

HI-LITER

~ including McHenry County News

SEPT. 13-19, 2023 VOLUME 12 • NUMBER 19

DISPLAY ADS | CLASSIFIEDS | DELIVERY: (815) 877-4044

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Celebrate the season with SeptOberFest at Independence Grove

As the days grow cooler, the Lake County Forest Preserves has planned a variety of entertainment as part of SeptOberFest at Independence Grove Forest Preserve in Libertyville. Music by local artists, events and programs will take place Wednesdays and Thursdays through the end of October.

Lakeside fire pits and free firewood are available on a first come, first served basis. S'mores kits are also on hand for purchase.

Throughout SeptOberFest, the Beer Garden at Independence Grove is open 5-9 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays and 1-9 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. The venue features an array of local craft beers on tap from Lake County breweries. Wine, non-alcoholic beverages, cold brew coffee and packaged snacks are also available. Beer flights and tastings will be included in the lineup this fall.

"The beer garden has been a very popular place to enjoy the outdoors," said Angelo Kyle, president of the Lake County Forest Preserves. "The scenic venue overlooking a 129-acre lake provides a fantastic opportunity for family fun as we move into fall."

Musical Entertainment (6:30-8 pm)

- National slide guitar champion Kraig Kenning plays on September 21, and October 5 and 19.
- Singer and guitarist James Bruebach will perform September 13.
- Mariachi Viva Jalisco, a mariachi trio, performs September 14 in advance of

- Mexican Independence Day.
- Singer, songwriter Brett Ratner plays acoustic guitar on September 20.
- Todd Donnelly plays steel drums on October 11 and 18.
- Vocalist, guitarist Liz Berg performs solo pop rock on October 12.

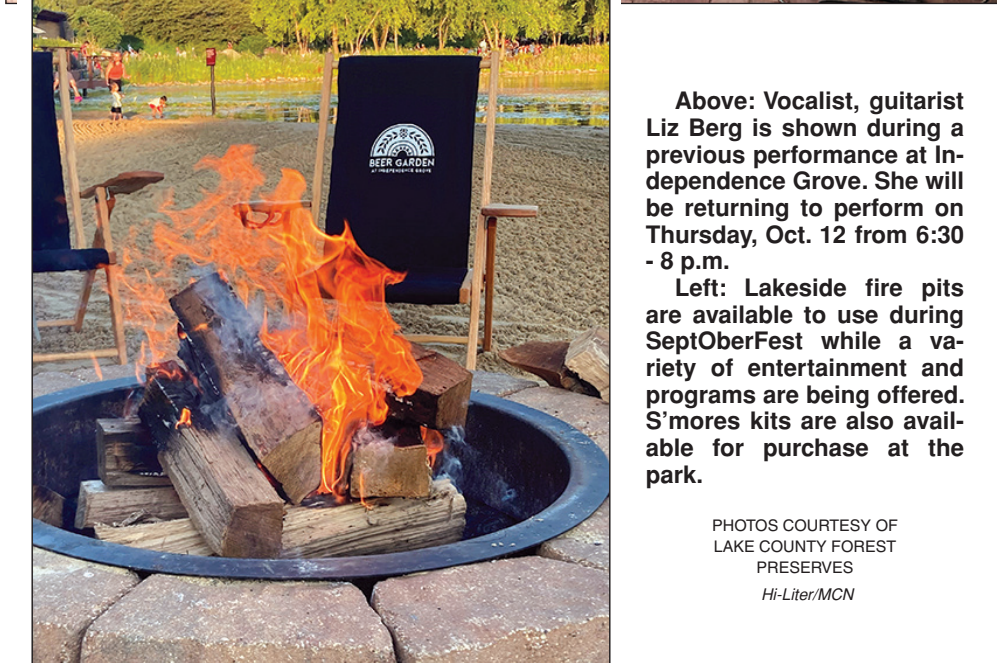
Programs

- Trivia Night takes place from 6-7 pm, September 27.
- Meet the brewmaster from Harbor Brewing from 6:30-8 pm, September 28.
- Enjoy a guided walk from 5:30-7 pm, October 4 at Independence Grove during Hike & Hops and relax by a bonfire. Registration is required at https://www.lcfd.org/calendar/hike--hops-20231004/?F_c=1208.
- Take a guided walk from 5-6:30 pm, October 25 at Independence Grove during Hike & Hops and enjoy a bonfire. Registration is required.
- Meet the brewmaster from Phase Three Brewing from 6:30-8 pm, October 26.

Entrance is free for Lake County residents. Non-residents are charged \$12 on weekends and holidays. With the exception of service animals, dogs, horses and other pets are not permitted at Independence Grove.

For more information on SeptOberFest visit the website at https://www.lcfd.org/calendar/?F_c=1208

The entrance to Independence Grove is located on Buckley Road (Route 137) just east of Milwaukee Ave (Route 21) and west of River Road in Libertyville.



Above: Vocalist, guitarist Liz Berg is shown during a previous performance at Independence Grove. She will be returning to perform on Thursday, Oct. 12 from 6:30 - 8 p.m.

Left: Lakeside fire pits are available to use during SeptOberFest while a variety of entertainment and programs are being offered. S'mores kits are also available for purchase at the park.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVES
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Dying and disabled Illinois prisoners kept behind bars, despite new medical release law

The Joe Coleman Medical Release Act was expected to have freed hundreds of terminally ill and medically incapacitated prisoners in Illinois by now. But only a few dozen have been released, an investigation from Injustice Watch and WBEZ reveals.

By Carlos Ballesteros (Injustice Watch), Shannon Heffernan (WBEZ) and Amy Qin (WBEZ)

Editor's note: This article was produced by WBEZ, Chicago's NPR news station, and Injustice Watch, a nonprofit news organization in Chicago focused on issues of equity and justice in the court system.

