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Groundhog overshadowed by Tom Skilling appearance



Woodstock's annual Groundhog Day ceremony seemed extra special this year. Meteorologist Tom Skilling, who is retiring after 45 years at WGN-TV Chicago, was the guest of honor and took great pride in reading the prognostication after groundhog Woodstock Willie failed to see his shadow, predicting an early spring this year. Woodstock Mayor Mike Turner even designated the Friday event 'Tom Skilling day'.

Above: Tom Skilling is shown waving to adoring fans that were lingering and waiting to get a glimpse of him before he made his way down from the gazebo. Chants of 'We love Tom' broke out multiple times during the morning ceremony.

Top right: Businesses around the square were open early and many had signs in their windows welcoming Skilling. Many fans throughout the large crowd also held signs professing their well wishes to the legendary meteorologist, as shown here (from left) Dorene Smith, Katie O'Neil, and Becky Kirchner.

Right: Handler Mark Szafran holds Woodstock Willie up for the crowd to see as they make their way down from the gazebo after the groundhog predicted an early spring.



Above: Over five thousand people were estimated to have been gathered on the Woodstock square for the 7 a.m. reading of the prognostication on Feb. 2.

HEIDI SCHULZ Hi-Liter/MCN

Man gets 20 year sentence for fatal shooting

On January 31, Andrew Alexander, 18, entered a negotiated "guilty" plea on one count of 2nd degree murder, a special class 1 felony, and was sentenced to 20 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections.



Andrew Alexander

"I would like to commend the Grayslake Police Department and the Lake County Major Crimes Task Force for their hard work on this extensive investigation and bringing this offender to justice. Thank you to our team of prosecutors and victim specialists have who have been working hard on this difficult case. Our hearts break for the family and friends of the victim and we will continue to offer support to them," Lake County State's Attorney Eric Rinehart said.

At the sentencing hearing at the Waukegan Courthouse, the Court

See **GUILTY**, Page 7

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All for the art of music

Diva Quest winners follow their hearts to the top

By Jennifer Eisenbart
STAFF WRITER

For the final two standing at Jan. 27's Diva Quest contest at The Journey Church in Kenosha, it was all about following their hearts.

With Yocelin Valdez of Waukesha (WI) South and Ana Pucetti of Vernon Hills High School side-by-side, each had picked a song – no pun intended – that sung to them.

"It connects a lot to my family, the people that they've lost. I sing it as a dedication to them," said Valdez, who ended up second, about her choice of "Amor Eterno," a Spanish song about love beyond death.

Pucetti, the winner, went with the suggestion from her vocal teacher.

"She said, 'I think this is a really powerful song,'" the high school senior explained. "I was like, I really do love it. This is the one."

The two were the best of a group of 10 at the annual competition, an event presented by Riverport Chorus to provide scholarship money to young performers.

Each of the 10 finalists participated in both individual and group mentoring from the Riverport Chorus, as well as a rehearsal process.

This year's field varied widely, both in terms of geography and song choice.

Valdez, Kendra Meyer and Asia Goodwin were from Waukesha South, while Pucetti was one of three contestants from Illinois.

Those three all made it into the top four. In addition to Pucetti winning, Emily Self of Antioch High School finished third and Danielle Gibson of Libertyville High School took fourth.

The other finalists included Emma Robers of Elkhorn (WI) Area High School, Ella Malliet of Shoreland Lutheran High School (WI), and Meredith Sullivan and Norah Peregrin of Wilmot Union High

School (WI).

The music selections were also diverse. Robers, up first, tackled "The Climb," a popular hit from Miley Cyrus, while Malliet had the crowd tapping its feet and clapping its hands for Dolly Parton's famous "9 to 5."

Both Goodwin and Gibson tackled Broadway songs – Goodwin "I Dreamed a Dream" from "Les Misérables" and Gibson "Stupid with Love" from "Mean Girls."

Sullivan, meanwhile, offered up the Joni Mitchell classic "Both Sides Now," while fellow Wilmot student Peregrin performed "To Make You Feel My Love."

Self also pitched in a Broadway classic, "Someone Like You" from "Jekyll & Hyde," while Meyer presented "Vienna" by Billy Joel.

Both Pucetti and Valdez offered up some thoughts on why the competition was helpful to them.

