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Tulip Fest brings splash of Holland to area

Expecting late-April opening for fest featuring 1 million blooms in more than 30 varieties

Cynthia Wolf
CONTRIBUTOR

Whether one strolls, strides, rolls, dances or tiptoes through the tulips, the shades of eye-popping color all around will be sure to delight at this spring's Richardson Farm Tulip Festival.

Exactly when the fifth annual event will open at 909 English Prairie Road, Spring Grove, is, as always, up to Mother Nature, the Richardsons said, noting their best current guess is between Friday, April 18, and Friday, April 25.

"We're kind of right in line with where we were last year, when we opened April 20," said George Richardson, who operates the farm along with his wife, Wendy, brother, Robert, Robert's wife, Carol, George's son, Ryan, and Ryan's wife, Kristen. "Those who visit can expect an especially brilliant array, with blocks of flowers more densely packed."

To stay up to date on the latest farm news, visit the Richardson Farm website at richardsonfarm.com, click on the Richardson Tulip Festival button and sign up for the newsletter under the contact tab. Or, check out the Richardson "World's Largest" Corn Maze Facebook page or follow [richardsonadventurefarm](https://www.facebook.com/richardsonadventurefarm) on Instagram.

Those who do any or all of the above will be among the first to be alerted to the first day to take in 10 acres of tulips in more than 30 varieties — from Allison Bradley (red) and Avignon (peach) to Zantuyell (light orange) and Zantupur (purplish pink). Daffodil fans also will find flowers to fawn over, as

50,000 more of these predominantly yellow spring beauties have been added to the roughly 1 million anticipated tulip blooms.

"The colors are so magnificent," said Robert Richardson, who first broached the idea of adding the tulip festival to the Richardson Farm lineup of events back in 2019. "It's so fun to look forward to."

George Richardson added that the yellow pomponettes are among his favorites.

"They are absolutely gorgeous," he said. "They have double the petals and a magnificent scent."

Along with taking in the spring blooms — which offer breathtaking photo opportunities — visitors can enjoy live music on weekends, food trucks, lakeside picnic areas and outdoor games like giant Jenga, giant checkers and bag toss. A spacious, well-stocked gift shop will be open daily throughout the festival, with a wine-tasting bar featuring Prairie State Wines. Modern restroom facilities are located at the shop as well.

New at the gift shop this year will be mimosas for sale in a commemorative glass to sip while shopping, available on weekends, Wendy Richardson said. She added that the same shop will feature tulip bulbs in the fall that correlate to the ones now emerging in the fields.

"If visitors see a particular flower that they love this spring, they should make a note of the variety so they can come buy some bulbs in the fall," she said.

During the fest, visitors can expect to find lots of tulip-related



TOM FUNK PHOTOS Hi-Liter/MCN

Two friends pose in the photo frame located at the Richardson Farm Tulip Festival. This year's fest, the fifth annual, is expected to begin within seven days of April 18 at the farm, 909 English Prairie Road, Spring Grove.

items in the gift shop, including everything from leather key chains and purses from Holland to potted, tabletop tulips.

Once opened, the fest typically lasts two to three weeks. Hours are expanded this year, opening one hour earlier, at 10 a.m., and remaining open until 6:30 p.m. The gift shop, too, will open earlier, at 9:30 a.m., closing at 7 p.m.

Admission will be \$16 per person, all ages, Tuesdays through Fridays, and \$19 on Saturdays and Sundays for those 13 and older. The cost for those ages 4 through 12 on Saturdays and Sundays is \$16. Ages 3 and younger are admitted free. The fest is pet-friendly; leashed, well-behaved dogs are welcome.

All paying visitors receive one free tulip with admission.

Richardson Farm also is home to the "World's Largest" Corn Maze and Adventure Farm plus Sunflower Fields in the fall, and a cut-your-own Christmas Tree Farm in the winter.

Professional, compensated photographers should view the Photography & Filming page at richardsonfarm.com before visiting.