Phillip Merritt's dementia is so advanced he's lost the ability to speak. But with the help of his cellmates at Western Illinois Correctional Center, the 71-year-old still manages to get on the phone with his brother every few weeks. "He has to have someone call me, and then I don't know what to say to him because he can't understand anything, so I'll just talk," said Merritt's brother, Michael Merritt, in an interview. "All he can say are two words. ... I mean, he's just gone."

Merritt's deteriorating condition makes him a prime candidate to get out of prison under the Joe Coleman Medical Release Act, a pivotal criminal justice reform bill touted by Gov. JB Pritzker and Illinois Democrats as an effective way to alleviate the

state's decrepit prison health care system, reduce the "staggering" costs of caring for ailing people in prison, and reunite families with frail loved ones.

Under the act—named after a decorated Army veteran who died of prostate cancer while incarcerated—Illinois prisoners can request early release if they're terminally ill and expected to die within 18 months or if they're medically incapacitated and need help with more than one activity of daily living, such as eating or using the bathroom.

But a year-and-a-half since the Coleman Act went into effect, an investigation by Injustice Watch and WBEZ found far fewer prisoners have been released under the law than expected, as the medical release process has become mired in the charged politics of criminal justice reform in the post-George Floyd era.

Behind the lower-than-expected numbers is the Prisoner Review Board, a state body appointed by Pritzker and confirmed by the Illinois Senate with final say on medical release requests.

As of mid-August, the board had denied nearly two-thirds of medical release requests from dying and dis-

abled prisoners who met the medical criteria to get out of prison under the Coleman Act—including Merritt. "I couldn't believe it," his brother said. "How could they deny him? He can't even talk!"

More than half of the 94 denied applicants were older than age 60, and half had spent at least 15 years behind bars, according to an analysis of state prison data. At least two died in prison, including an 81-year-old who had been incarcerated for more than three decades and was scheduled to be released in 2025. Another man died five days before the board denied his request.

Meanwhile, the Prisoner Review Board has only granted 52 medical releases—a rate of fewer than three releases per month on average since board members began voting on those requests, records show.

Advocates say the board is undermining the Coleman Act and forcing ill-equipped prison staff to care for dying and disabled prisoners, even those with families practically begging to take them off their hands.

"Our prison system is now completely overburdened by people who pose absolutely no risk to public safety but are tremendously expensive to care for," said Jennifer Soble, lead author of the Coleman Act and executive director of the Illinois Prison Project, a nonprofit legal group that represents dozens of medical release applicants.

"From a cost-saving perspective, from a government-efficiency perspective, and truly from a moral perspective, we need to be doing something differently here," she said.

Donald Shelton, chair of the Prisoner Review Board, declined an interview request, but he defended the board's record on medical release requests in an email sent through a spokesperson.

"Each case that comes before the board comes with its own set of circumstances to be studied and evaluated by members," he wrote. "Due diligence is given by the board to every person who sets a petition before them."

More medical releases could save taxpayers millions

It's unclear exactly how many of Illinois' nearly 30,000 prisoners could qualify for medical release. Under the Coleman Act, the Illinois Department of Corrections is required to keep track of that number, but department officials said they don't have it yet. A department spokesperson said the data would be published by year's end.

What is clear, from years of scathing reports from an independent monitor appointed by a federal judge, is Illinois prisons are unfit to provide health care for the thousands of aging, disabled and incapacitated prisoners.

Half of the state's prison medical staff jobs are currently vacant. Prisoners with mobility issues suffer bed sores and frequent falls because no one is around to care for them. Some are even left sitting in

their own waste, according to the monitor's reports.

"Prescriptions go unrefilled, cancers go undiagnosed. In the worst cases, as everyone here knows, people die painful deaths because of the lack of care," attorney Camille Bennett with the ACLU of Illinois said at a recent hearing on health care in state prisons.

Even this substandard care is expensive. Illinois paid \$250 million last fiscal year to Wexford Health Sources, a for-profit company contracted to provide health care to state prisoners, according to state records.

Wexford's 10-year contract expired in 2021, but the company continues providing care as Illinois seeks new bidders. Releasing more people under the Coleman Act could bring down the long-term cost of prison health care, said Alan Mills, executive director of the Uptown People's Law Center, a legal clinic in Chicago whose lawsuits against the state led to the appointment of the independent monitor.

"The more prisoners there are who are medically needy, the higher the cost of caring for them, and the higher the bids will be," Mills said.

Conversely, if the Prisoner Review Board approved more medical releases, the cost savings for taxpayers in the long term could be in the millions, Mills said.

Daniel Conn, chief executive of Wexford Health Sources, did not respond to an interview request. LaToya Hughes, acting director of the Illinois Department of Corrections, declined to comment.

There are other, more immediate savings for Illinois taxpayers if more ailing prisoners were released, Mills said.

A recent government report showed Illinois spends more than \$76,000 on average to incarcerate a single person for a year. Experts say terminally ill and incapacitated prisoners are much more expensive to care for. Prisoners whose medical needs can't be met in prison infirmaries are escorted to and from hospitals by guards. With prisons short-staffed, officers already routinely require overtime pay.

By refusing to release more ailing prisoners, the Prisoner Review Board is also making it harder for prison medical staff to care for everyone else, Mills said.

"What limited resources we have are being devoted to people who are most seriously mentally or physically ill, and that doesn't leave any health care for anybody else at all," he said.

At the same time, the overburdened health care system is also blocking more prisoners from getting out under the Coleman Act.

Prisoners must be found qualified for medical release by a prison doctor or nurse before the board votes on their case. But prisoners often wait weeks or months to know whether they'll qualify, records show. In one case, a prisoner at Illinois River Correctional Center waited 152 days before finding out he didn't qualify for release, records show.

Prison medical staff have

said 240 prisoners who applied were unqualified for medical release. At least a handful of those prisoners lived in a prison infirmary, used wheelchairs, or had terminal diseases like end-stage liver disease; and at least three died in prison, records show.

There are other frail and disabled prisoners who don't see a doctor on a regular basis, "so there's no way for the doctors to know about their condition," Soble said.

