale. Paducah had its warmest Dec. 17-28 period and tied record long winter streaks of 65-plus degree highs on six days and lows higher than 50 degrees on five days.

Much colder air arrived to end the month, with highs struggling to reach freezing again on the 29th.

Precipitation

Precipitation was drier than normal, with monthly deficits ranging from 1.5 to 3 inches. Much of Southeast Missouri and southwestern Illinois didn’t even register an inch of precipitation for the month. The highest amounts were recorded across the Pennyriple region of Western Kentucky, but even here totals were only around 1.5 to 2 inches.

Check out The Gazette-Democrat online at

annanews.com

Hess News

By Glenn Heisner

The family of Louise and Bruce Williams had their annual family day sat at Anna Heights FLC (gym).

Six of their daughters and family and friends enjoyed food and games.

Gary Hoskins recently spent a couple of days visiting from Winchester, Tenn.

Allen and Glenna Harris came up for several days from Texas before the holidays.

On Dec. 21 Billy Williams, Sandra Boaz and Juanita had birthdays. Dec. 22 was Wanda

Schlenker’s birthday.

Aaron and Daniel Harris came up for a visit also at a different time.

Justin McClellan came from Wisconsin and fixed us some good food. He is a good cook.

Our son Danny got her for her birthday and son Sam joined us later.

Les Grubbe, a long time Saddle Club member, passed away today. We went on some rides together over 50 years ago.

Cobden Elementary students reach reading goals

Cobden Elementary School has announced the names of the students who have reached their goals for the month of December in the school’s Accelerated Reading program. Students were required to read books and take comprehension tests on a computer to achieve their points. Photos provided.



25 point club

Back Row: Meredith DeMarie, Allie Petermichel, Hasely LeFevre, Marshall Jackson, Flynt Brumleve and Grayson Johnson.
Front Row: Amelia Anderson-Estes, Lacy Plott, Dante Juarez, Johnie Mason and Holden Hess. **Not Pictured:** Yana Santaclara.



100 point club

Lilly Paulson



50 point club

Keegan Wilson, Walker Schilling and Macy Adamitis.
Not Pictured: Harper Stringer.

Wetlands center grand reopening set

A grand reopening is planned at the Henry Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center near Cypress. The event is scheduled from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 10. The wetlands center is located at 8885 State Route 37 South, two miles north of the intersection of State Routes 169 and 37 and nine miles south of the intersection of State Routes 146 and 37.

Activities at the grand reopening are slated to include an opportunity to explore the wetlands center and its trails; family friendly environmental crafts and activities; informational booths and networking; self-guided winter hiking, biking and birding; a chance to sign up for an out-of-network library card; an opportunity to meet the new site natural resources coordinator; a business card raffle; and an opportunity to complete a river activity sheet and earn a sew-on Cache River Wetland patch. A food truck is scheduled to be on site from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Organizers shared that a wide range of organizations will be participating in the grand opening, including the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, along with community, education and conservation partners. Stinson Memorial Public Library District has announced plans to be at the grand opening. Stinson will offer opportunities to sign up for a library card, to explore a selection of library resources, to pick up free stickers and bookmarks and to help kids create a wood-slice wetland critter craft.

January events set at Jonesboro Public Library

In addition to their after school program, which runs from 3:30 to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays through Fridays, The Jonesboro Public Library has announced several Saturday events for the month of January.

On Saturday, Jan. 10, the library is hosting a movie and PJs event starting at 2 p.m. featuring popcorn and cocoa.

The next weekend on Saturday, Jan. 17, a tutorial for upcycling 2025 planners will be held at 2 p.m. The program will give tips on creative ways to transform unused

2025 planers into refreshed 2026 versions.

Saturday, Jan. 24 is Slime Day, starting at 2 p.m. Supplies will be provided for participants to make their own slime. The event is free and open to all ages. The project can be messy, and attendees are encouraged to wear clothing they don’t mind getting dirty.

The Last Saturday Book Club will be held on Saturday, Jan. 31 at 2 p.m. The book for the month is “Bury My Bones in the Midnight Soil.”

News from

Anna First Baptist Church

Anna First Baptist Church met for worship the first Sunday of the new year on Jan. 4 with Pastor Lupe greeting everyone in the Sanctuary and on our Live Stream.

Pastor Perry opened our service with prayer.

Our Call to Worship was on The Lord’s Supper. We will observe Our Lord’s Supper at the end of our worship service today, as a church family, remembering what our Savior did on Calvary for each one of us.

Our Worship Team led us in three songs: “Worthy of it All,” “Lead Me to the Cross” and “Mighty to Save.”

Pastor Lupe’s sermon was titled, “Origin.” Highlights included, “The first fundamental question every worldview must answer in Origin: ‘Where did we come from?’ This question addresses the beginnings of the universe, life, and humanity. Different worldviews provide different answers—some say we arose by chance, others claim we were designed by a creator, Christianity teaches that God intentionally created the

heavens, the earth, and every human being with purpose and design. Understanding our origin shapes how we see ourselves, our value, and the meaning of life.”

Our Sunday School begins at 9 am. and is for all ages and our Worship Service and Children’s Worship begins at 10:15 a.m. Our bus runs for all of these classes and worship services.

Our church is located at 409 Morgan Street in Anna. Our phone number is 618-833-5416. Our office is open Monday through Thursday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Please check us out on Facebook.com/AnnaFirstBaptistChurch

Our email is fbcanna409@gmail.com

We invite you to our services. You will find our Church Family warm and inviting. You will find Jesus in all we do, in our teaching, preaching, and in our hearts. If you need to know Jesus, please call, we will be happy to tell you about our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. God Bless You is our prayer for you.

Flu activity climbs to ‘Very High’; IDPH encourages immunizations

The Illinois Department of Public Health, IDPH, is urging residents to take precautions against the spread of influenza (flu) and other seasonal respiratory illnesses, as rates continue to climb across the state.

IDPH reported in a news release that as of Jan. 5, flu activity in the state had climbed to “Very High” in recent days. “Very High” is the most severe of five categories of respiratory illness activity, as defined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC.

In addition, COVID-19 rates have climbed to “Moderate” levels in Illinois. These trends are similar to what is being seen across the nation, IDPH reported.

Illinois is also reporting its first influenza death in a child this season. Nationally, there had been nine pediatric deaths due to influenza this season. During the 2024-2025 season, Illinois reported 12 pediatric deaths from influenza, six from RSV and three from COVID.

Data on seasonal respiratory illnesses across the state is available at IDPH’s Seasonal Respiratory Illness Dashboard, which is updated weekly.

“Illinois is facing a significant winter surge in seasonal respiratory illnesses with flu activity at very high levels,” IDPH director Dr. Sameer Vohra said. “Vaccinations remain the most effective tool to prevent severe illness from flu, COVID-19 and RSV. Simple steps like covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands regularly, staying home when sick if you are able and improving ventilation are also critical to preventing further spread. If you develop symptoms, it is important to get evaluated and treated early in your illness, especially if you are 65 years or older, are a young child under the age of 2 years, are pregnant, have chronic conditions, or care for someone at risk. IDPH is monitoring the situation closely and working with our partners in public health and healthcare to protect Illinois families across the state.”

According to IDPH’s Illinois Vaccination Coverage Dashboards, 21.9 percent of Illinoisans have received their flu shot this season, while only

Mild weather this week; area very dry

The first full week of the new year has brought a winter warm up to the Southern Illinois, Southeast Missouri and Western Kentucky region.

The National Weather Service office in Paducah reported that warmer temperatures were expected on Monday and would continue through the work week. The forecast was calling for high temperatures to climb into the 60s. The highs will be 10 to 15 degrees above average.

Rain chances were expected to come back during the night time hours on Wednesday and will last through Friday. Some thunderstorms may be possible. A severe weather risk is possible on Friday, when a front is expected to move through. Rainfall amounts were forecast to be the range of 0.75 of an inch to 1.25 inches, with locally higher amounts possible.

Drought Update
As 2025 came to an end, drought conditions once again were making an appearance in the Southern Illinois area.

A Dec. 31 update posted online by the U.S. Drought Monitor showed that all of Union County was experiencing abnormally dry conditions. Similar conditions were reported in all of Williamson, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski and Alexander counties, as well as in a tiny part of southeast Jackson County.

Most of Jackson County was experiencing moderate drought conditions.

6.8 percent have received COVID-19 immunization. Speak to your provider, pharmacist or local health department for information on how you can obtain vaccines for yourself and loved ones, IDPH advised. Illinois residents can also find out more about vaccine availability in their area via the state’s vaccine locator dashboard.