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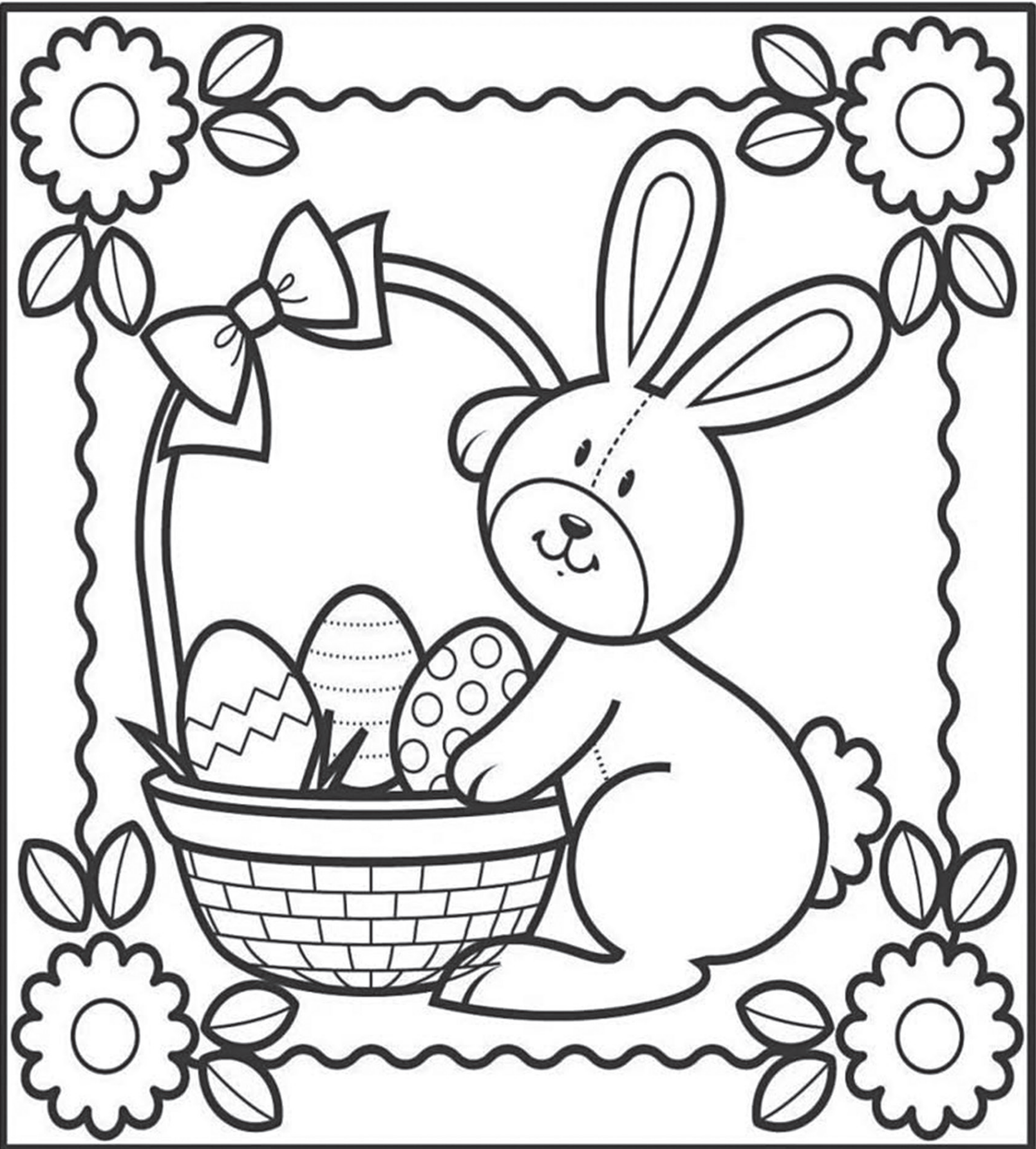
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Lawmakers seek ways to prevent data centers from straining Illinois' power grids

Rapid expansion of AI sparks worries over environmental goals, electricity rate spikes

By Leonard Pini and Medill Illinois News Bureau

Illinois has been at the forefront of the data center boom, but state lawmakers are working to gauge and mitigate the impact these centers have on climate and energy consumption.

In the last two decades, data centers have multiplied due to increased demand for cloud computing, information storage and data processing. However, data centers now also serve AI and cryptocurrency mining, which puts new digital coins into circulation and enters transactions on the blockchain.

Powering these data centers is costly, consuming large amounts of water and energy. The growth of this business has prompted concerns about the impact on the environment and the electricity grid, including rising costs for rate-paying consumers.

State Sen. Steve Stadelman, D-Rockford, chair of the Senate Committee on Energy and Public Utilities, has filed legislation that aims to gather data on the industry to determine the impact on energy and water usage and prevent them from putting too much strain on Illinois' power grids. "As data centers continue to multiply, they are putting an incredible strain on the grid," he said. "And this legislation is trying to ensure that residents are not bearing the rise of this energy cost caused by the booming of this industry."

Under Stadelman's Senate Bill 2181, companies that operate data centers in Illinois would need to report their annual water and energy consumption to the Illinois Power Agency beginning next spring under threat of \$10,000 fines for non-compliance. The IPA would then synthesize the data into annual reports to answer the question of whether residential ratepayers in Illinois are, in effect, subsidizing data centers, along with the environmental impacts of the industry.