Michael Merritt knows the limitations of the prison health care system all too well. His brother Phillip Merritt hasn't received proper medical treatment in prison for years, he said, and he's afraid of what could happen as his brother's dementia worsens.

He wishes the state would let his brother die at home, where his family can take turns caring for him, instead of a prison cell, where he's unsure whether there's anyone to properly look after him.

"I don't know what the problem is," Merritt said. "They know they can't take care of him in there the way he is supposed to be taken care of."

Medical release decisions dictated by politics

The Prisoner Review Board never told Merritt why they denied his brother's medical release request. Their deliberations happen behind closed doors, and the law doesn't require them to provide an explanation.

Board chair Shelton said members weigh many factors when voting on medical release requests, but they primarily focus on an applicant's prior convictions, where they plan to live once they're released, and testimonies from the victims of their crimes.

An analysis of the board's decisions shows there's likely another factor at play: politics.

Under state law, the board is required to be roughly evenly split between Democrats and Republicans. The 12 current members include former law enforcement officials, educators, attorneys, and counselors. Pritzker appoints all board members, who are then confirmed by the state Senate.

Medical release requests are decided by panels of three board members; at least two must agree to either approve or deny a request. Shelton said board members are "chosen randomly" for the panels. But so far, Republicans have cast more votes in medical release cases than Democrats—and they are much more likely to vote to deny those requests, an analysis of voting data shows.

Three out of the four board members with the highest denial rates—Jared Bohland, Kenneth Tupy, and LeAnn Miller—are Republicans. Each of them voted to deny release in more than 70% of the cases they heard, and each voted on more than a third of all medical release requests, voting data shows.

Bohland and Tupy, along with Democrat Matthew Coates, were on the panel that

denied Phillip Merritt's medical release request in July. They voted to deny six out of seven requests that day, records show.

A month earlier, Bohland was part of another panel, this time with two other Democrats, when they heard the case of 82-year-old Saul Colbert.

Like Merritt, Colbert developed dementia while serving time for armed robbery. They both also had previous violent convictions, records show; Merritt had a conviction for attempted murder, while Colbert was convicted of murder.

Both had family ready to take them in, and both were represented by the same attorney with the Illinois Prison Project. But the board voted 2-1 to release Colbert, with Bohland voting against.

"The only difference between those cases was the panel," Soble said.

Through a spokesperson, Bohland, Tupy, and Miller declined to answer questions about their voting records.

Lisa Daniels, a former board member and a restorative justice practitioner, said she believes some of her former colleagues are ideologically against letting anyone out of prison early.

They "simply believe that a person should complete the entirety of their sentence, no matter the circumstances they present in their petition, no matter how that person may have shown themselves to be redeemed, and no matter (if they're) no longer a threat to public safety," Daniels said.

Daniels resigned from the board in January, one of six Democrats to step down or fail to be appointed since 2021. In the past few years, the state GOP has turned the board into a new front in the ongoing debate over criminal justice reform.

Democrats, who have a supermajority in the state Senate, have failed to muster enough support among their ranks to get Pritzker's appointments through, leaving the board with three vacant seats.

Pritzker declined an interview request.

In a statement, he acknowledged his administration has had a hard time recruiting potential board members because of the frayed political atmosphere around its work. "In today's political climate where supporting common-sense criminal justice reform has become a lightning rod, the Coleman Act's initial success should be seen as major progress in the right direction," he said.

Coleman Act has 'failed to live up to its promise'

The day Pritzker signed the Coleman Act, its main sponsor, state Rep. Will Guzzardi, D-Chicago, said in a press release the law would transform Illinois' prison system and allow families to properly say goodbye to their loved ones. "I'm sorry we couldn't afford this mercy to Joe Coleman, but I'm proud that we'll be able to do so for hundreds of other Illinoisans," Guzzardi said.

See BEHIND BARS, Page 3

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SUBMITTED PHOTO HI-LITER/MCN

Pet of the week

Buttercup, is about 3 years old, spayed, up-to-date on shots (incl. rabies), tested negative for heartworm and on preventative and microchipped.

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While walk-ins are welcome, adoptions are by appointments only to ensure we have the staff available to help adopters. For information and/or to complete an online application, please visit www.saveapetil.org/adopt.



Student manufacturing internship program celebrates another successful year

Students joined McHenry County, its partners, and local manufacturers at McHenry County College to celebrate another successful summer of the Manufacturing Pathways Rotational Internship Program.

The Thursday evening event at the college's Luecht Auditorium commemorated the second year of the program, which partners high-school students interested in pursuing manufacturing careers with local manufacturers offering paid internships. Eighty-nine students worked this summer with 22 host companies – and seven of them were subsequently hired full-time.

County Board Chairman Michael Buehler lauded the program as a crown jewel of the Advance McHenry County initiative, which invested millions of dollars in federal COVID-19 relief funding into programs that directly benefit the community. One of the first grants approved by the McHenry County Board was a \$717,300 award to MCC and the Manufacturing Pathways Consortium to get the internship program started.

"I firmly believe that this grant was one of the wisest investments that the County Board ever made," Buehler, R-Crystal Lake, said. "The Rotational Internship Program was exactly what the County Board had in mind when Advance McHenry County was created – a forward-thinking endeavor that is paying major dividends, both immediate and long-term."

Buehler and County Administrator Peter Austin hosted a brief panel discussion with several of the students to discuss their experiences, which

many of the participating manufacturers chronicled on social media throughout the summer. This year's students came from 12 county high schools and the Illinois Math and Science Academy.

"I'm a senior, and next year, I'll be going to college for engineering," said Liam Kellas, a Huntley High School student who worked as a rotational intern over the summer. "I think that getting a feel for what I'm going into, or what I could go into, is pretty helpful."

McHenry County College President Clint Gabbard hailed the success of the program in showing students preparing for adulthood the benefits of pursuing careers in manufacturing. The college jointly applied for the grant with the Manufacturing Pathways Consortium, which is a partnership of manufacturers, schools and community groups with a mission to ensure that McHenry County manufacturers have a steady pipeline of talented and trained workers.