While anyone can potentially become seriously ill from seasonal respiratory illnesses, the most susceptible are the very young, very old, pregnant individuals and those who are immunocompromised or have other underlying health conditions.

IDPH recommends the following steps to reduce your risk of contracting or spreading seasonal respiratory illness:

Get immunized. With flu season usually peaking between December and February, and lasting until May, it’s not too late to get your flu shot and other immunizations, such as for COVID-19 and RSV (for those who are eligible). For more information on respiratory illness vaccines, view IDPH’s immunization

guidelines.

Wash your hands frequently with soap and water – it is one of the most effective ways to reduce spread of illness. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective if soap and water are not available.

Stay home when you are ill, if able, and wear a mask if not.

Cover coughs and sneezes. Wearing a mask when ill will further help prevent viral spread. An N95 or comparable mask offers the best protection.

Minimize close contact with sick people.

Antiviral treatments can minimize symptoms and speed up recovery when started quickly after symptoms emerge, IDPH advised. Antiviral treatments for flu are most effective when given within 48 hours of starting to feel ill. For COVID-19, treatment must be started within five to seven days after symptoms appear. Older adults, young children and those who are pregnant or have certain underlying conditions are at risk for complications and should contact a healthcare provider to be assessed for the need for treatment as soon as possible.

New public health laws took effect Jan. 1 in Illinois

The Illinois Department of Public Health, IDPH, announced that several new laws designed to strengthen public health initiatives took effect with the start of the New Year on Jan. 1, 2026.

“The New Year offers a critical opportunity to advance public health and protect Illinois families through new laws and innovative strategies,” IDPH director Dr. Sameer Vohra said in a news release. “We thank Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois General Assembly for their leadership in enacting a series of public health measures that include improving overdose reporting, addressing maternal health disparities and promoting a One Health approach to safeguarding communities. IDPH is committed to actively working with our partners to ensure these laws are implemented effectively and deliver measurable improvements to the health and well-being of Illinois residents.”

Among the new initiatives which took effect Jan. 1 is House Bill 3645. The new law authorizes the transmission of limited information regarding suspected overdoses reported by first responders covered under the Emergency Medical Services Systems Act. Under the statute, IDPH will submit the information to the Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program, ODMAP. The data will help state and local public health officials track and respond to overdose events, supporting timely intervention, effective use of resources, and overdose prevention efforts.

Other new laws approved by the General Assembly in 2025 include:

Senate Bill 119, which requires every appropriate health care professional who is attending to a pregnant patient shall conduct a test for prenatal syphilis at the time of the first examination and again during the third trimester, to ensure that appropriate treatment can be administered.

House Bill 3709, which requires public institutions of higher education to provide enrolled students with access to one or more health care professionals whose scope of practice includes prescribing and dispensing contraception and/or medication abortion and will provide information to students on how to access such services.

Senate Bill 291, which establishes a state One Health Commission within IDPH. “One Health” refers to the recognition that human health is interconnected with the health of animal populations and the environment. A One Health approach covers zoonotic diseases (which can be transmitted from animals to humans) such as avian influenza, diseases carried by insects (including Lyme disease and West Nile virus), antimicrobial resistance and other health concerns. The commission will promote interdisciplinary communication and collaboration among doctors, veterinarians, other medical and scientific experts and state agencies to develop a unified approach to these issues. The commission will be co-chaired by the director of IDPH and the president of the University of Illinois System (or their designees)

House Bill 2462, which authorizes IDPH to issue a standing order that would allow an authorized entity or individual to obtain a supply of epinephrine delivery devices and for trained individuals to administer the medication to someone who is undergoing a severe allergic reaction or anaphylactic shock

House Bill 2517, which will require health care professionals who provide maternal health services to complete a one-hour training course on implicit bias awareness as a condition of license renewal. The new requirement seeks to address ongoing concerns about historic disparities in maternal health care impacting racial and ethnic groups with increased maternal mortality rates.

Senate Bill 1950, also known as the Medical Aid in Dying law, it will take effect in September of 2026. The law provides options for qualified terminally ill patients to request end-of-life medication and peacefully end their own life on their own terms in consultation with a physician. If a patient elects the end-of-life option as outlined in the Act, physicians must submit information within 60 days after the patient’s death to IDPH regarding the patient, their diagnosis, notice that requirements under the act were completed and notice that medication has been prescribed pursuant to the act. This information is to be considered confidential, privileged and not discoverable in any civil, criminal, administrative or other proceeding.

Obituaries

Raymond P. Flamm

Raymond P. Flamm, age 87 of Cobden, passed away Friday, Jan. 2, 2026 at the Lutheran Home in Cape Girardeau, Mo.

He was born on July 31, 1938 in Cobden, the son of Adolph and Agnes (Bradac) Flamm. He married Janice Gray on Aug. 29, 1958. She survives.

Raymond is survived by his wife, Janice Flamm of Cobden; sons, Steven Lynn (Donna) Flamm of West Des Moines, Iowa, and Gregory Alan Flamm of Taylor Ridge, Ill.; grandchildren, Alyssa (Scott) Nelson, Benjamin Flamm and Stacy (Trevor) Owen; great-grandchildren, Caden and Callum Owen; numerous nieces, nephews, other relatives and friends.

He was preceded in death by his parents and siblings, Delores Osbourne, Loretta Flamm, Edwin Flamm, Sr. Rose Marie Flamm, Agnes Williams, Norbert Flamm, Albert Flamm, Margaret Arter and Mildred Murphy.

After leaving college, Raymond began work for the Missouri Pacific Railroad as a civil engineer for 8 years. After leaving the railroad, he began working for Farmec Industries, a farm grain storage company as a builder and field technician. This new job took him and his family to Waterloo, Iowa. Once in Waterloo, his career changed again.

He began employment with Hinson Manufacturing as an engineer, specializing in the manufacturing of tractor cabs. In 1978 his career changed again, as he took an engineering position with John Deere in Waterloo. Then in 1984, a career opportunity would see him and Janice move to Horicon, Wisc. where he worked in field service as a technician, writer, and teacher for John Deere's lawn and garden division. He would finish his career with John Deere in Horicon.

Upon retirement in 2000, Raymond and Janice went full circle to where their lives began, and moved back to their hometown of Cobden, Ill.

Raymond had a love for woodworking, with a gift for recognizing the beauty in wood and what it could produce.



Raymond had a passion for plants, especially peaches, apples, and cacti. He always enjoyed the thrill of catching bass quietly in a canoe and the comradery with his fishing buddies.

With a passion for life, a deep devotion to God, a reverence for virgin Mary, Raymond thrived on his love of family and his friends who had become family.

We will miss his stories, the good nature of a joke, and the excitement he sought to make even the ordinary tasks an adventure to cherish.

Funeral mass for Raymond Flamm will be held at 10:30 a.m. Friday, Jan. 9 at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Cobden with Father Uriel Salamanca as celebrant.

Interment will follow in St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery. Visitation will take place from 5 to 8 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 8, at Rendleman and Hileman Funeral Home in Cobden.

The Rosary will be recited at 4 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 8 at the funeral home. In lieu of flowers, please make memorial contributions to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital or the Lutheran Home Hospice Unit. Envelopes are available at Rendleman and Hileman Funeral Home.

The family of Raymond Flamm would like to give special recognition to Deaconess Illinois Medical Center in Marion and the Lutheran Home in Cape Girardeau for the wonderful care they provided over the past several months.

To visit Raymond's memorial page and leave online condolences for his family, please visit the Rendleman and Hileman Funeral Home website at rendlemanhilemanfh.com.

Norman "Bud" Powles

Norman "Bud" Powles, age 58, of Dongola, passed away on Tuesday, Dec. 30, 2025 surrounded by his family.

He was born on Nov. 7, 1967 to Marvin and Sandra (Stokes) Powles in Waukegan, Ill.

On Jan. 16, 1987, he married Joyce Chapman and they have shared over 38 years together.

Bud served in the United States Army for four years and worked in the medical field while in the army.

Bud had a paper route for the Southern Illinoisian for 28 years and then he went to work for Walgreens in Anna.

Bud loved martial arts, especially Hapkido. His passion was creating music, playing video games, and working complex puzzles and was a chess strategist.

Bud deeply cared for his family and his cats. He will be deeply missed.