Across the U.S., utilities and grid operators are worried by the increased demand of electricity needed for data centers, and some have proposed delaying the closure of fossil fuel plants to support that demand, setting back environmental goals.

A January study by Frontier Group, a coalition of environmental and consumer groups, found at least 17 units at seven fossil fuel plants have seen their planned closures delayed—or are at risk of being delayed—due in part to increased demand from data centers. Most of it is happening in Virginia, where "Data Center Alley" is located, and nearby Maryland and West Virginia.

Stadelman cited similar environmental concerns about Illinois' goals under the 2021 Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA), which requires the state to shift to 100 percent clean energy by 2050. He worries that indiscriminate expansion of data centers could hamper Illinois' ability to meet that deadline.

"When we passed CEJA, no one anticipated the impact of data centers," Stadelman said. "That is going to have an impact on our ability to meet our energy demands with these data centers."

The proposal also calls for the agency to suggest legisla-

tive solutions "to mitigate any negative impacts of data centers on rate-paying customers."

But SB 2181 has not yet received a hearing—or any co-sponsors—despite agreement from fellow state Sen. Laura Ellman, D-Naperville, that data centers' resource usage could become a problem for Illinois.

"Illinois has a wealth of power and water, but we have to be good stewards of that wealth," said Ellman, who chairs the Senate Environment and Conservation committee. "One fear I have is that this increased demand from data centers will delay the closure of fossil fuel plants, much like they did in Virginia and Maryland."

Trying to regulate the business, though, could be "somewhat tricky," according to Laurance Lewis, senior advisor at Metro Edge Development Partners, a Chicago commercial real estate firm focused on data center development.

All data centers are not the same, Lewis pointed out. There are both "hyperscalers" and "colocation" centers. Hyperscaler data centers are usually owned and operated by one company, such as tech giants like Google or Amazon. Colocation centers, on the other hand, rent out space to smaller companies, which could make it difficult to collect data on resource usage.

"If you are a data center landlord of a retail colocation facility, you have multiple tenants. Some of their energy and water consumption may not be metered precisely," Lewis said, noting that poorly crafted legislation could be "unduly burdensome."

An October study published by the Center for Secure Water at the University of Illinois found that hyperscalers can use up to 550,000 gallons of water per day, while smaller data centers can consume up to 18,000 gallons per day.

However, Lewis argued that many critiques on water consumption are "overblown," claiming the data center industry is "self-regulating" and trying to find solutions, "such as a closed-loop water system that does not require millions of gallons of water."

Recently, the need for such large expenditures of resources by U.S. data centers has been called into question with the emergence of new Chinese AI large language model "Deepseek," which reportedly consumes less water and power than Open AI and other competitors.

Cushman and Wakefield, a global real estate services firm with a Chicago office, assesses that Chicago's metro area currently hosts 1.2 gigawatts of operational capacity, with 169 megawatts under construction and about 2.6 gigawatts already planned in upcoming years.

Nevertheless, a compre-

hensive study to estimate data centers' impact on the electricity grid is difficult to find. The rapid boom of data centers in recent years means their impact is still up for interpretation.

In the meantime, data centers are multiplying. The Chicago Tribune reported last month that a new data center in Minooka, 40 miles southwest of Chicago, could be opened by California-based Equinix Inc. by 2034. The new structure, the Tribune reported, will need 3 million gallons of water per day and 700 megawatts of power.

Weighing the economic benefits

As in many other municipalities, local leaders and residents are weighing the economic benefits of the project—including new jobs and tax revenue—against possible environmental tradeoffs. But absent state action like the data collection called for in Stadelman's bill, those environmental factors are currently difficult to quantify.

Andrew Chien, director and founder of the Center for Unstoppable Computing at the University of Chicago, believes that in the meantime, "planning is always important."

"In Virginia, for example, they are building fossil fuel generators alongside renewables because they did not have an adequate plan to support the demand of power data centers required through renewable energy," said Chien, a professor at the University. But he pointed out that Illinois has a different mix of energy sources than Virginia, owing to the state's 11 reactors at six nuclear plants—the most of any state—"and ample wind and solar resources."

"I think the right way to deal with this is to build capacity with those clean energy resources to be prepared for the growth in data centers," Chien said. "If we are prepared, we would not only attract jobs and investments. We would also do so in a way that does not increase carbon emissions."

On this note, Lewis agrees with Chien: Illinois is different from other states, as Illinois' energy market deregulated nearly 30 years ago, opening it up "to the entire country to procure energy," he said.

"Going back to fossil fuels is less likely to happen in Illinois than in a regulated state," Lewis said. "There are solar projects in DeKalb, for example, some wind projects and new technology coming in the market like hydrogen fuel cells and Dairy Renewable Natural Gas. There is a general sense that fossil fuel can only take us so far."