"Manufacturing represents the largest industry in McHenry County. And as the community's college, we're committed to growing and educating a workforce ready to fill these highly skilled, technical roles," Gabbard said. "This program allows students to experience the breadth of career opportunities within the manufacturing industry, positively impacting our local workforce for years to come."

Next summer will mark the third and final year of the program, and applications to participate will be available in early 2024. The application portal, when it opens, can be found on the Manufacturing Pathways Consortium website at mfgpathways.com.

Complaint alleges ComEd violated state law by raising fees on customer bills

Regulatory filing is among the first dealing with state's 2021 climate law

By Andrew Adams
CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS

A group of businesses filed a complaint with state regulators last week alleging that Chicago electric company Commonwealth Edison improperly raised customer bills this summer.

The complaint—centered on a portion of the 2021 Climate and Equitable Jobs Act that allows utilities to recoup carbon mitigation investments—alleges the utility failed to follow the proper regulatory channels laid out in Gov. JB Pritzker's marquee climate policy.

The complaint was filed by the Chemical Industry Council of Illinois, a trade group that lobbies for chemical businesses, alleging the change in billing will cost its roughly 100 member companies about \$100 million combined between June 2023 and May 2024. Eight other groups are also listed as complainants, including Loyola Academy, a suburban Catholic school.

Read the ICC complaint
It's the latest salvo in the industrial sector's opposition to elements of CEJA. Other major business groups have long warned that CEJA could result in increased energy costs, especially to large industrial customers, which are among the biggest users of electricity.

The Illinois Commerce Commission will consider the complaint, which could set a precedent allowing the oversight agency to have tighter control over how fees are calculated. All five of the commission's members were appointed by Pritzker.

The fee at the center of the complaint is the "Carbon-Free Resource Adjustment," or CFRA. The complaint alleges the fee was calculated without

proper oversight and asks the ICC to order ComEd to stop using CFRA to recover costs and reimburse the complainants for any fees already collected this year. ComEd began collecting money from customers using CFRA in June.

While businesses filed the complaint, the CFRA charge appears on residential customers' bills as well. ComEd serves 3.8 million residential customers and 400,000 non-residential customers, according to data from the ICC. For residential customers, this fee currently accounts for around 7 percent of total monthly bills, depending on local taxes and electric usage.

The hearing process, which is overseen by an administrative judge, could take up to a year unless the parties agree to an extension. The case will then be decided by the five governor-appointed commissioners of the ICC.

CEJA's role

The authority to charge such a fee comes from a provision in CEJA that provided subsidies to nuclear power plants in an effort to save three aging plants from going offline.

The law outlined a program that allows the state to purchase energy in bulk from three of the state's six nuclear power plants at fixed rates using a financial instrument called carbon mitigation credits, or CMCs, which are then sold to electric utilities.

This guaranteed income was intended to entice Exelon, the then-owner of Illinois' nuclear fleet, to keep open several plants it had planned to close. In early 2022, Exelon, which remains ComEd's parent company, spun out its nuclear generation arm into an independent

company, Constellation Energy. Constellation's executive team is entirely made up of former ComEd and Exelon executives and managers.

Under the CMC program, if the actual market rate for electricity is lower than the cost of CMCs, utilities can credit consumers for the difference—something they did last year, saving the average customer around \$20 per month, according to a press release from Pritzker from the time. If the market rate is higher than the fixed price, utilities may add a charge to customer bills to make up the difference.

The complaint alleges that ComEd increased the CFRA charge to customers in June to include a "clawback" of money that was credited to customers last year in addition to compounded interest on those fees. This change was outlined in a set of revisions to the legal document outlining how ComEd calculates CFRA fees based on its "tariff"—the document that defines what rates utilities can charge. These revisions were not "suspended," meaning the ICC held no formal hearings on the subject.

In a May filing with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, Exelon told federal regulators and investors that ComEd lost \$1.1 billion due to the CMC program between June 2022 and March 2023.

The fact that ComEd determined losses on its own, the complainants allege, violated a provision of CEJA that requires those determinations to be reviewed by the ICC in an annual proceeding.

"As a result of ComEd's lack of disclosure of the real

See COMPLAINT, Page 4

Behind bars

(Continued from page 2)

Criminal justice reformers celebrated the Coleman Act as a model for other states to follow. In a report last year, FAMM, a prominent national advocacy group, said the Coleman Act was one of the strongest "compassionate release" laws in the country.

But so far, the act has "failed to live up to its promise," said Mary Price, FAMM's general counsel and the report's author. Advocates want lawmakers to institute several changes to the Coleman Act to encourage the Prisoner Review Board to release more people.

Lawmakers should require board members to visit prison infirmaries to see firsthand the state of prison health care, advocates said. The board should also receive more training on how to evaluate the medical conditions of prisoners applying for release.

Advocates also want the state to provide prisoners who are applying for medical release with an attorney to argue their case. Guzzardi said he'll advocate for funding for that in the upcoming fall legislative session.

Lawmakers should also allow prisoners to reapply

for medical release sooner than currently allowed, said William Nissen, an attorney who represents prisoners pro bono, including on medical release requests.

Prisoners denied medical release currently have to wait six months before they can reapply, unless they get

a special exemption from the board. Shelton has only approved three out of 10 requests so far, according to figures provided by the board's chief legal counsel.

"If you're representing a terminally ill person, then a large part of their remaining life is gone before you can

even apply again," Nissen said.

Nissen said lawmakers should also require the board to explain why they denied a medical release to "instill a certain amount of discipline in the decision-making process." If board members have to articulate their reason for

denying someone release, maybe they'll reconsider the decision, he said.

Phillip Merritt's attorney is in the process of refiling his medical release request. His brother Michael doesn't know whether he'll get out this time. And he hasn't been able to reach Phillip in

three weeks—the cellmate who had helped facilitate the calls was apparently transferred.

But he's certain he and his family can give Phillip a more humane send-off than any prison could.

"At least he could go peacefully," he said.