Survivors include his wife, Joyce; children, Christopher (Brandy) Powles and Seth Powles; one grandson, Jakob Powles; his mother, Sandra; his siblings, Donald (Kathy) Powles, Pamela (Russ)

Crain Funeral Home



Marsh, Bridget (Jim) Harris, Marvin Powles, Jr., and Carolyn (David) Hironimous; along with nieces, nephews, and other relatives.

Norman is preceded in death by his father, Marvin.

No services will be held at this time.

The cremation of Norman "Bud" Powles will be personally handled by the staff of Crain Funeral Home.

Crain Funeral Home in Dongola is in charge of arrangements.

Gary R. Honey

Gary R. Honey, 80, of Tamms, Ill. passed away on Dec. 28, 2025.

Affectionately known to all as 'Gabby,' he was born Aug. 26, 1945 with a love of the simple life.

His joys included farming, local and U.S. history, aviation and Sunday rides around the county in his pickup. He partook often of rides on his side-by-side and Little Debbie snack cakes.

An Army veteran, he assisted with several tractor restorations including his own Allis Chalmers D17.

A quiet man, he enjoyed seeing his great nephews and nieces, listening to the golden oldies of his youth, and watching classic TV shows, in black and white of course.

Gabby is preceded in death by his parents, Earl and Jewel Honey, as well as five brothers: Delmar (Red), Douglas, Glenn, Darrell (Bud), and Terry.

He is survived by two sisters-in-law, Edna (Doug) Honey and Rachel (Terry) Honey, his niece Deana Bennett, nephews Todd Honey and



Wade Honey, as well as many more nieces and nephews.

Visitation to be held Jan. 8 at 10 a.m. with a service to follow at noon at Crain Funeral Home in Tamms with Pastor Clint Nale to officiating.

Interment will follow the service at McCrite Cemetery in Tamms, Ill.

The family requests with gratitude that Memorials may be made to McCrite Cemetery.

Crain Funeral Home in Tamms is in charge of arrangements.

Otis Glen Burris

Otis Glen Burris, age 86 of Jonesboro, passed away, Friday, Dec. 26, 2025 surrounded by his family.

He was born Nov. 21, 1939 in Wolf Lake, the son of Francis Mezo. He married Linda Pecord on June 9, 1961 in Mill Creek.

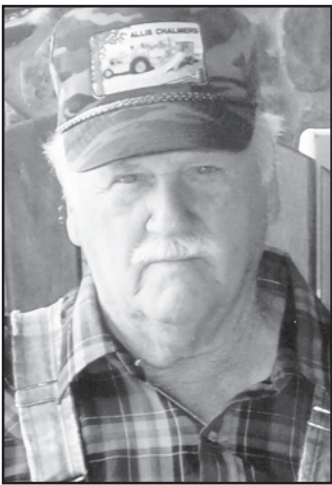
Otis is survived by his loving wife, Linda Burris; son, Rowdy Burris, daughter, Michele Burris, all of Jonesboro; two grandchildren, Corlis (April) Burris of Tamms, Zach Burris (Lindsey Edwards) of Jonesboro; three great-grandchildren, Grant and Tate Burris and Blake Edwards; sister, Sharon Stafford of Elberta, Ala.; uncle, "Brother" Larry (Maggie) Burris of Saraland, Alabama; aunt, Vonnie Burris of Mobile, Ala.; nieces and nephews; other extended family and host of dear friends.

He was preceded in death by his mother and sisters, Mary Catherine Santacruz and Phyllis Singley.

Otis honorably served his country in the United States Air Force. After he returned home, he operated the Standard Station on the Jonesboro Square until the 70's. He later joined the Teamsters and drove a truck for E.T. Simonds for thirty-six years until his retirement.

Otis was very involved in the Teamsters and served as Union Steward until he retired.

Otis never met a stranger;



he enjoyed good conversation and talking with good company.

Along with his son and grandsons he enjoyed tinkering with antique tractors and all the wheeling and dealing he did along the way. You might find him out in the shop, at an auction, or visiting a neighbor at his farm, just watching them work.

Funeral services were on Friday, Jan. 2 at the Rendleman & Hileman Funeral Home in Jonesboro with Brent Miller officiating. Interment followed in the Jonesboro Cemetery.

Graveside military rites were conducted by the Carroll P. Foster Post #3455 of the V.F.W. in Anna and the Scott Air Force Base Honor Guard.

Memorial contributions may be made to Shriners Hospital for Children or the American Heart Association. Envelopes will be available at the funeral home.

Janet Dabbs

Janet Dabbs, age 67 of Mill Creek, passed away Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2025 at her home, surrounded by her family.

She was born on April 8, 1958 in Cape Girardeau, Mo., the daughter of Grady and Imogene (Nolan) Dabbs. She married Cecil Salyers.

Janet is survived by her daughter, Addison Newell-Dabbs; sister, Lisa McClellan; brothers, Jerry and Randy Dabbs; niece, Sydney Newell; numerous other nieces, nephews, other relatives and many friends. She was preceded in death by her husband, parents, siblings, Carolyn Dabbs-Gill, Cathy Klasner, Sherry Newell, Linda Turner and Patricia Coleson and nephews, Jerry Dabbs, Nathan Klasner and Gary Sparks.

Janet was an avid hunter. She enjoyed crocheting and traveling. She was a people person, always willing to help others. She loved her family and spending time with them.

Her greatest accomplishment was



adopting Addison.

Memories of Janet Dabbs were shared by family and friends on Monday, Jan. 5 at Rendleman and Hileman Funeral Home in Jonesboro.

Memorial contributions can be made to Rendleman and Hileman Funeral Home to assist the family with expenses. Envelopes are available at the funeral home.

To visit Janet's memorial page and leave online condolences for her family, please visit the Rendleman and Hileman Funeral Home website at rendlemanhilemanfh.com

Wendel Dean Davis

Wendel Dean Davis, age 84, of Anna, passed away on Monday, Jan. 5, 2026 surrounded by his family.

He was born on Dec. 22, 1941 to Wendel and Wilhelma (Pearce) Davis in Johnson County, Ill.

Wendel worked for many years as a carpet installer and then worked at Choate Mental Health, and following retirement, worked at his true love, farming.

He was an active member of Gospel Assembly Church in Anna. He visited and cared for his fellow worshippers. Wendel never met a stranger and was there for anyone who needed him and never expected anything in return.

Survivors include his wife, Georgena Davis; three children, Jerry (Demetria) Davis, Bonnita (Stan) Penrod, and Tina (Bob) Carter; six grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; and father-in-law, Fred Pitts.

Along with his parents, he is preceded in death by his sister, Wilma Booth; and mother-in-law, Barbara Pitts.

Crain Funeral Home Services will be held



on Thursday, Jan. 8 at 5 p.m. with Rev. Brandon Reynolds officiating at Crain Funeral Home Anna with the conclusion of services to follow. Visitation will be held prior to the service from 2 p.m. until 5 p.m. at the funeral Home.

A Private Interment will be held at Ebenezer Hall Cemetery in Lick Creek, Illinois.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests with gratitude that memorial contributions be made to Ebenezer Hall Cemetery and/or Hospice of Southern Illinois.

Crain Funeral Home in Anna, Illinois is in charge of arrangements.

David J. "Butch" Cook

David J. "Butch" Cook, age 80, of Anna, passed away at Mercy Southeast Hospital in Cape Girardeau, Mo. on Dec. 28, 2025 at 2:50 a.m., surrounded by his family.

David was born July 17, 1945 at home in Cobden, the son of David and Helen (Adams) Cook.

He married Frances Tucker on Dec. 27, 1964 in Cobden. She preceded him in death on June 14, 2022.

David is survived by their children, David (Janet) Cook, Jr., Scott Cook, and Amanda (Chris) Fowler; seven grandchildren; fourteen great-grandchildren; two great-great grandchildren; one sister, Mabel Ann Hill, and several nieces, nephews, other relatives and friends.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Frances Cook, sister, Neomia Means, brother, Robert Allan Cook, and two nephews, Robert D. Hill and Jeff Hill.

David spent many years working for the Illinois Central Railroad and retired from Canadian National Railroad. He honorably served his country in the United States Army. David treasured spending time with his family and friends at Sunday dinners and cookouts.

He was the past governor of the Anna Moose Lodge 1346 where he earned his Pilgram Degree, past master of the Cobden Masonic Lodge 466,



and a proud member of the Ainad Shriners.

Funeral services for David J. "Butch" Cook were held on Friday, Jan. 2, 2026 at the Rendleman and Hileman Funeral Home in Cobden with Pastor Bobbi Schultz officiating. Interment followed in the Cobden Cemetery.