"This was like my first performance," said Pucetti. "I've always been super-shy, not wanting to put myself out there. My parents really pushed me, and the scholarship really is convenient."

Valdez, who said she is shy and often a victim of stage fright, entered the competition to overcome both.

"I used to not even want to sing in front of my mom," she said. "I've just been trying to put myself out there a little bit more."

Each of the top four earned a



JENNIFER EISENBART Hi-Liter/MCN

Antioch High School's Emily Self performs "Someone Like You" from the musical "Jekyll and Hyde" Jan. 27 at the Riverport Chorus' Diva Quest competition at The Journey Church in Kenosha. Self finished third overall, earning a \$400 scholarship.

scholarship prize: \$1,500 to the winner, \$750 for second, \$400 for third and \$300 for fourth.

"We felt that with the cost of education, it would be more beneficial," said event organizer Susan Nelson.

One additional honor was given out, as Peregrin earned the Spirit Award for being the contestant best exhibiting the values of the contest and helping others.

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As of Feb. 9, 2022 Hi-Liter is the successor publication to McHenry County News

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Community Police Academy applications due Feb. 12

Sheriff John D. Idleburg announces the return of the Lake County Sheriff's Office Community Police Academy, which will begin the week of February 19, and run until April 29. Classes will be held on Mondays at the sheriff's

substation in Libertyville and headquarters in Waukegan. The Community Police Academy is open to all Lake County residents aged 18, or older, of good moral character with no felony convictions. This

is a free series of events and participants will get an in-depth view of all the various responsibilities of the Lake County Sheriff's Office. Participants will get an inside look at our Corrections Division, Patrol Division, Court

Security Division, Criminal Investigations Division, Crash Investigations Unit, Evidence Collections/Processing Unit, and more. Sheriff John D. Idleburg said, "The Community Police Academy is a great

opportunity to get an inside look at the operations of your sheriff's office. You will have a chance to hear and learn from the incredible professionals who work for the sheriff's office. I hope to see you in the academy!"

The application deadline is Monday, February 12, 2024. Applications are available on the homepage of the sheriff's office website at: www.lakecountyl.gov/sheriff

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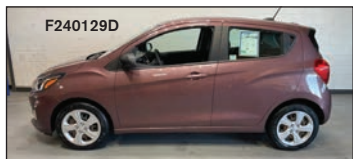
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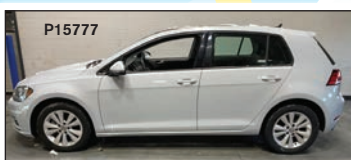
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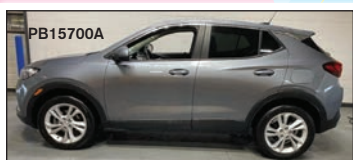
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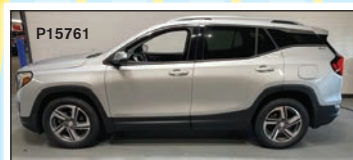
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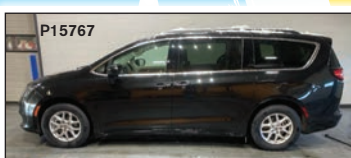
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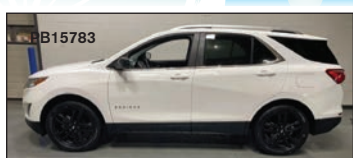
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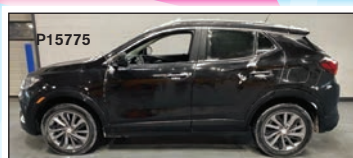
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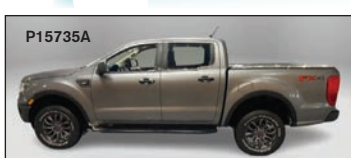
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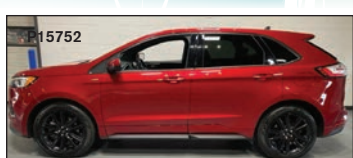
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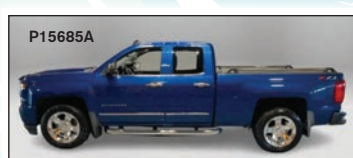
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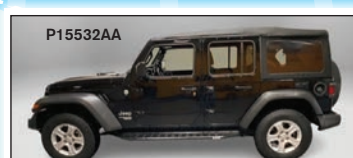
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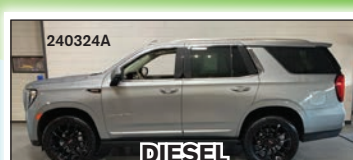
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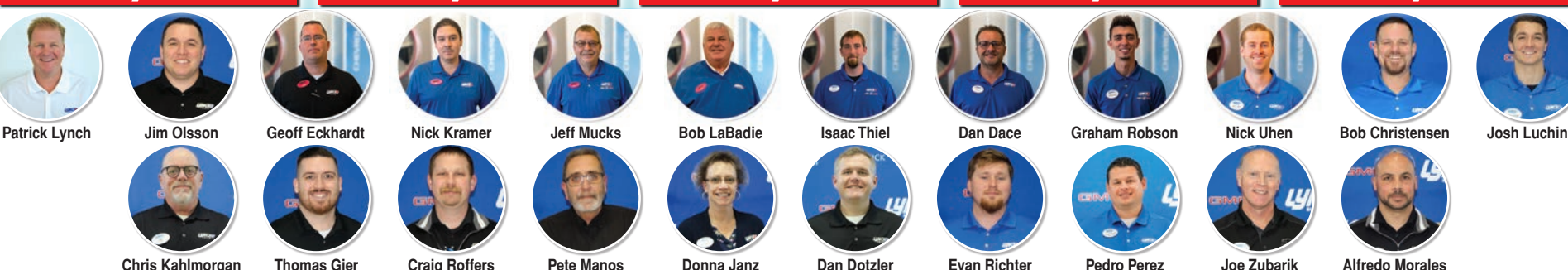
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Court & crime news