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Regional Consolidation Partners and Lake County break ground on ROC facility

After years of planning and research, Regional 9-1-1 Consolidation Partners and the Lake County Board joined together to celebrate the groundbreaking of the new Regional Operations and Communications (ROC) Facility in July.

The 37,426 square-foot facility, termed the "ROC" will be built next to the Lake County Central Permit Facility in Libertyville. The facility is designed to house a consolidated Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP), the County's Emergency Management Agency (LCEMA), and the supporting staff and technologies. It will bring together highly trained experts and state-of-the-art technology to coordinate resources, information, and emergency communications and management all under one roof.

"The Regional Operations and Communications (ROC) Facility is a critically important infrastructure project that will enable our first responders - law enforcement, fire, EMS, and dispatch - to respond more quickly to emergency events across Lake County and the region," said Lake County Board Chair Sandy Hart. "The ROC Facility will be a model of excellence and will bring greater coordination and collaboration between the vital agencies who are dedicated to serving our Lake County residents."

"This is a very exciting day for Lake County," said Sheriff John D. Idleburg. "The ROC is coming to fruition thanks to countywide

stakeholders and legislators who have a strong desire to keep the community safe. This building will house dedicated staff who will utilize the most state-of-the-art public safety technology. We are very proud and thrilled to see ground broken on what will be an incredible public safety facility."

On average, there are 85,000 emergency calls every year in Lake County, with 7,000 of those calls requiring mutual aid from surrounding agencies. Every time a call is transferred, valuable minutes can be lost leading to emergency response delays.

"When responding to a public safety emergency, minutes matter," said Greater Round Lake Fire Protection Chief Greg Formica. "This new facility will bring the necessary resources to the right place in the shortest amount of time, providing for the best possible outcome. In the end, this can be lifesaving."

Coordination between community partners is critical when responding in emergency events, whether local or regional. Within this new facility, participating agencies will have an unprecedented opportunity for seamless information sharing and collaboration between first responders.

"The Lake County Emergency Telephone System Board (LCETSB) has always supported the concept of consolidating ETSB, 9-1-1 and EMA into one facility," said Lake Zurich Police Chief and Lake County ETSB Chair Steve Husak. "Because these

independent entities will share one space, there will be collaboration among dispatch, law enforcement, fire, EMS, and other first responders. This will lead to a more effective public safety response for the participating partners and the communities they serve."

"Because Lake County Emergency Management and the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) will be in the same building as the consolidated 9-1-1 and ETSB, we will have increased insight into information and data that will enhance coordination, support and response actions across the County during disasters and other emergency events," said Dan Eder, Lake County Emergency Manager. "We are proud to share this space with the other partnering entities and look forward to 2025 when the building opens."

Financial assistance for this project includes a \$1 million Emergency Operations Center Grant obtained by U.S. Congressman Brad Schneider, \$2 million from the Illinois Clean Energy Communities Foundation Grant, \$5 million Lake County Emergency Telephone System Board commitment, a \$30 million Lake County General Obligation Bond approved by the Lake County Board and additional monies contributed via Lake County's Capitol program and the American Rescue Plan Act.

It is anticipated that construction will be completed by December 2024. The ROC building is scheduled to open in 2025.

Roofing assistance program open to help low-income residents

Deadline to apply is Friday

Low-income homeowners with roofs in need of repair or replacement can get financial assistance through the new McHenry County Roofing Assistance Program.

The program, funded through a US Department of Housing and Urban Development Grant, was created to assist low- to moderate-income McHenry County homeowners who face costly roof repairs and/or replacement.

In order to qualify, a homeowner must have a total household income of 80% or less of Area Median Income, with preference going to homeowners at or below 50%, and senior citizens 65 and older. The home must be in McHenry County and must be the homeowner's primary residence. The income cut-offs, which are also based on the number of persons in the household, can be found at <https://bit.ly/3Lf4ccM>.

Interested homeowners are strongly encouraged to attend any of the three informational sessions being held by the McHenry County Community Development Division:

- The Monday, Sept. 11 meeting will have already passed by press time of this publica-

tion. • Wednesday, Sept. 13, from 5 to 6 p.m., at the McHenry County Housing Authority, 1125 Mitchell Court, Crystal Lake.

• A virtual meeting will be held from 2 to 3:30 p.m. Friday, Sept. 15, through Microsoft Teams. The link to join the meeting is <https://bit.ly/3sN9h5J>; the meeting ID is 213 105 413 185, and the passcode is c6pZVS.

The pre-application period opens at 8 a.m. Sept. 15; it ends at 4 p.m. Wednesday Sept. 20, or when 200 pre-applications have been received, whichever comes first. Pre-applications must be completed and submitted online, and the portal can be found at <https://portal.neighborlysoftware.com/MCHENRYCOUNTYIL/Participant>.

The grant will be awarded to 25 homeowners, and a blind lottery will be held Sept. 25 to choose the recipients, who will be notified by email and invited to complete the full program application.

For more information, please contact Michelle Halvorsen at MLHalvorsen@mchenrycountyil.gov, or call 815-334-4088.

• Complaint

(Continued from page 3)

nature of its filings of these tariff revisions with the Commission, no party had an opportunity to object to the massive impacts of ComEd's revisions," the complaint reads.

The business groups also allege ComEd's maneuver violates the state's Public Utilities Act as an act of "imprudent management" of the Carbon Free Resource Adjustment credits and charges.

"It was never reviewed, there were never any hearings on it, it's a lot of money and our position is that it violates the law," Patrick Giordano, a lawyer representing the business groups listed in the complaint, told Capitol News Illinois.

ComEd has denied impropriety in its use of the adjustment and CMCs.

"We are appropriately charging and crediting customers and have been clear about the CMCs and the charges and credits that implement them with the Commission and our customers," Shannon Brey-

maier, ComEd's head of communications, said in an email. "We're still analyzing the complaint, but expect to vigorously defend our actions in implementing carbon mitigation credits."