While the coexistence of technological innovation amid the shift towards renewable energy has proved problematic in other parts of the

country, Illinois legislators think it is still early enough to tackle this issue.

Rep. Carol Ammons, D-Urbana, chair of the House Energy and Environment committee, said it's "critical" for state policy to "achieve this balance" allowing those two sectors cohabitate.

"I think it is a false choice to put our environment and innovation against each other, it should not have to conflict," she said. "We need to protect our environment and ensure that up-and-coming technology develops sustainably. We need to regulate the industry to ensure technology does not pollute our communities while allowing new fields to emerge and provide opportunities."

But environmental concerns are not the only possible pitfall for data centers. Another concern is their impact on energy customers, who could see the cost of their rates spike in upcoming years. Sarah Moskowitz, executive director of the Chicago-based consumer advocacy group Citizens Utility Board, said she worries that Illinois' energy capacity may be monopolized by data centers in the near future.

"In Illinois, we have put together solutions to ensure adequate energy supply for citizens through ratepayer support for nuclear power plants," Moskowitz said, referring to fees approved by the General Assembly in the last decade that support the continued operations of nuclear plants in the northern half of the state as a bridge to expanding more renewable energy.

"Those supports do not expire for a couple of years, but now is the time to start working on strategies to ensure that the power generation that citizens need is not all gobbled up by these single, powerful customers."

Moskowitz warned that the growth of data centers could cause higher prices for energy for consumers and cautioned that "the entities that control the information about data centers are the entities that benefit the most from inflating demand projections."

"Suppose those data companies can outbid everyday ratepayers for electricity generation," she said. "In that case, that is removed from the overall markets and exacerbates real or perceived energy supply shortages that drive up market prices."

Lake County appoints Gordon to Metra Board of Directors

Gary Gordon has been appointed to represent Lake County on the Metra Board of Directors, replacing Melinda Bush, who resigned from the Board in January.



Gary Gordon

A Lake County resident for 22 years, finance professional and regular Metra commuter, Gordon brings a wealth of skills and experience and will be a strong asset for the Board. The Metra Board of Directors is made up of 11 members representing the six-county Chicago metropolitan area.

Gordon has worked the past seven years as the Chief Financial and Administrative Officer at the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, which relies on the ability of guests to navigate the regional transportation system. He previously worked for Lake County, first as the Director of Management and Budget. His professionalism,

attention to detail and management style led him to be the County's first Director of Finance and Administrative Services, a position he held from 2006 to 2018.

He also has a long history of giving back to communities. Among his contributions were serving as President of the Lincolnshire Prairie View School District Board of Education, coaching the Daniel Wright Junior High School Science Olympiad team and being a national trainer for the Government Finance Officers Association, promoting excellence in state and local government financial management.

"I am thrilled that the board has unanimously approved Gary's appointment to represent Lake County in this important role," said Sandy Hart, Lake County Board Chair. "I am confident that he will be an outstanding advocate for everyone in the region who relies on public transit in their daily lives."

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SUBMITTED PHOTO Hi-Liter/MCN

From left: Dr. Ryan Wollberg, Albus the Grass Lake School therapy dog, and Dr. William Newby. Dr. Wollberg has been appointed Dr. Newby's successor when he retires after the 2025/26 school year.

New Superintendent appointed at Grass Lake School District 36

After careful consideration, Dr. William Newby has announced his decision to retire as Superintendent of Grass Lake School District 36 following the 2025-2026 school year. Dr. Newby has dedicated over 9 years of service to District 36, leaving a lasting impact on the school and community. He has been a pillar of strength and vision for the district, guiding it through numerous challenges and spearheading significant improvements. His leadership, vision, and unwavering commitment to providing the best educational experience for Grass Lake School District 36 students will always be appreciated.

At the January 21, 2025, Board of Education meeting, Dr. Ryan Wollberg, the current principal of Grass Lake School, was appointed Dr. Newby's successor. Dr. Wollberg will officially

take on the role of Superintendent effective July 1, 2026, following Dr. Newby's retirement. Since joining Grass Lake School in 2023, Dr. Wollberg has demonstrated exceptional leadership, a deep understanding of the district, and a passion for education. His expertise in school leadership, community engagement, staff development, curriculum design, and financial management makes him an outstanding choice to lead Grass Lake School District 36 forward.

Over the next year, Dr. Newby and Dr. Wollberg will work closely to ensure a seamless transition. There is great confidence that under Dr. Wollberg's leadership, Grass Lake School District 36 will continue to thrive and uphold its mission to nurture and empower students to explore, achieve, and excel.

Supreme Court rules House Republicans waited too long to challenge maps

By Ben Szalinski
CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS

Illinois House Republicans waited too long to file a lawsuit challenging legislative maps drawn in 2021, the Illinois Supreme Court ruled last week.