Graveside military rites were performed by the Army Funeral Honors Team and the Carroll P. Foster Post 3455 of the V.F.W. in Anna.

Memorial contributions may be made to Shriners Children's Hospital or Mooseheart Child City & School. Envelopes will be available at the funeral home.

To view the obituary and leave online condolences for the family, visit www.rendlemanhilemanfh.com.

Rendleman and Hileman Funeral Home in Cobden is in charge of arrangements.

Rendleman & Hileman Funeral Homes



News from

Anna Nazarene Church

Sunday, Jan. 4
The morning worship service was held at 10:35 a.m. on Jan. 4, with special guests Illinois District Superintendent Dr. Terry Armstrong and wife Becky.
Announcements were given by Jessica Elkins. The worship service was led by Pastor Wright and the worship team. The message “What Lies Ahead” was brought by Pastor Wright from Philippians 1:6, Isaiah 43:18-19, Philippians 3:13-14, Jeremiah 29:11, 2 Corinthians 5:17, John 5:39-40, John 14:6, Romans 6:4, John 7:37-38.
There was no evening ser-

vice on Jan. 4.
Celebrating a birthday this week is: 7th Dorris Johnson Sunday, Jan. 11
Breakfast - 9:00 a.m. Sunday School - 9:30 a.m. Morning Worship Service-10:35 a.m. No Evening Service
Wednesday, Jan. 14
Wednesday Night Service will be held at 6:30 p.m. in the sanctuary.
Youth Group in the Fellowship Hall at 6:30 p.m.
You may contact the church by calling the church office at 618-833-6702 and leaving a message if necessary or by calling Pastor Wright at 618-534-7103

News from

First Baptist Church, Jonesboro

This past Sunday, January 4, Pastor Perry presented a message asking the question, “If you could have God grant your request, what would it be?” He used the story of Solomon as an example who asked for wisdom and God granted his prayer. His text was found in the third chapter of 1 Kings in the Old Testament.
Music Director, Dee Rose, led in worship accompanied by the Praise Team: Lucas, Megan and Isabel Tehandòn, and Kerry Shipley. Debbie York accompanied them on the piano. The Tehandòn sang a special: “We Were Made for Heaven.”
Our service was sent via

transmitter station 87.9 FM for those who want to listen via the radio. The service was also live streamed on Facebook, so if you missed it, you still have an opportunity to view it. Please check our Facebook page, Jonesboro FBC, for the videos and latest info on church events.
This week’s activities include the Men’s Bible Study at 6 p.m., Monday, January 5; and the Senior Adult group, Living Longer and Loving It (LLL), monthly meeting and potluck with special guest Terri Goldsburly, Tuesday, January 6, 11 a.m.
Recent birthdays: Amber Brown, January 4; Jerry Hunter

and Aaron Sheffer, January 7; Amy Sheffer, January 10; and Denna Williams, January 11. Happy birthday to all!
Currently, our regular schedule for worship at Jonesboro First Baptist includes Sunday School classes on Sundays at 9 a.m.; Sunday morning worship at 10 a.m.; both Youth for 6th-12th grades and Sunday evening worship at 6 p.m. Our Children’s Dig-In Program meets on Wednesdays, from 6-8 p.m. Youth 7th-12th grades meet 6-8 p.m. Wednesdays. Our Adult Prayer Meeting and Bible Study also meets on Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m. All are invited to attend.

Anna VFW hosting music events

The Veterans of Foreign Wars Carroll P. Foster Post No. 3455 of Anna are hosting two musical events this week-end. Mystify Music Service will be at the post on Friday, Jan 9 from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. Star Karaoke will also be spinning on Sunday, Jan. 11 from 3 to 7 p.m.

Check out
The Gazette-Democrat online at
annanews.com

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It's Time to Redecorate



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With time, money and effort, we can change our surroundings... color swatches, wallpaper samples and a marathon of television “instruction” can certainly be exhilarating. But what is the answer to happiness when the “new” becomes boring once more? Perhaps we need spiritual “adrenaline”? When you give your life to God, your spirit will be satisfied, full and alive. Worship this week and learn about the spirit of newness that never gets old.

Weekly Scripture Reading						
Matthew	John	John	Hebrews	Hebrews	Hebrews	Hebrews
28.1-20	20.1-31	21.1-25	4.1-13	4.14-5.14	6.1-20	7.1-28

Scriptures Selected by the American Bible Society

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Wednesday
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The Gazette-Democrat

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HELP WANTED

City of Anna, General Clerk
The City of Anna, IL is accepting applications for the position of a General Clerk. Applicants must be 18 years of age with a high school diploma or equivalent. The position will be 40 hours a week, 8 am to 4 pm. Candidates must have a positive attitude, be able to multi-task and work well with the public and employees. Duties include but are not limited to: greeting customers, answering multi-line phone system, collecting and posting payments, entering data and creating customer bills. Must be able to operate basic office equipment, proficient computer skills (including Window Office), and basic accounting knowledge. This position is under the Local 773 Collective Bargaining Agreement and the starting pay is \$24.60/hour. Applications will be available for interested candidates at Anna City Hall or online at cityofanna.org. Please return resume and employment application to the Human Resources Department at Anna City Hall, 103 Market Street Anna, IL 62906 or by email to mmcreynolds@cityofanna.org. Position will remain open until filled. EOE

Anna First Baptist Church is looking for a Part-time Custodian – 20 hours per week, Monday through Thursday. If interested, applications can be picked up at the church office located at 409 Morgan Street in Anna.

LEGAL NOTICE

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR THE 1ST JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
UNION COUNTY - JONESBORO, ILLINOIS
Rocket Mortgage, LLC f/k/a Quicken Loans, LLC f/k/a Quicken Loans Inc.
PLAINTIFF
Vs.
Dylan Shane Barker; Esther Barker; Merandia Gifford a/k/a Merandia R. Gifford; City of Anna; Unknown Owners and Nonrecord Claimants
DEFENDANTS
No. 2025FC15
NOTICE BY PUBLICATION
NOTICE IS GIVEN TO YOU:
Unknown Owners and Nonrecord Claimants
That this case has been commenced in this Court against you and other defendants, praying for the foreclosure of a certain Mortgage conveying the premises described as follows, to-wit: **COMMONLY KNOWN AS:** 807 N Main St Anna, IL 62906 and which said Mortgage was made by: Dylan Shane Barker Esther Barker Merandia Gifford a/k/a Merandia R. Gifford the Mortgagor(s), to Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc., as mortgagee, as nominee for Quicken Loans Inc., as Mortgagee, and recorded in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds of Union County, Illinois, as Document No. 2016R1231; and for other relief; that summons was duly issued out of said

Governor names National Guard assistant adjutant general-Air

Illinois Air National Guard director of staff Col. Steven B. Rice of Morrison has been selected as the next assistant adjutant general-Air of the Illinois National Guard. Gov. JB Pritzker announced the selection Dec. 20.

With the selection, Rice will be promoted to brigadier general and will serve as one of two governor-appointed deputies to Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the adjutant general of Illinois and commander of the Illinois National Guard. The other deputy is Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the assistant adjutant general-Army. Rice will replace Maj. Gen. Dan McDonough, who will retire after nearly 38 years of military service.

“Colonel Rice was an enlisted Airman for the first 15 years of his career, so he understands the Illinois Air National Guard from the ground-level up,” the governor said in a news release. “His proven leadership abilities and years of technical Air Force experience make

him an excellent choice to serve our state and the Illinois Air National Guard Airmen and their families in this role.”

Boyd said that McDonough has had an incredible impact on the Illinois Air National Guard, helping to usher in transformative changes such as standing up the Contingency Response Group and the new C-130Js at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria.

He also oversaw major construction and new missions in both the 183rd Wing in Springfield and the 126th Air Refueling Wing on Scott Air Force Base. All three wings have continued to excel in major inspections and support important exercises while adapting to meet the challenge posed by “near peer” competitors such as China.

“Colonel Rice is ready to take the reins of the Illinois Air National Guard as the Assistant Adjutant General,” said Maj. Gen. Boyd. “He has worked closely with

me, Major General McDonough, and Illinois Air National Guard Chief of Staff Brigadier General Kevin Jacobs. We are all confident in Colonel Rice’s ability to help lead the Illinois Air National Guard as the National Guard and the Air Force transforms to meet future challenges.”