Fatal traffic crash under investigation

An 88-year-old Kenosha man was pronounced dead, and a 46-year-old Machesney Park man sustained minor injuries following a two-vehicle crash on Charles Rd. in unincorporated Woodstock.

On February 1, at 7:40 a.m., members of the McHenry County Sheriff's Office and Woodstock Fire Department responded to a crash involving two vehicles. There were no passengers in either vehicle.

Preliminary investigation indicates that a 2000 Lincoln Town Car was traveling westbound on Charles Rd. The Lincoln lost control and entered the eastbound lane of travel and collided with the front of a 2014 Hyundai. This caused both the Lincoln and the Hyundai to exit the roadway to the south.

The driver of the Lincoln, an 88-year-old Kenosha man was seat belted with airbag deployment. He was

transported to Northwestern Hospital McHenry in serious condition where he was later pronounced dead.

The driver of the Hyundai, a 46-year-old Machesney Park man was seat belted with airbag deployment. He was treated at the scene and released.

Two car serious injury crash under investigation

A 39-year-old Jacksonville, Oregon man and a 53-year-old McHenry female were injured following a two-vehicle crash in the 1500 block of River Road in unincorporated McHenry.

On February 1, at 7:19 a.m., members of the McHenry County Sheriff's Office, Island Lake Police Department and McHenry Fire Department responded to a crash involving two vehicles which resulted in injuries to both drivers. There

were no passengers in either vehicle.

Preliminary investigation indicates that a 1996 Ford Club Wagon van was traveling northbound on River Road and attempted to pass a vehicle in a marked no passing zone. The Ford lost control and collided with a southbound 2010 Honda Element in the southbound lane of River Road. The vehicles came to rest in front of the entrance for Moraine Hills State Park. The driver of the Ford was ejected from the vehicle and the driver of the Honda was extricated from the vehicle.

Both drivers were transported to Northwestern Medicine Hospital in McHenry. The driver of the Ford was later flown to Advocate Condell Medical Center in Libertyville with life-threatening injuries. He was not wearing a seatbelt at the time of the crash and there was no airbag deployment. The driver of the Element is listed in serious but stable condition. She was wearing a seatbelt and airbags were deployed.

The investigation is ongoing by the McHenry County Sheriff's Office Major Traffic Crash Investigation Unit.

• Guilty (Continued from front page)

noted that Alexander was first charged as juvenile in May 2023, but was transferred to adult court in January 2024. The charges stem from the fatal shooting that took place in Grayslake on September 17, 2022. Grayslake Police Department responded to Northwestern Medicine Center for a report of a gunshot wound victim, later identified as Isidro Juarez, 23.