As a result, the Democrat-majority court will not hear the case.

House Republican Leader Tony McCombie, R-Savanna, along with a group of individual voters, asked the court to reject the current legislative map for its partisan bias and lack of compactness. House Republicans wanted the court to appoint a special master redraw the districts.

They alleged the voting district maps are not "compact," a requirement of the state constitution, which has led to allegations of gerrymandering in favor of Democrats.

The plaintiffs argued court cases in other states and at the federal level required them to gather data from multiple election cycles with the maps in place to show a pattern that proves the maps aren't compact and were drawn for partisan benefit. But the court said McCombie's caucus waited too long to make their case.

"Plaintiffs could have brought this argument years ago," the court wrote in a short two-page opinion. "Their claim that waiting multiple election cycles is necessary to reveal the effects of redistricting is unpersuasive."

Republican Justice David Overstreet was the lone dissenting justice.

"They had the chance to make this right just to give the voters the chance to pick their representatives instead of representatives picking their voters and they declined," Rep. Dan Ugaste, R-Geneva, told reporters.

The court's ruling follows a similar case in 2012 that challenged the compactness of the 2011 maps. In that case, the court dismissed the challenge as untimely even though it was filed just eight months after the maps were enacted.

Attorneys for House Speaker Chris Welch, D-Hillside, and Senate President Don Harmon, D-Oak Park, were allowed to intervene as defendants in the case, which was originally filed against the State Board of Elections.

"To allow plaintiffs to proceed now, mid-decade, with their proposed redistricting challenge would invite political parties to wait until they have a wave election and use their best election results to justify a partisan challenge to the legislative map," the Democrats' lawyers said in their filing.

The court wrote that five years since the 2020 census, population data might also be "stale."

"Plaintiffs' approach would also be prejudicial and create uncertainty for voters and officeholders alike, now and in the future, as to whether any redistricting plan in Illinois is ever final," the court wrote.

The court's decision not to hear arguments on the case is the latest blow to various Republican legal efforts to throw out maps drawn by lawmakers and instead force an independent commission to draw new maps.

A lawsuit from multiple parties challenging the map was dismissed in 2021 by a federal three-judge panel, which rejected arguments that the map diluted the voting strength of racial minorities.

The court's ruling last week noted Republicans did not appeal those rulings.

The Illinois Supreme Court blocked a 2016 citizen-driv-

en referendum attempting to create an independent redistricting commission. The lead plaintiff in that case was John Hooker, a now-convicted conspirator in the "ComEd Four" corruption case. Federal courts also rejected Republican efforts to throw out the 2011 legislative maps.

In the case thrown out last week, Republicans argued that more than half of the current House Districts were less compact than a district the state's high court tossed out in 1981. They also said Rep. Lisa Hernandez, D-Cicero, who led the House redistricting process for House Democrats in 2021, admitted during debate that the maps were drawn for her party's political gain.

The Princeton Gerrymandering Project, which assesses legislative maps around the country on several metrics, gave the current Illinois House map an "F" grade for its compactness metric.

Republican leaders said they will review possible additional legal options in this case, but their next steps toward enacting independent mapping will be outside of court. Rep. Ryan Spain, R-Peoria, said he wants to try another petition drive to force a ballot referendum on the issue.

"It's up now to the voters to take this baton and run with it," Spain told reporters. "We need to have voters initiate the redistricting reforms that were cut down."

Republican lawmakers also want to pursue judicial ethics reform, arguing Democrat Justices Elizabeth Rochford and Mary K. O'Brien should have recused themselves from the case after receiving campaign contributions in 2022 from a political action committee run by Harmon, who intervened as a defendant in the case.

Conservation district upcoming events

Basecamp Basics: Outdoor Cooking

Thursday, April 17, 6:30-8 p.m., Prairieview Education Center, Crystal Lake.

Want to learn some basic camping skills like how to

cook outdoors? This program is part of a series that focuses on teaching adults camping skills, with activities and hands-on practice designed to get you comfortable with the camping basics. Ages 14+.

World Migratory Bird Day

Saturday, May 17, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Lost Valley Visitor Center, Glacial Park, Ringwood.

Come enjoy a variety of bird-themed activities and

crafts, including guided hikes, meeting a live bird and a scavenger hunt! The is a drop in, free event for all ages.

Conservation Egg Hunt

Saturday, April 19, 10-11

a.m., Prairieview Education Center, Crystal Lake.

Embark on a short hike that leads you to various bird habitats where you search for the "eggs" of local birds and win a prize! Bring the whole family and stay to cel-

brate Earth Day. Ages 13 and under.

Earth Day Celebration

Saturday, April 19, noon-4 p.m., Prairieview Education Center, Crystal Lake.