As the director of the Illinois Air National Guard, Rice oversaw the daily operations of the headquarters staff and directed activities of his staff members in the areas of strategic planning, policy implementation, personnel services, logistics, recruiting and retention, facilities, security and force protection, along with homeland security and homeland defense. Before being selected as the director of staff, Rice served as the commander of the 182nd Mission Support Group, 182nd Airlift Wing, in Peoria.

As the assistant adjutant general-Air, Rice will be responsible for plans and programs affecting nearly 3,000 Illi-

nois Air National Guard personnel at Scott Air Force Base, Peoria and Springfield. His broad range of responsibilities will include ensuring combat readiness and mission capability of three major air bases comprised of flying wings, command and control facilities, logistics and mission support units, while providing combat trained personnel to meet all the U.S. Air Force mission requirements. He will also supervise a full-time force of over 900 federal and state employees.

Rice enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1986. Upon completing his initial active duty basic and technical training, he was assigned as a munitions systems specialist at Osan Air Base, Republic of Korea. He was selected for a federal air technician position at the 182nd Fighter Group in 1992 and was assigned as the NCO in charge of missile maintenance.

In 1994, he was selected as a flight engineer with the newly as-

signed C-130E aircraft, where he obtained his instructor and evaluator flight engineer ratings. Rice obtained a commission in the Air National Guard in 2001, serving as commander of the 182nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron and the 182nd Communications Flight before becoming the 182nd Maintenance Group commander in 2018.

Rice deployed to Camp Dublin, Iraq, in 2008 in support of the NATO Training Mission-Iraq, where he helped the Italian Carabinieri train more than 2,500 Iraqi national police. He is a lifetime member of both the National Guard Association of Illinois and the National Guard Association of the United States and served as the 182nd Airlift Wing director on the NGAI board. He is also a member of Lewistown Lodge 104 of the Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, American Legion Post 1 in Lewistown and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5001 in Lewistown.

IDOT highlights projects, achievements for 2025

As 2025 came to an end, the Illinois Department of Transportation, IDOT, highlighted accomplishments which were recorded during the year.

IDOT continued to work to revitalize and modernize transportation and mobility across the state in 2025. Made possible by the bipartisan Rebuild Illinois capital program, projects transformed highways, transit, railroads, airports, waterways and active transportation everywhere Illinois residents call home, creating safer and more reliable travel options while boosting economic opportunity for generations to come.

“From launching the largest infrastructure program in state history to spearheading transformational projects, Illinois is making landmark investments in our present and future – creating good-paying jobs and paving the way toward an Illinois that is built to last,” Gov. JB Pritzker said in a news release. “Whether it’s on a repaved road, over a repaired bridge, or in a brand-new bike lane, IDOT is working to get

you where you’re going smoothly and safely while supporting community revitalization in every corner of the state.”

Passed in 2019, Rebuild Illinois is investing \$45 billion in the state’s aging infrastructure, creating jobs and building stronger communities. Accomplishments through Year Six include almost \$20.8 billion of improvements statewide to 21,309 lane miles of highway, 815 bridges and 1,181 additional safety improvements, ranging from routine maintenance projects and minor resurfacings to extensive interstate and bridge reconstructions.

A 2025 highlight was the October release of the largest multi-year construction program in state history: \$50.6 billion over six years, eclipsing the previous record of \$41.4 billion in 2024. Covering fiscal years 2026 to 2031, the multi-year program is both comprehensive and multimodal, touching every Illinois county.

“The past year was another landmark one for investing in people and communities up and down Illinois,” IDOT

Secretary Gia Biagi said. “The projects and initiatives today are making our state a better place to raise a family, build a career and do business for tomorrow.”

Projects and accomplishments in the Southern Illinois area, along with some of the statewide achievements, included:

Highways, Bridges
The expansion of I-57 between West Frankfort and Benton in Franklin County wrapped up last summer, meaning 27 miles of six-lane highway have been completed in Southern Illinois. Work continues on the next segments: 8 miles between Marion and I-24 and nearly 17 miles in the Rend Lake area.

Trails
The new 2.4-mile Saluki Greenway in Carbondale opened in November to provide access to shopping, medical care and recreation. Supported through the Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program, the project includes a fully separated walking and biking route, painted crosswalks and signalized crossings at high-traffic intersections along Illinois 13

between Wood Road and Old Route 13.

Multimodalism
The Consolidated Vehicle Procurement program is investing more than \$57 million in local communities this year, allowing them to acquire paratransit vehicles for transit agencies and non-profits. The program is in the process of delivering more than 500 vehicles to 110 providers. IDOT’s consolidated procurement of vehicles ensures uniformity of meeting specifications, adds efficiency and volume cost savings to the process, and takes the burden off transit providers, particularly for smaller agencies and nonprofits.

The Shawneetown Regional Port District broke ground in August on a new fertilizer distribution center along the Ohio River. Made possible by \$12.6 million from Rebuild Illinois, the project will make local agriculture operations more efficient by reducing the traveling distance to the next closest port, resulting in improved safety as well as less wear and tear on local roads.

Initiatives
The third official no-

tice of funding opportunity through the Illinois National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Program, which will provide approximately \$65.6 million for the construction of charging stations across the state, was announced in December. The latest opportunity builds on the first two rounds, which awarded funding for 62 charging stations along Illinois interstates to help meet the governor’s goal to have 1 million electric vehicles on Illinois roads by 2030.

Statewide, volunteer groups and civic organizations led the charge on the Adopt-A-Highway program to arrange regular pickups of litter. Over the past year, 771 hours were recorded by 2,019 volunteers to collect 1,814 bags of trash. The program accepted 51 applications to join in 2025, pushing the number of participants in Adopt-A-Highway to 1,296.

IDOT’s podcast “Take the Exit” launched in May to explore the individuals, projects and stories shaping transportation in Illinois. New episodes of “Take the Exit” will be released monthly.



Blankets made
Jane Bauer, president of GFWC Illinois Anna Jonesboro Woman’s Club, delivered 20 blankets to Three Rivers Advocacy Center and 20 blankets to Children Medical Resource Network in Anna. These were made by Debbie Rossberg and Jane Bauer from the club.



January meeting
The General Federation of Women’s Clubs Illinois Anna Jonesboro Woman’s Club met at Anna Pizza Hut on Monday, Jan. 5.
Front row, from left, Martha Ann Webb, PPR; Macky Cohen, Parliamentarian; Nancy Skroglund, guest. Back row, Martha Schwegman, celebrating her January birthday also discussed current events; Lillian Milam, education and gave the devotion; guest speaker Venus Buck, RN and Deaconess Illinois Union County patient advocate and activity coordinator, discussing her work at the hospital; Jane Bauer, president, lead in the Pledge of Allegiance and our club collect. Jane also gave the treasurers report and discussed the past history and future. Jane blessed the food and everyone enjoyed a delicious meal. The club also worked on volunteer hours they did for 2025.

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County Line News

(Mill Creek and Upper Elco)

By Suzan Harvel

Members of P.A.S.T. of Union County met for their monthly meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 30, 2025. Donations for both St. Anne’s and PAST Heritage House Luncheons were appreciated. Plans for numerous fund raisers and events were discussed and new ideas shared.

The first of these many events will be an Open House Tea, held at the historic St. Anne’s Episcopal Church on Jan. 24 from 2 to 4 p.m. The community is encouraged to stop in for a tour and learn more about its history and what both it and the Heritage House can offer to those in Union County and beyond.

2026 has gotten off on a fairly good start...weather wise. No snow or ice. This time last

year we had both. That’s not to say we won’t be getting it, because, as we know...February isn’t here yet.

Folks have been talking about how late they’ve seen it snow in the spring. We buried my maternal grandmother March 30, 1987 in snow and bitter cold. My mother-in-law says when they were married, April 11, 1953, it snowed that week. My grandmother always said she’d seen it snow in May. Since she never said when, I Googled it, and it says on May 2, 1929 a freak snowstorm moved through. We were on the lowest end of accumulation, but hey...it snowed. She would have been 15 years old. I think we can all agree, we don’t want that again.

Today is the 12th day of Christmas (Jan. 5) and, normally, I can take down my Christmas decorations without getting the stink eye from friends and relatives. However, my mother-in-law just returned home, and she hasn’t had Christmas with everyone yet, so she wants them left up until later...like the middle of the month.

I will admit we left the outside lights on the house up until March (many years before) because bad weather moved in and stayed. We solved that problem by just not putting them up where they are too hard to get down in a hurry.