Constellation, which has attributed continued operations of three of Illinois' nuclear plants to the CMC program, signaled caution regarding the program to its investors in a February regulatory filing with the SEC. In it, the company noted that "regulatory or legal" challenges like this were possible and that the company "cannot reasonably predict the outcome of any such challenges."

CEJA's other effects

The complaint is not the only matter before the ICC that will largely define the strength of CEJA's regulatory backbone.

The commission is currently considering sets of plans from both ComEd and Ameren Illinois that set the utilities' next four years of electric rates, infrastructure spending and long-term plans for the electric grid. These complex plans are the result of CEJA's reforms to the state's ratemaking process.

The ICC is expected to approve modified versions of these plans before the end of the year.

CEJA also opened the door for closer ICC oversight of utilities' profit rates and the energy sector's environmental impacts. This has attracted the attention of national and state-level advocacy groups.

Similarly, because of a requirement in CEJA, the ICC has requested all large gas and electric utilities in the state offer discounted energy rates to low-income customers. Consumer advocates are currently sparring with gas utilities over the question of how steep these discounts should be and who should be eligible for them in cases that are also expected to finish before the end of the year.

Electric utilities are expected to file low-income rate design plans in the coming years.

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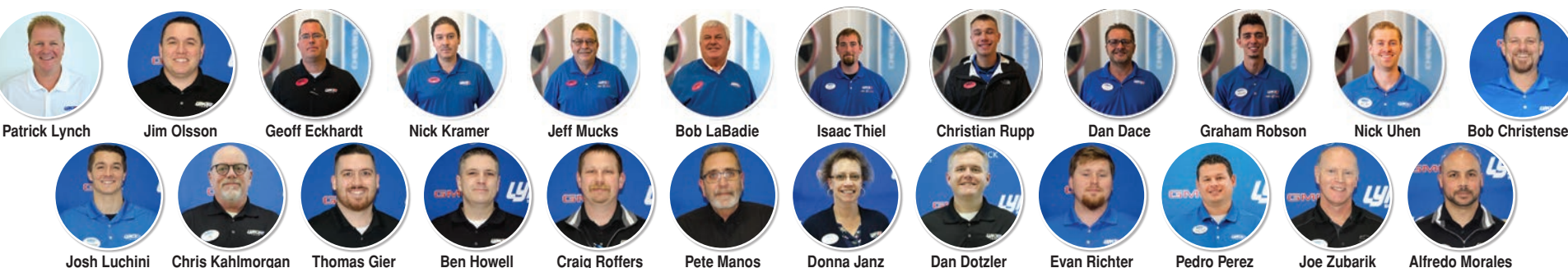
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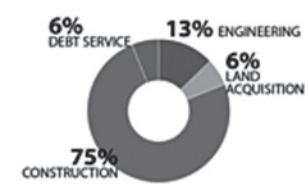


TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM ---- 2023 - 2028 ----

PROGRAM BY WORK CATEGORY



PROGRAM BY ACTIVITY



ROADS AND BRIDGES



TECHNOLOGY, SIGNALS, AND SAFETY INITIATIVES



BIKE AND PEDESTRIAN ACCOMMODATIONS



SUBMITTED IMAGE Hi-Liter/MCN

Lake County announces 2023-2028 Transportation Improvement Program

The Lake County Division of Transportation (LCDOT) has released the 2023-2028 Transportation Improvement Program that includes more than 300 projects designed to maintain the more than 900 lane-miles of county highways, increase driver and pedestrian safety, improve mobility and reduce carbon emissions. This program is updated annually to show the projects that are planned in the current year and the next five years.

View the interactive dashboard at <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/05dfbae79de64fa484d80d52eed175c8/page/Page-1/> to see the projects LCDOT will be working on.

“The Lake County Board is proud to be investing more than \$800 million in transportation projects over the next six years,” said Lake County Board Chair Sandy Hart. “Seven new roundabouts, dozens of safety projects, and miles of new bike paths and sidewalks are on the docket for the coming years.”

Transportation projects are broken down into three categories:

- Preservation projects are our top priority by keeping county highway pavements, bridges, bikeways and signals in a state of good repair.
- Modernization projects focus on increasing safety, reducing delays, adding bike paths and filling sidewalk

gaps. Expansion projects look to add capacity to the system to reduce traffic congestion. Examples of these types of projects include installing a railroad/road grade separation, adding travel lanes to a road to eliminate a bottle neck and sometimes even re-aligning an existing road.

“Even a project as simple as adding center and shoulder rumble strips can make a huge difference and save lives,” said Jennifer Clark, Lake County Board Member for District 15 and Chair of the Public Works and Transportation Committee. “All projects big and small serve a purpose in how we travel.”

Safety is at the top of mind for all projects in the 2023-2028 Program.

“The safety of all users of the transportation system is always our number one priority, and every project in our program takes that into consideration first,” said Shane Schneider, Director of Transportation and County Engineer.

Notable projects programmed over the next five years includes:

Fairfield Road 3R (Preservation)

Resurfacing, restoration and rehabilitation (3R) of Fairfield Road. A 3R is similar to a standard resurfacing but can also include making non-motorized improve-

ments, replacing culverts, conducting drainage work and bringing the roadway up to current design standards.

Patriot Path along IL 137 (Modernization)

A new 5.5-mile long path to connect the Des Plaines River Trail and Robert McClory Path.

Lewis Avenue Corridor (Modernization)

Preliminary engineering study on Lewis Avenue from IL 137 to Belvidere Road to identify alternatives that improve safety and operations along the corridor.

Old McHenry Crossings (Expansion)

Transportation improvements surrounding the Old McHenry Road railroad crossing and along Quentin Road. The feasibility of constructing a new grade separation at the CN Railroad tracks is being evaluated.

Lake Cook Road Bike Path (Modernization)

A new bike path connection along Lake Cook Road between the Skokie Valley Bike Path and the Chicago Botanic Garden.

The 2023-2028 Proposed Transportation Improvement Program is a great way to learn about what is planned in the coming years. Make sure to check out the new interactive dashboard.