Join us to celebrate mother earth at this free event! Visit various environmental-themed booths hosted by partner organizations, participate in earth-friendly activities and crafts, grab lunch at one of our visiting food trucks and enjoy live music and puppet shows! All ages, free/drop-in event.

Wildflowers and Watercolors

Thursday, April 27, 10 a.m. - noon & 1-3 p.m., Prairieview Education Center, Crystal Lake.

Do you love flowers and art? Join for a beginner or intermediate class as you learn about spring wildflower identification. Choose between a guided step-by-step lesson or free paint while receiving tips. Ages 10+.

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



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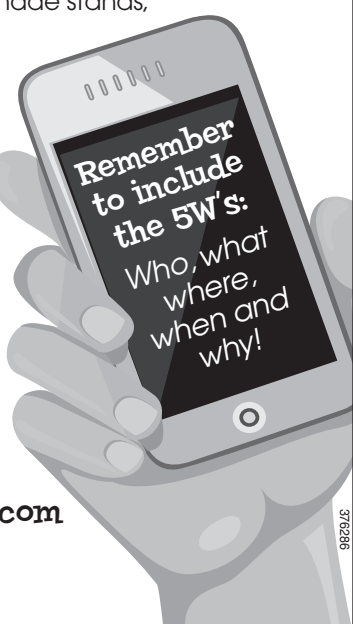
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Circuit Clerk announces launch of HOPE card program

Cards will simplify reporting order of protection violations

McHenry County residents with plenary orders of protection will be able starting March 31 to obtain HOPE cards, making it easier to report violations.

A HOPE card is a laminated card that includes essential information about a plenary order of protection which can be presented to law enforcement when reporting a violation of an order of protection or other related crimes without having to present the actual court documents.

“We are excited to be a part of the next phase of pilot Circuit Clerk’ Offices

that will be issuing HOPE cards,” Circuit Clerk Kathy Keefe said. “While the concept seems very simple, the purpose behind the HOPE Card is to make it easier for victims and survivors of domestic violence to move on with their lives by eliminating the necessity of carrying around a bulky stack of court paperwork, replacing it instead with a small card that can easily be carried in

a wallet.”

A HOPE card lists the case number, the names of the petitioner and other people protected under the order of protection, as well as the name of the respondent and whether he or she has specific firearm restrictions under the order. Law enforcement upon being presented with a HOPE card must verify the information through the Illinois Law Enforcement

Agencies Data System.

Individuals with currently valid plenary orders of protection who wish to obtain a HOPE card may do so as of, March 31, in Room 353 of the Michael J. Sullivan Judicial Center, 2200 N. Seminary Ave., Woodstock. There is no cost for doing so.





















A 2021 law empowered the Illinois Supreme Court to implement the program, which is being gradual-

ly rolled out. Five Illinois counties – DeKalb, DuPage, Jefferson, Grundy and Madison – began issuing the cards last year, and McHenry County joins Kane, Winnebago, Marion and Coles counties in this latest expansion.



Illinois is one of nine states that have created HOPE card programs, and more state legislatures are considering doing so.



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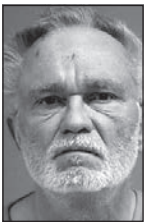
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Court & crime news

Man found guilty of attempted first degree murder, aggravated battery after jury trial

The McHenry County State's Attorney's Office announces that on April 7, Mark Alex, 60, of Crystal Lake, Illinois, was found guilty on two counts of Attempted First Degree Murder and two counts of Aggravated Domestic Battery. A jury reached their verdict after 53 minutes of deliberation at the conclusion of a week-long trial before the Honorable Judge Mark Gerhardt.



Mark Alex

On March 5, 2022, at approximately 3:30 p.m., officers of the Crystal Lake Police Department responded to a 911 call where the caller had reported being stabbed by her estranged husband. On scene,

the victim was determined to have sustained multiple injuries to her head. Responding Officer David Lang began immediate medical attention until first responders from the Crystal Lake Fire and Rescue arrived. The victim was immediately rushed to Northwestern Hospital in Huntley where further medical treatment was provided. Evidence and testimony at trial showed that Alex had stopped at a Home Depot, where he purchased both a demolition hammer and a hatchet, before arriving at the victim's apartment for what was supposed to be a child parenting-time exchange. Prior to entering, Alex removed the packaging from both the hammer and axe, and less than forty-five minutes later attacked the victim. Able to fight him off, though sustaining numerous

severe wounds, she was able to call 911 after Alex had left the apartment. Following the attack, Alex donned a mask and stopped at a nearby Meijers to purchase Motrin, Tylenol and a new jacket. Alex was eventually apprehended by officers of the Crystal Lake and Algonquin Police Departments approximately an hour later in Algonquin after his car was located in a nearby hotel parking lot.