Brother Bobby Richardson gave his sermon this week from 1 Corinthians 11: 23-34. As we observed the Lord’s Supper, we turned to these passages to remind us we must examine ourselves for sin before we partake. It is in

Jesus’ sacrifice and in the honest recognition of our sins that makes us worthy to partake. Jesus instituted the observance of the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26: 26-30) and gave us the blueprint for doing it correctly. Paul was correcting the church in Corinth that they were doing it in a wrong manner. Reverence, respect, and repentance should be remembered. We all sin, every day, and need to ask God’s forgiveness each day, not just in observance of the Lord’s Supper.

The Mill Creek community has had several families lose loved ones this last week, please keep them in prayer: Otis Burris, Janet Dabbs, Ronnie Dillow, Norman “Bud” Powles, and our pastor’s step-mother, Sandy Richardson. We offer our sincere condolences. Also, remember Doug Bridgman for health concerns.

Union County Fixin’s

Healthy Peanut Butter Cups

2 full sheets of graham crackers

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 cup peanut butter

2 Tablespoons honey

12 oz. bag of semisweet chocolate chips

Line a 12-cup mini muffin tin with small cupcake liners

Process graham crackers and salt in a food processor until finely ground.

Transfer to a bowl and add peanut butter and honey. Cover bowl and chill for 10 minutes.

Spread out a sheet of plastic wrap on a cookie sheet. Divide peanut butter mixture into 12-1 Tablespoon balls.

Place on plastic wrap covered cookie sheet. Flatten slightly with fingers. Chill again for 10 minutes.

Place chocolate in a double boiler or heat safe bowl over saucepan of boiling water. Stir until melted and smooth. Remove from heat and cool slightly.

Spoon 1 teaspoon of the chocolate into each of the paper cupcake liners. Spread with the back of spoon, half-way up the sides and across bottom of liners. Chill until hardened, about 30 minutes. Keep remaining chocolate at room temperature.

Press a peanut butter ball disk into each chocolate lined paper liner. Spread 1 Tablespoon of remaining chocolate over the top. Chill until firm, about 1 hour.

Keep refrigerated until ready to serve.

Television Listings

THURSDAY											
	ABC	CBS	FOX	NBC	ESPN	TBS	USA	DISN	HBO	MAX	PARSHO
6 PM :30	Local Programs	Local Programs	(5:00) Local Programs	Local Programs	GameDay	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	ZOMBIES	“A Man Called Otto”	“Means War” (33) “Blue Beetle” (‘23) Xolo Maridueña. (HD)	(5:00) “Lost Ark” (81)
7 PM :30	9-1-1 “Secrets” (HD)	Golden Eve	Hell’s Kitchen “Queens of the Kitchen,” (HD)	Law & Order (HD)	(40) 2025-26 College Football Playoff from State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Ariz.	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Kiff	★★★ “Margaret” (‘11, Drama) Anna Paquin. (R) (HD)	“Temple of Doom” (84) Harrison Ford. (HD)	
8 PM :30	9-1-1: Nashville	Matlock (HD)		Law & Order: SVU		Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Kiff		“Kong: Skull Island” (‘17) Tom Hiddleston.	
9 PM :30	Gray’s Anatomy (HD)	Elsbeth “Ick, A Bod”	Local Programs Local info.	The Hunting Party		Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Wizards	(33) “65” (‘23) Adam Driver. (HD)		“Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade” (‘89)
10 PM :30	Local	Local		Local	(:20)	★★½ “Blue Beetle” (‘23) Xolo Maridueña. (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Electric		(40) “Glass” (‘19) James McAvoy.	
11 PM :30	Jimmy Kimmel Live (HD)	(35) Late Show (HD)	Local Programs	(35) Tonight (HD)	SportsCenter with Scott (HD)		Law & Order: SVU	Bluey	FL Man		“Crystal Skull” (‘08)
	Nightline	(37) Local		Late Night	Sports			Bluey	TBA		

FRIDAY											
	ABC	CBS	FOX	NBC	ESPN	TBS	USA	DISN	HBO	MAX	PARSHO
6 PM :30	Local Programs	Local Programs	(4:00) Local Programs	Local Programs	GameDay	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	ZOMBIES	“Twilight Saga” (‘09)	“Lincoln” (36) ★★★½ “Wonder Woman” (‘17, Action) Gal Gadot.	(5:15) “Shell” (25) (R)
7 PM :30	Celebrity Wheel	Sheriff Country	The Masked Singer “Premiere” (HD)	Figure Skating “2026 US Figure Skating Championships” (Live) (HD)	2025-26 College Football Playoff from Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta (Live)	★★½ “Ram-page” (‘18) Dwayne Johnson. (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	“Monsters University” (‘13) (HD)	★★ “The Twilight Saga: Eclipse” (‘10) (HD)		“Vicious” (‘25) Dakota Fanning.
8 PM :30	20/20 Investigative news. (HD)	Fire Country (HD)					Law & Order: SVU	(:50) Kiff			(45) “Scream” (‘96, Horror) David Arquette.
9 PM :30		Boston Blue	Local Programs			(15) ★★★ “The Flash” (‘23, Action) Sasha Calle. (PG-13) (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	(:15) Kiff	“Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn: Pt. 1” (‘11)	(58) ★★★ “Wonder Woman 1984” (20, Action) Gal Gadot.	
10 PM :30	Local	Local	Local Programs	Local	(:20)		Law & Order: SVU	Electric			“Baby Driver” (‘17) Ansel Elgort.
11 PM :30	Jimmy Kimmel Live (HD)	(35) Late Show (HD)	Local Programs	(35) Tonight (HD)	SportsCenter with Scott (HD)		Law & Order: SVU	Big City	(:05) “Dawn 2” (‘12)		
	Nightline	(37) Local		Late Night	Sports			Big City		“Evil Dead”	

SATURDAY											
	ABC	CBS	FOX	NBC	ESPN	TBS	USA	DISN	HBO	MAX	PARSHO
6 PM :30	Local	To Be Announced	NFL Playoffs (Live)	Local Programs	College Basketball	“Aquaman” (‘23) (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	“Zombies 4: Dawn” (25)	(05) Hard Knocks	“Man of”	“Forrest Gump” (94)
7 PM :30	Shark Tank (HD)	Coben’s Final Twist	College Basketball “Teams TBA” (HD)	The Wall (HD)	College Basketball Texas vs Alabama (Live)	★★★ “Black Adam” (‘22, Action) Dwayne Johnson. (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Big City	“John Wick” (‘14) Keanu Reeves.	“Suicide Squad” (‘16, Action) Will Smith.	“The Martian” (‘15, Science Fiction) Matt Damon. (HD)
8 PM :30	Shark Tank (HD)	48 Hours (HD)		Dateline NBC (HD)			Law & Order: SVU	Big City			
9 PM :30	Shark Tank (HD)	48 Hours (HD)	Local Programs	Saturday Night Live	College Basketball BYU vs Utah (Live) (HD)	★★ “Green Lantern” (‘11, Action) Ryan Reynolds. (PG-13)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas	“John Wick: Chapter 2” (‘17) Keanu Reeves.	(40) “The Suicide Squad” (21, Action) Margot Robbie.	(25) “The Aviator” (‘04, Drama) Leonardo DiCaprio. (HD)
10 PM :30	Local Programs	Local Programs Local info.	The Floor (HD)	Local			Law & Order: SVU	Miraculous	“John Wick: Chapter 3” (‘19) (R)	“Justice League”	
11 PM :30	Local Programs		Local Programs	Saturday Night Live (HD)	SportsCenter (HD)		Law & Order: SVU	Big City			

SUNDAY											
	ABC	CBS	FOX	NBC	ESPN	TBS	USA	DISN	HBO	MAX	PARSHO
6 PM :30	Home Videos (HD)	Golden Globes	To Be Announced	Stumble	Why Not Both!	“Wonder” Gal Gadot.	Law & Order: SVU	“Ralph Breaks the Internet” John C. Reilly.	Industry	“Bodyguard”	(5:45) “Top Gun: Maverick” (22) Tom Cruise.
7 PM :30	Videos	The 83rd Annual Golden Globe Awards	To Be Announced	Football	We’re #1	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU		(40) Industry	“Life as We Know It” (‘10) Katherine Heigl.	
8 PM :30	(33) “That Thing You Do!” (‘96) Tom Everett Scott. (HD)		Krapopolis Simpsons		Fab Five (HD)	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas	Industry (HD)		Coldwater
9 PM :30			Local Programs Local info.			Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas	(:03) Industry (HD)	(35) “This Means War” (‘12) (HD)	
10 PM :30	Local Programs Local info.	Local Programs			Sports	“The Suicide Squad” (21) Margot Robbie.	Law & Order: SVU	Miraculous	(:06) Industry (HD)	(13) “Carol” (‘14, Romance) Cate Blanchett.	
11 PM :30		Local Programs	Local Programs	Local Programs Local info.	SportsCenter with Scott (HD)		Law & Order: SVU	Bluey	(:09) Industry (HD)		Coldwater
								Bluey		“Fight or”	