Conservation district upcoming program dates set

Disc Golf introduction

Friday, Sept. 15, 4-5:30 p.m., Fel-Pro RRR Conservation Area, Cary.

Learn what disc golf is, the terminology, how to keep score, the basic rules, tips and tricks, and more. If you have your own discs, you are welcome to bring them. We will have a few for demonstration purposes and to try. Ages 5+, children ages 13 and under must be accompanied by an adult.

Prairie Trail Riders

Sunday, Sept. 17, 9-11 a.m., Long Prairie Trailhead, Boone McHenry County Line Road.

Grab your bike and join us as we explore bike trails near McHenry County. We will start and end at the trailhead on Boone McHenry County Line Road, about 1/2 mile north of Route 173 and ride west to Poplar Grove. Ride is 15 miles in length. Ages 10+.

Discovery Days: Who Lives in a Tree?

Monday, Sept. 18, 10-11 a.m., Prairieview Education Center, Crystal Lake.

Enjoy a morning of fun, educational activities focused on the special theme of the day: who lives in a tree! Games, lessons, and other hands-on experiences help participants explore conservation areas. Ages 2-6.

National Public Lands Day: Restoration Day at Boger Bog

Saturday, Sept. 23, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Boger Bog, Bull Valley.

Celebrate National Public Lands Day by volunteering at a habitat restoration day. Tools will be provided. Dress for the weather and off-trail restoration activities. RSVP to steward Ders Anderson, danderson@openlands.org

Hike with Mike: Buehler's Day Outside

Saturday, Sept. 23, 9-10:30 a.m.,

Pleasant Valley, Shelter #1, Woodstock.

Curate conservation conversations with McHenry county Board Chairman Mike Buehler while exploring Pleasant Valley. Bring a water bottle and enjoy the outdoors. All ages.

Snakes

Thursday, Sept. 28, 4:30-5:30 p.m., Lost Valley Visitor Center, Savanna Conference Room, Ringwood.

Learn about the adaptations and natural histories of some of McHenry County snakes from Wildlife Resource Center staff and a live animal ambassador! We will also explore more with a craft and hike to follow. Ages 8+, children ages 13 and under must be accompanied by an adult.

Twilight at the Farmhouse

Thursday, Sept. 28, 6-8 p.m., Powers-Walker House, Glacial Park, Route 31 & Harts Road.

Enjoy the twilight ambiance of this 1850s homestead by candlelight among the ever-changing colors in the Lost Valley Marsh. Historical characters will demonstrate how early settlers spent their days at dusk. Free, all-ages event. No registration required.

Kishwaukee Brewing Fun-raising kick-off

Saturday, Sept. 30, Kishwaukee Brewing Company, Woodstock.

Joining the McHenry County Conservation Foundation at Kishwaukee Brewing in Woodstock for a night of camaraderie, raffles, and Hungry Hungry Hippos tournament. The evening kicks off the October special: \$1 from every pour of their Sandhill Lager will be donated to the McHenry County Conservation Foundation.

For more information or to sign up for programs please visit the McHenry County Conservation District website at MCCDistrict.org.

Volunteer opportunities

Volo Bog in need of volunteers for restoration effort

The breathtaking and unique Volo Bog is protected for its habitat and numerous rare and endangered species including calla lilies, pitcher plants, and star flowers. And that's where the Bog needs your help. Many of these rare species are in decline, and brush and invasive species threaten to crowd them out. Volo Bog eagerly awaits new friends in an active stewardship community who will be some of the first people to help this precious nature regain lost ground.

The public is invited to join in on this new restoration effort by walking the bog and talking about the eco-

logy and discuss projects and areas where they would like to work. Volunteers can help plan and lead, or just pitch in on various projects.

Join on Saturday, Sept. 30 from 9 a.m. to noon. Meet in the nature center parking lot. Volunteers should come dressed for the weather and ready to learn, work and make an impact.

To rsvp or ask a question, contact Jo at jonathan@friendsilnature.org.

Volunteers needed for Moraine Hills 'Run for the Hills' Sept. 23

Moraine Hills State Park and Friends of Moraine Hills State Park are looking for volunteers to help with

the Moraine Hills 'Run for the Hills' on Saturday, Sept. 23.

Volunteers will need to arrive at 6:45 a.m. for an instructional meeting, and coffee, then help out along the course until 12:30 p.m.

Anyone that volunteers will receive a Run shirt and snacks – and a hearty thank you from our Friends of Moraine Hills State Park.

To apply, please send an email to dnr.volobog@illinois.gov and specify your preference of a course marshal that helps direct runners at key junctures along the course, or start/finish cheer crew that lends a festive atmosphere by cheering at the start and handing out water and finisher medals at the finish line.

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▼ Community events, car washes, festivals, lemonade stands, school projects – people at work and at play.

We are interested!

▼ Show the community what your group has been doing!

▼ **NO EXPERIENCE NEEDED!**

▼ Just shoot and e-mail!

▼ We need you to ID everyone in the photo *first* and *last* names required

▼ Tell us what's happening in the photo

▼ **Please do NOT crop your photos.**

▼ Tell us who took the photo and we will give them a photo credit

This is your chance to promote your organization or special event!

Remember to include the 5W's:
Who, what, where, when and why!

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Court & crime news

Repeat weapon offender convicted of possession after jury trial, second case pending in court



Carnell Wesson

On September 7, a jury trial concluded in Lake County with “guilty” verdict on armed habitual criminal charges.

Carnell Wesson, 30, was convicted on one count of Armed Habitual Criminal, class X felony and one count of Unlawful Use of a Weapon by Felon, a class 2 felony. Wesson is facing a sentencing range of 6 to 30 years.

In March 2022, Zion Police conducted a traffic stop on a vehicle where Wesson was a passenger. Wesson failed to follow police orders during the traffic stop and instead entered a nearby home. A search was conducted on the vehicle and police located two firearms under the driver’s seat. While officers were still on the scene, Wesson eventually came out of the home and officers took him into custody.