McHenry County State's Attorney Randi Freese commends the strength the victim showed in fighting off Alex and for her courage to testify and recount the horrific ordeal to a jury. "While the method of the attack was uncommonly brutal in this case, there was also a classic escalating cycle of violence that was readily identifiable as well. As a society, we recognize the need

to stop this dangerous cycle from its inception," Freese stated. Freese recognizes the hard work done by the multiple officers and detectives involved from the Crystal Lake Police Department.

This case was successfully prosecuted at trial by Chief of Staff Ashley Romito and First Assistant State's Attorney Ashur Y. Youash. The sentencing hearing is scheduled for June 5, 2025.

Sheriff's office investigates domestic incident

At approximately 7:47 p.m. on April 8, McHenry County Sheriff's Office was dispatched to the 5000 block of Terra Cotta Road in unincorporated Crystal Lake for reports of a domestic incident. Patrol deputies responded to the scene and located two

household members who had been in a physical altercation. Both household members were transported to the hospital.

There was no threat to the community and no arrests have been made. The incident remains under investigation by McHenry County Sheriff's Office. More information will be shared once available.

Deputy involved shooting under investigation

On Thursday, April 10 at approximately 4:23 p.m., McHenry County Sheriff's Office was dispatched for a domestic dispute in the 300 block of Briarwood Road in unincorporated Crystal Lake.

Deputies made contact with an individual who was armed with a firearm. The suspect then barricaded him-

self in the residence. McHenry County Sheriff's Office SWAT Team and Hostage Negotiation Team were dispatched to the scene.

The Hostage Negotiation Team was in active conversation with the suspect in an effort to get him out safely, which proved unsuccessful, and a deputy-involved shooting occurred. The suspect was struck and later pronounced deceased.

Per state statute, the investigation has been turned over to the Major Investigation Assistance Team (MIAT) in conjunction with the McHenry County State's Attorney's Office. Interviews and evidence, including a review of body-worn camera footage, will all be conducted by MIAT. The Sheriff's Office will provide updates as they become available.

IDOT, ISP: 'Don't Drive Distracted. Eyes Forward'

Pay attention, create safe habits during Distracted Driving Awareness Month

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is teaming up with the Illinois State Police (ISP) and local law enforcement agencies to promote April as Distracted Driving Awareness Month, reminding drivers to pay attention or pay the price.

Distracted driving, which involves cellphone use or any activity that takes attention away from the task of operating your vehicle, is a risky behavior that endangers everyone on the road.

"Arriving late is better than never arriving. Stay focused,

stay safe and reach your destination without distractions," said Stephane B. Seck-Birhame, IDOT's bureau chief of Safety Programs and Engineering. "Remember: 'Don't Drive Distracted. Eyes Forward.'"

According to IDOT statistics, 260 people died and 29,458 people were injured in crashes involving distractions between 2019 and 2023. In 2023, 58 people were killed in crashes involving at least one

distracted driver, 4.7% of all traffic fatalities that year.

All of these crashes can be prevented. Drivers can prioritize safe driving by keeping their hands on the wheel, their eyes on the road and their focus on driving, and by following these steps:

- If you are expecting a text or need to send one, pull over and park your car in a safe location.
- Do not engage in social media scrolling or messaging

while driving.

- Cellphone use is habit-forming. Struggling to not text and drive? Activate your phone's "Do Not Disturb" feature.

"Taking your attention away from the road and other drivers around you, even for just a second or two, can be a costly mistake, or even a deadly one," said ISP Division of Patrol Col. Chris Owen. "The minute you get behind the wheel, driving

should be your priority and everything else needs to take a back seat."

"Don't Drive Distracted. Eyes Forward." is a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration campaign focused on distracted driving prevention. The heightened enforcement in Illinois is made possible through federal funds administered by IDOT and coincides with the comprehensive multimedia campaign "It's Not a Game."



SUBMITTED PHOTO Hi-Liter/MCN

Pet of the week

Qwirkle, a Beagle/Lab mix, is about 2-1/2 months old, spayed, up-to-date on routine shots (incl. rabies), tested negative for heartworm and on preventative and microchipped.

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.

Advantage Dealer Group to break ground on new Honda Dealership

The Roberts family, Chicagoland residents and owners of Advantage Dealer Group, will be having a groundbreaking ceremony for its forthcoming Honda dealership in Fox Lake on Thursday, April 17, at 11 a.m.

This momentous event marks a significant milestone for the Roberts family of Advantage dealerships, as this first Honda store will round out the greater portfolio of family-owned and operated dealerships, including Advantage Acura of Naperville, Ad-

vantage Chevrolet Hodgkins, Advantage Chevrolet Bolingbrook, Advantage Chevrolet Bridgeview, and Advantage Toyota Calumet City.