MONDAY											
	ABC	CBS	FOX	NBC	ESPN	TBS	USA	DISN	HBO	MAX	PARSHO
6 PM :30	Local Programs	Local Programs	(5:00) Local Programs	Local Programs	Monday Countdown	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas	(5:07) “Missing” (‘23)	“Wonka”	“Spider-Man: Homecoming” Tom Holland.
7 PM :30	(15) Monday Night Football “Teams TBA”	Neighbor.	Best Medicine (HD)	Medical	(15) NFL Wild Card (Live)	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas	Industry (HD)	★★½ “Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom” (‘23)	
8 PM :30		FBI “Takeover” (HD)	Doc “Kaddish” (HD)	The Wall (HD)		Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas	“Flight Risk” Michelle Dockery.		Coldwater
9 PM :30		NCIS: Origins (HD)	Local Programs Local info.	Brilliant Minds (HD)		Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas and Ferb	(:03) Industry (HD)	(45) ★★★ “Blue Beetle” (‘23, Action) Xolo Maridueña. (HD)	
10 PM :30	(15) Local	Local		Local	Monday	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Miraculous	(:36) Industry (HD)		
11 PM :30	Jimmy Kimmel Live	(35) Late Show (HD)	Local Programs	(35) Tonight (HD)	SportsCenter (HD)	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Miraculous	“Ex Machina” Domhnall Gleeson.		(45) “The Comeback Trail” (‘20)
	Nightline	(37) Local		Late Night	Sports	Family	Law & Order: SVU	Bluey		★★½ “Everything” (‘17)	

TUESDAY											
	ABC	CBS	FOX	NBC	ESPN	TBS	USA	DISN	HBO	MAX	PARSHO
6 PM :30	Local Programs	Local Programs	(5:00) Local Programs	Local Programs	Golf (Live)	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas	“Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire” (24)	“Elevation”	“Scream 2” (‘97, Horror) David Arquette. (HD)
7 PM :30	Will Trent (HD)	NCIS (HD)	Best Medicine (HD)	NBA Basketball Minnesota Timberwolves at Milwaukee Bucks (Live)		Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas		(39) “Superman” (‘78, Action) Christopher Reeve. (HD)	
8 PM :30	High Potential (HD)	NCIS: Origins (HD)	Doc “Family Matters”		College Basketball “Teams TBA” (HD)	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas	Hard Knocks		“Scream 3” (‘00, Horror) Neve Campbell. (HD)
9 PM :30	The Rookie (HD)	NCIS: Sydney (HD)	Local Programs Local info.			Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas and Ferb	Industry (HD)	(:03) “Superman II” (‘81) Gene Hackman. (HD)	
10 PM :30	Local	Local		Local		Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Miraculous	(:03) Hard Knocks		“Scream 4” (‘11) David Arquette.
11 PM :30	Jimmy Kimmel Live	(35) Late Show (HD)	Local Programs	(35) Tonight (HD)	SportsCenter (HD)	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Miraculous	(:03) Hard Knocks	“Superman III” (‘83)	“Halloween”
	Nightline	(37) Local		Late Night	Sports	Family	Law & Order: SVU	Bluey			

WEDNESDAY											
	ABC	CBS	FOX	NBC	ESPN	TBS	USA	DISN	HBO	MAX	PARSHO
6 PM :30	Local Programs	Local Programs	(5:00) Local Programs	Local Programs	(12) NBA Basketball Cleveland vs Philadelphia (Live) (HD)	Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas	“Going Distance” (R)	“Carol”	“Impossible” (‘96)
7 PM :30	Gears	Hollywood Squares	The Masked Singer	Chicago Med (HD)		Bang (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas	Industry (HD)	“Bad Santa” Billy Bob Thornton.	“Mission: Impossible II” (‘00) Tom Cruise.
8 PM :30	(02) Daytime Talk	The Price Is Right at	(02) Fear Factor. (HD)	Chicago Fire (HD)		AEW: Dynamite “Dynamite 1/14/2026” (Live)	Law & Order: SVU	Phineas	“Fargo” Frances McDormand. (R)	(13) ★★★ “Bad Santa 2” (‘16) (R)	
9 PM :30	(02) Shark Tank (HD)	Coben’s Final Twist	Local Programs Local info.	Chicago P.D. (HD)	(35) NBA Basketball Denver vs Dallas (Live) (HD)	Jokers	Law & Order: SVU	Big City	(45) Industry (HD)	(46) “The Great Wall” (‘17) Matt Damon. (HD)	“Mission: Impossible III” (‘06) Tom Cruise.
10 PM :30	Local	Local		Local		Jokers	Law & Order: SVU	Miraculous			
11 PM :30	Jimmy Kimmel Live	(35) Late Show (HD)	Local Programs	(35) Tonight (HD)	SportsCenter (HD)	Family	Law & Order: SVU	Miraculous	(47) “65” (‘23) Adam Driver. (HD)		(15) “Mission” (‘11)
	Nightline	(37) Local		Late Night		Family	Law & Order: SVU	Bluey		“Island”	

Anna Jo Garden Club News



Anna Jo Garden Club members enjoyed our annual Christmas gathering, catered by The Kitchen on Lafayette. Items were collected to donate to the Veteran’s Home, and a silent auction also contributed additional funds.

We sang Christmas carols and celebrated the past year’s accomplishments. New officers were installed and we gave thanks for our long time president, Nancy Kucera.

AJGC is always seeking new members. We are calling out all gardeners ! Most especially new retirees and their grandchildren. Our newest member is 8-years-old.

We enjoy time working together on the Garden Park, as well as the Anna City Park. We work on projects at the school, and the Annabelle Festival as well learning from speakers at our monthly meetings. In the spring AJGC is also hosting the District Meeting of Illinois Garden Clubs.

AJGC is hosting a series of speakers, beginning in January on topics of interest to community members who care for gardens and property. These will be held at the Shawnee Hills Art Council building in Anna on the last Monday of each month. All are welcome to attend.

Anna Jo Garden Club hosting new monthly speaker series

The Anna-Jo Garden Club is sponsoring a new monthly educational program, Conservation Corner, aimed at sharing practical, local knowledge about environmental topics that affect Southern Illinois.

The free speaker series is open to the public and is designed for landowners, gardeners, conservation enthusiasts, and professionals. Each session will feature a guest speaker with expertise in conservation-related fields.

Programs will be held at the Shawnee Hills Arts Council, located at 125 West Davie Street in Anna. All events begin at 6 p.m.

The 2026 Conservation Corner schedule includes:

January 26

Zack Rowatt of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service will speak on water quality.

February 23

Chris Evans of the University of Illinois Extension will present on invasive species in Southern Illinois.

March 30

Tony Gerrard of Shawnee Community College will discuss reptiles and their role in local ecosystems.

April 27

John Wingate of Cache River Habitat Management LLC will speak on habitat management.

There is no cost to attend, and community members are encouraged to participate in one or all of the sessions.

Opinion and Commentary

Reset. Rebalance. Refresh. Dry January starts with one choice

January 1 marked the start of a new year and a new challenge: Dry January. The Illinois Liquor Control Commissions says Dry January is the time to reset and renew after an indulgent holiday season.

Dry January is a one-month sobriety challenge where participants abstain from drinking alcohol for 31 days. The goal is to cleanse the body, adopt healthy new habits, and reevaluate one’s relationship with alcohol.

Just one month can bring about many physical and mental health benefits according to this Healthline article, including repaired liver damage, decreased risk of heart disease, improved sleep, and weight loss. The decision to participate in Dry January can be a personal choice or group effort. Either way, if you decide to take the challenge, consider the following tips to help you plan for success:

- Remove any alcohol from your home and other areas you may frequent.
 - Load up on non-alcoholic beverages, such as water, seltzers, teas and juices.
 - Avoid events and locations where drinking is prevalent, like bars, parties and sporting events.
 - Establish your support group by letting your inner circle know your plans.
 - Forgive yourself if you slip up. Tomorrow is another day to try again.
- “Dry January is an opportunity for individuals to reset, refresh, and re-evaluate their relationship with alcohol,” Illinois Liquor Control Commission executive director Lisa Gardner said in a news release. “Every day you choose clarity and wellness is a win. Most importantly, this is a personal journey. Take this time to shape your new life in the new year. Best of luck!”