After conducting an extensive investigation, detectives learned the Juarez was a passenger in a Nissan that was traveling on Washington Street near Lancer Ln. An occupant of a Ford Focus that was also traveling on Washington began shooting at the Nissan. Juarez was struck and rushed to the hospital where he was pronounced deceased. Eventually, detectives from Grayslake "broke the case" and determined that Alexander

was the perpetrator after a lengthy and detailed canvas of Focus owners.

During the plea, a victim impact statement written by the victim's mother was read. The statement described how the mother's grief looked different every day and the pain she feels every day because she will never be able to hear her son's voice again.

After the court hearing, Grayslake Deputy Chief Jeff Myhra stated, "We would like to thank the Lake County State's Attorney's Office for working alongside Grayslake Detectives to bring this case to a successful conclusion. Thanks to this collaborative effort Andrew pleaded guilty to 2nd-degree murder charges and was sentenced to 20 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections in connection with this incident."

Alexander will receive 250 days credit for time already served.

LCWDB kicks off Apprenticeship Training Initiative for local youth-serving agencies

Supported by FHI 360's National Institute for Work and Learning (NIWL), the Lake County Workforce Development Board (LCWDB) is kicking off Illinois' first-ever Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship (YDPA) training initiative.

Employers and job seekers in Lake County will be the first in the State of Illinois to benefit from this initiative. An initial employer training session for youth-serving agencies occurred on January 25-26. Locally, the participating agencies include Boys and Girls Club of Lake County, Business and Career Services, Inc., Curt's Café, Lake County Workforce Development, The Community Works, Inc., Youth Conservation Corps, and YouthBuild Lake County.

FHI 360 serves as the supporting partner for the YDPA and will deliver training to apprentices, train-the-trainer style sessions to employers and apprentice supervisors, as well as training materials to ensure a positive and rewarding experience for both the apprentice and the employer. FHI 360 reports directly to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) on behalf of employer sponsors and coordinates the apprentice's DOL certification at program completion. Participating apprentices will commit to 1,000 hours of on-the-job learning, along with 165 hours

of related coursework.

Kimberly Wimer, LCWDB Chair, stated, "This is an exciting time to be at the forefront of actively engaging with and supporting the workforce development needs of the youth in our region and state. Young job seekers are one of the hardest to reach segments of the talent pipeline and this training initiative aims to empower our local youth-serving agencies with the tools and resources they need to effectively support the future workforce via valuable apprenticeships."

Lisa Johnson, MPA, Director of FHI 360's NIWL, said, "Apprenticeships are a highly successful way for employers to increase in the quality and size of their applicants and cultivate a stable, qualified workforce. FHI 360 is excited to partner with youth-serving organizations to expand apprenticeship opportunities throughout Lake County."

Following the initial training session, it is anticipated that subsequent trainings will be held with additional Lake County youth-serving agencies as the program grows and expands over the coming year. Agencies interested in participating in the program should contact Jennifer Serino, LCWDB Executive Director, at jserino@lakecountyl.gov.

Funding provided in whole or in part by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Eco-

nomics Opportunity.

About Lake County Workforce Development Board

The Lake County Workforce Development Board is a workforce development leader in the county, region, and state. The Workforce Board collaborates with key partners and stakeholders to lead performance-driven and innovative strategies that develop, align and integrate the workforce development system. Visit <https://www.lakecountyworkforce.org/> to learn more.

About FHI 360

FHI 360, a global organization with over 4,000 expert staff members working in more than 60 countries around the world, mobilizes research, resources, and relationships so that people everywhere can access the opportunities they need to lead full, healthy lives. Visit <https://www.fhi360.org/> to learn more.

About National Institute for Work and Learning

The National Institute for Work and Learning, part of FHI 360, has more than 50 years of experience advancing access, equity, and excellence in education and workforce systems by focusing on two key drivers – education and employment – to improve lives. Visit <https://niwl.fhi360.org/> to learn more.

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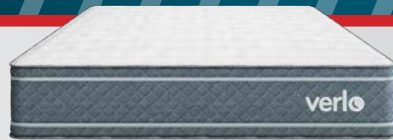
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