The Roberts family's automotive legacy began with Desmond Roberts, the patriarch and visionary behind Advantage Dealer Group. After immigrating to the U.S. from the Caribbean with nothing but ambition and resilience, Desmond worked as a taxi driver in New York before transitioning into the banking industry. In 1999,

he took a pivotal step by acquiring Advantage Chevrolet of Hodgkins, establishing a foundation for what would grow into a thriving family business.

Now serving as CEO of Advantage Dealer Group, Desmond Roberts continues to lead with the same dedication and entrepreneurial spirit that started it all. He has mentored and prepared his two children, Jason and Krystal Roberts, to carry forward the family legacy.

"This groundbreaking rep-

resents more than just a new dealership—it symbolizes the journey that began over three decades ago when I first entered the automotive industry," said Desmond Roberts, CEO of Advantage Dealer Group. "From day one, my goal has been to build a business that not only grows but also gives back to the community. I'm proud to see our family expanding into the Honda brand, and I look forward to seeing Jason and Krystal continue what we started—creating opportunities, investing in people, and shaping the future of the industry."

"This groundbreaking ceremony marks a significant milestone for our community and our commitment to providing exceptional service and quality Honda vehicles," said Krystal Roberts, Executive Manager of Advantage Dealer Group. "The presence of the Fox Lake community and elected officials would mean a great deal to our Advantage team as we embark on this exciting new journey!"

For more information, please contact Krystal Roberts at kr Roberts@advantage-dealer.net.

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Pace receives \$1M in funding for electric buses

McHenry County and Pace Suburban Bus representatives came together to celebrate receiving \$1 million in federal Community Project Funding to purchase five electric paratransit buses to serve local residents. The new vehicles will serve McHenry County’s groundbreaking MCRide paratransit service, which offers affordable on-demand rides to any location in McHenry County. The funding, secured by US Rep. Bill Foster, will enhance mobility options for McHenry County residents with disabilities, while supporting environmental sustainability and advancing Pace’s goal to operate 100 percent zero-emissions vehicles by 2040.

McHenry County DOT to host public information meetings for intersection improvement studies

After an intensive County wide study of intersections, which analyzed years of data such as traffic flow, vehicle count and crash reports, the McHenry County Division of Transportation (MCDOT) has identified safety concerns surrounding the intersections of Alden Road at O’Brien Road, Maple Street at Coral Road and Spring Grove Road at Miller Road. The MCDOT, to address these concerns, is beginning the redesign process of these intersections by conducting a Phase I Study. This study will explore potential construction designs and engineering changes that would work to resolve the specific safety concerns at each intersection.

Key portions of a Phase I Study include gathering preliminary public input, conducting engineering analyses of existing traffic flow and environmental reviews to investigate the potential impacts from changes to the existing roadway. Based on the data collected as well as stakeholder input, the study team will draft a series of transportation alternatives for evaluation and review. With the drafts now in their final phases, public input is requested before the team recommends a preferred approach and design work begins. Each intersection will be the subject of its own Public Information Meeting with the goal of

sharing project information and obtaining location specific public input.

Below are the meeting dates, times and locations:

- The meeting for the intersection of Alden Road at O’Brien Road will be on April 16, from 4:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m., at the Alden Township Offices located at 8515 Alden Road, Harvard, IL 60033.
- The meeting for the intersection of Maple Street at Coral Road will be on April 22, from 4:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m., at the Marengo Park District Office located at 825 Indian Oaks Trail, Marengo, IL 60152.
- The meeting for the intersection of Spring Grove Road at Miller Road will be on April 30, from 4:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m., at the Spring Grove Village Hall at 7401 Meyer Road, Spring Grove, IL 60081.

As this project moves closer and closer to the design phase, public input is needed to help our team ensure that the needs of the community, and all roadway users, are met. The McHenry County Division of Transportation encourages everyone who is interested to attend the upcoming public information meeting.

As the project progresses, and individual public meetings are held for each intersection, more information will become available for public review at www.mcdotsafety.com.

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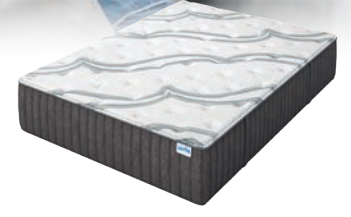


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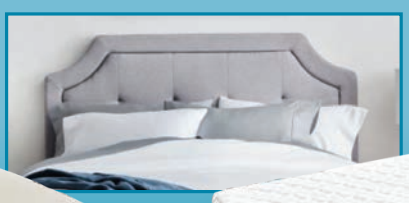
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