Illinois residents urged to watch for text scams

Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias is reminding all Illinoisans to remain vigilant for fraudulent text messages claiming they owe money for traffic violations or tolls.

Scam texts, which have surfaced recently, typically claim that the recipient’s vehicle registration or driving privileges are at risk of suspension and prompt immediate action through a link. These messages are phishing attempts designed to instill fear as a means of stealing money or personal information.

“Phishing scams continue to be a persistent threat, especially during the holiday season, with criminals repeatedly attempting to steal Illinoisans’ personal information and hard-earned money,” Giannoulias said in a news release. “These messages are designed to look legitimate, which is why it’s important for residents to remember that our office will never contact them by text about license or registration issues. Ignoring and reporting these scams helps protect everyone.”

The Secretary of State’s office sends text messages only to remind customers about scheduled DMV appointments. The office does not send texts related to driver’s license status, vehicle registration issues or enforcement actions.

Illinoisans who receive scam messages are encouraged to report them to the Federal Trade Commission by visiting reportfraud.ftc.gov.

The Cat's Meow

by Cobden Spay and Neuter Coalition

WOW! You’ve probably already seen on Facebook that CSNC spayed or neutered 170 community and feral cats in 2025. That is a huge achievement, given our limited resources. But we could do it because of your attention, compassion and generosity. We will, with your help, continue on this path throughout this coming year.

Let’s just consider the math. 170 cats. We’ll say half were females, so 85 breeding females with average litters of five = 425 kittens first six months. Half of those female, so 212 more to breed next six months = 1062 kittens, plus another 425 from the original 85 = 1487 kittens in just the first year.

The numbers are staggering, and so are the tragedies and suffering of many of these babies dying of starvation, predation, cruelty, environment. Needless and preventable suffering of completely innocent and helpless babies.

That’s why we pursue and promote and preach spay and neuter. Won’t you support us in our mission in our community?

You may drop off, call in, or send donations to our account at Meller-James &

Associates, or mail them to CSNC, P.O. Box 542, Cobden, IL 62920. CSNC is a 501c3 nonprofit organization, and donations are tax-deductible.

We continue to plan our Chili Cook-off on Saturday, Jan. 24 at Fuzzy’s in Cobden from 4-7 p.m. A fun new development—we will have a silent auction during the cook-off, hosted by the Green Mug, right next door to Fuzzy’s.

We are now accepting your donations of items, big or small, for this event. You may drop items off for the silent auction at the Cobden Village Hall or at KiKi’s Coffeehouse in Anna. We plan to put together a number of great gift baskets for the silent auction. Hope to see you there!

Please visit our website, cobdenspayneutercoalition.org, or our facebook page to see what we’re up to.

Spay/Neuter/Adopt companion animals. Meanwhile, if you see a companion animal in need, in trouble, or suffering, please, please call someone before it’s too late for them. Call your local animal control office, the police, or the Sheriff’s Dept. It IS your business if an innocent being who cannot speak for himself needs your help!

Please read this...

The most beautiful place in Illinois...



Sharing a “cute” picture of what appeared to be a well-fed squirrel seemed like a good way to start the new year. This Critter was seen during another “routine” visit to the Lincoln Memorial Picnic Grounds in Jonesboro. Actually, this particular squirrel was spotted on the final day of 2025. The Critter was probably getting ready for a big New Year’s Eve celebration.



A hawk was hanging out in the bare branches of a tree along Aldridge Road not far from metropolitan Cobden on a sunny first afternoon of 2026.



Nearly full moon

Jet contrails were passing in front of a nearly full moon in the sky over Union County on the evening of Dec. 30. The moon was full on Jan. 3. The full moon was the last supermoon that will make an appearance in the night sky until November, according to nationalgeographic.com.



Sunset on last day of 2025

Contrails and a few clouds were seen in the sky over Union County as the sun was setting on the last day of 2025. The image was captured late Wednesday afternoon, Dec. 31.

By Geof Skinner

Did you know that one of the most beautiful spots in the United States is practically in our backyard? I’m thinking our backyard is pretty nice, and yours probably is, too.

Anyway...while looking for some “good news” Monday evening, I came across a Travel + Leisure article online with a headline that read “The 51 Most Beautiful Places in the U.S.” The headline was accompanied by what we’ll call a sub-headline that read: “From stunning desert scenery to gorgeous beaches, these are the most scenic spots in every state.” The article was written by Anne Olivia Bauso.

When I see such headlines, I often take a look at the accompanying article...just to see if someplace close to home like our backyard, might be on the list. The list started with Alabama and continued, in alphabetical order, through all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Our backyard was not included.

The most beautiful place in Illinois: the Cache River State Natural Area. A place right here in Southern Illinois. Famous for its cypress trees and bayou environment. Our travels in Southern Illinois have taken us there a number of times. If you have never paid a visit, be sure to do so, especially now that you know you would be seeing one of the most beautiful places in the United States.

And, for what it might be worth, the most beautiful place in Kentucky (a home away from us for many years) is Mammoth Cave National Park. The last time we visited Mammoth Cave, as we were heading into the cave for a tour, we met a fellow traveler on The Journey Through Life from our hometown.

After scrolling through the rest of the list, I can see that there are a lot of places in our country that I need to see...even if our backyard is a pretty nice place...

Meanwhile...
Speaking of the outdoors...
“Just enjoying it...”

Couldn’t have said it better myself. The words were spoken by a young man (well, somebody who was much younger than yours truly) as we passed by one another on the first day of the brand new year.

We were among a fair number of folks who paid a visit to the Trail of Tears State Forest on the first day of January in 2026. Even though it was “technically” winter, the weather for early January was really, really nice. Lots of sunshine and the temperature was unexpectedly mild.

I had decided to pay a visit to the state forest to participate in a First Day Hike. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources had invited everyone to step into 2026 with a First Day Hike at an Illinois state park on New Year’s Day. Hikes were planned on Jan. 1 at 17 state parks. And a state forest, too.

IDNR explained that the First Day Hike program is an initiative in partnership with America’s State Parks Foundation. The organization began the event in 1992 in Massachusetts. The campaign encourages participants nationwide to hike, bike and engage in activities at state parks on the first day of the new year.

“There’s no better way to clear your mind after the holidays and look ahead to a new year than to explore the outdoors,” IDNR director Natalie Phelps Finnie shared ahead of the event. Couldn’t agree more.

My hike involved more of a long walk along the road through a picnic/playground/shelter area at the state forest. As is often the case, I also wandered along a creek bed which is parallel to the State Forest Road. The creek was, for the most part, lacking much in terms of water, a sign of how dry things have been, again, in our little corner of the world.

Before leaving the park (or the forest), First Day Hikers were invited to log in their “miles” in a book which was available at the landmark white barn at the state forest. To be honest, I have no idea how many “miles” I may have wandered. I left the space blank.

IDNR also invited hikers to share photos and videos on social media with the hashtag #ILFirstDayHikes. As somewhat of a Luddite when it comes to such things, I do not partake of social media or hashtags or viral moments. Guess it’s my loss. I did pick up a nifty First Day Hike sticker as a memento.

As I was finishing up my First Day Hike at the state forest, another young fellow drove by in his car...with the windows down...

“Happy New Year,” the young man said. Indeed, the new year was off to a nice start...

Meanwhile...

The Other Half continues to gear up for the 2026 gardening season. She has been busy putting together her new raised beds in the backyard. One is even ready to go. Potatoes have been planted. We’re eager to see how they do.

Her greenhouse continues to produce produce. As in fresh leafy greens. Not a bad thing in January.

She is a bit concerned about already seeing daffodils, tulips and irises popping up so early in the year. We have certainly enjoyed this winter’s warm days...but such weather may not be so good for flowers and other green things. We shall see...

Meanwhile...

The new year’s Critter Sightings started with three hawks...all seen on January 1...one along Mountain Glen Road...one along Aldridge Road, not far from Illinois Route 127, and one more, a little farther down the way along Aldridge Road.

By the way...did you know that seeing a hawk as your first bird of a new year can symbolize change, wisdom and a need for clarity in your life? It may also indicate that you are being watched over and guided by spiritual forces. “Search Assist” on my computer told me those things. I sure hope the wisdom part is true...