The trial began on Tuesday, September 5, lasting three days. The jury heard from several State witnesses, including law enforcement officers who testified that prior to approaching the vehicle, they observed the backseat passenger, later identified as Wesson, appear to reach into the front area of the vehicle and hand something to the driver. Forensic experts explained how the DNA found on one of the firearms collected by police was a match to Wesson.

When Wesson was first charged in March 2022, he was able to post \$15,000 cash in order to be released from custody. While out on bond, Wesson is accused of participating in a shooting in December 2022. Wesson was arrested for that incident in February 2023, and faces the Class 1 offense of Aggravated Discharge of a Weapon.

After the verdict, Lake County State’s Attorney Eric

Rinehart said, “We appreciate the effective work of the Zion Police Department and the Northeastern Illinois Regional Crime Lab. Once again, our prosecutors were able to turn a successful investigation into a “guilty” verdict. We also see from these two cases that using a cash bond system makes our communities less safe. Under the SAFE-T Act, we would have sought detention for the March 2022 incident, and he could not have committed the December 2022 shooting had detention been ordered.”

During this trial, Wesson was held at the Lake County Jail on a \$1.25 million bond.

After the verdict, Judge Lombardo revoked Wesson’s ability to post bond. A status hearing is scheduled for October 16, 2023.

Drag race leads to fatality after crash

Lake County Sheriff’s Deputies are investigating a fatal traffic crash that left a man dead, following a high speed crash.

On September 10, at approximately 3:45 p.m., Lake County Sheriff’s Deputies were dispatched to Sheridan Road and Yorkhouse Road, Beach Park, for a serious traffic crash. Sheriff’s deputies arrived and located two vehicles with extensive damage.

Preliminary investigation shows a Ford Mustang, driven by a 60-year-old man of Waukegan, was traveling southbound on Sheridan Road. According to witnesses, the Ford was traveling at a high rate of speed and was actively involved in a drag race with the driver of a Mazda 3 sedan. As the two vehicles approached Yorkhouse Road, a Honda SUV, driven by a 59-year-old woman of Waukegan, was traveling northbound on Sheridan Road, attempting to make a left turn onto Yorkhouse Road.

As the driver of the Honda turned left from Sheridan Road onto westbound Yorkhouse

Road, the Honda was struck broadside by the Ford. The driver of the Ford was critically injured. Sheriff’s deputies attempted life-saving measures, however, the man was transported to Vista East Medical Center in Waukegan, where he succumbed to his injuries and was pronounced deceased.

The driver of the Honda sustained non-life-threatening injuries. The driver of the Mazda was identified as a 26-year-old man of Zion. The Mazda did not strike anything, however, the driver is being considered a part of the crash, as the drag racing likely contributed to the crash.

The crash remains under investigation.

Bicyclist critically injured in crash

Lake County Sheriff’s Deputies are investigating a traffic crash that left a bicyclist in critical condition.

On September 10, at approximately 7:00 a.m., Lake County Sheriff’s Deputies were dispatched to a traffic crash involving a bicyclist on Fairfield Road near Route 176, unincorporated Wauconda. Sheriff’s deputies arrived and found the bicyclist, a 48-year-old man of Waukegan, with critical injuries.

Preliminary investigation shows a Dodge SUV, driven by a 24-year-old woman of Palatine, was traveling southbound on Fairfield Road, just north of Route 176. The bicyclist was also traveling southbound, on the right side of the roadway. As the driver of the Dodge traveled southbound, she became distracted by young children in her car, and turned her attention away from the roadway. The Dodge veered to the right and struck the bicyclist, causing the bicyclist to strike the front of the Dodge and the Dodge’s windshield, before falling underneath the car.

When sheriff’s deputies arrived, they attempted life-saving measures on the bicyclist. He was transported to Advocate Condell Medical Center in Libertyville with critical, life-threatening injuries. The occupants in the Dodge, the driver and two minor children, were uninjured.

The crash remains under investigation.

Fatal crash involving motorcycle under investigation

On September 5, at approximately 5:00 p.m., Lake County Sheriff’s Deputies were dispatched to Route 21 south of Casey Road, unincorporated Libertyville, for a traffic crash with injuries, involving a motorcycle. Sheriff’s deputies arrived and found the operator of the motorcycle critically wounded.

Preliminary investigation shows a BMW motorcycle,

driven by a 49-year-old man of Lake Villa, was traveling southbound on Route 21. According to witnesses, the driver of the motorcycle was traveling at a high rate of speed, weaving in and out of traffic. As the motorcycle continued southbound, a Hyundai SUV, driven by a 68-year-old woman was turning left from the Independence Grove Dog Park onto southbound Route 21.

The motorcycle collided with the Hyundai, which caused the motorcycle to strike a curb and the driver was thrown into a guardrail. The driver of the motorcycle was transported to Advocate Condell Medical Center with life-threatening injuries, where he was later pronounced deceased. The driver of the Hyundai was uninjured.

The Lake County Coroner’s Office is scheduling an autopsy. The crash remains under investigation by the Lake County Sheriff’s Office Technical Crash Investigations Unit.

TRANSPORTATION

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Boats

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AVENGER FORD GT40 Mid eng., Buick turbo v-6, 4 sp., tube frame w/roll bar. See the movie “Ford Verses Ferrari.” Many spare parts. Please call 847-838-1916.

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GARAGE SALES

Garage Sales

27210 85TH PLACE/SALEM Fri. & Sat, Sept. 15 & 16th, 8-4. Multi Family Garage Sale! H/H, fishing & boating equip., furniture, tools, some vintage items. Too much to List!

Sept. 15 & 16, Fri. 8-5 & Sat. 8-2. Household items, adult & kids clothes, toys. Bargains galore. Everything must go!

Waterford Garage Sales

654 RIVERMOOR CIRCLE 9/14 & 9/15, 9am-4pm. Household & Misc.

Delavan Garage Sales

706 S. 7th STREET, 4 Family

REAL ESTATE

Other Real Estate

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