



INSIDE: Carlyle football opens with 26-14 win over Lawrenceville. See page 6B.

INSIDE: Special Needs Foundation for Community Link elects new board officers and member. See page 4A.



INSIDE: Donation boosts Clinton County Fair's 618 Event Center. See page 6A.

Three Sections • Eighteen Pages

BREESE Journal

"Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough."
— OPRAH WINFREY

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Honor Flight send-off set for Monday at Standin Proud Veterans Museum

Public is encouraged to show up and support along parade route

By Kelly Jo Ross
Breese Journal News Editor

Standin' Proud Veterans Tribute Museum in Bartelso is coordinating a special Honor Flight Celebration on Monday, Aug. 31, recognizing local veterans who have participated in an Honor Flight during 2026, as well as those preparing for two

upcoming flights in September. The celebration will begin at 11 a.m. at Standin' Proud, 1507 Carlyle Road in Bartelso, and will include guest speakers, tribute videos and a recognition ceremony.

"We will recognize the veterans as well as have a few guest speakers to help show our support of those that have so selflessly served for our freedom," said Larissa Monken, Standin' Proud Veterans Tribute Museum administrator.

Following the ceremony, veterans and their guardians will depart on a parade route through Clinton County at approximately 12:45 p.m.

Organizers are encouraging local schools, families and community members to line the route and help create a memorable show of appreciation for the veterans. Those attending are

HONOR FLIGHT / 2A



Proposed new amphitheater

The City of Breese held a town hall meeting for the proposed Breese Nature Amphitheater on Tuesday, Aug. 25, at the Breese American Legion. The amphitheater will replace the former stage at Northside Park that had to be torn down due to safety concerns. Pictured is a rendering of the proposed amphitheater. The city is applying for an Open Space Lands Acquisition Development (OSLAD) grant through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Rooted in faith... Century-old tree in Breese transformed into cross

By Kelly Jo Ross
Breese Journal News Editor

A large wooden cross now stands outside St. John's United

Church of Christ (UCC) and Custom Accounting Services, Inc. in Breese, giving new life to a century-old tree that had long been part of the property

shared by the church and the accounting business.

Local craftsman Josh Hays, owner of Wild Wood Creations in Iuka, spent two days working on the project, putting the final touches on the massive hand-carved cross last Friday evening.

The idea came from Sam Phillips of Custom Accounting Services, Inc., whose business is located next to the church, with Hays bringing Phillips' vision to life.

Phillips said the soft maple tree was approximately 100 years old and stood about 50 feet tall before it was taken down in June.

"So the tree, itself, was planted sometime in the 1920s," Phillips said.

Over the years, the tree had grown large enough, and most recently, had falling limbs during storms that had become a concern.

"It got to the point where we were worried about it," Phillips said.

Rather than simply removing the tree entirely, Phillips and his wife began thinking about a way to preserve part of it and recognize its history.

That history connects both St. John's UCC and the building that now houses Custom Accounting Services.

Phillips said longtime Breese residents remember when the building was once used for classes by schoolchildren associated with the church.

CROSS / 6A



Josh Hays of Wild Wood Creations out of Iuka transformed this 100-year-old soft maple tree in Breese into a beautiful, rustic cross.

Clinton County hero Rolves passes away

By Matt Wilson
Breese Journal Reporter

Live-in caretaker Donna Burklow confirmed that Wilbert "Vince" Rolves passed away at 3 a.m. Tuesday at HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital in Breese.

Rolves celebrated his 102nd birthday on Feb. 23. A Carlyle resident, Rolves is believed to be the last living World War II prisoner of war in Illinois.

Burklow said Rolves had been ill for a long time and died of natural causes.

"I am deeply saddened by the passing of SGT Vincent 'Vince' Rolves," Veterans Assistance Commission of Clinton County Superintendent Colbey Voss said. "It was truly an honor and a privilege to have known Vince, and I am grateful that I had the opportunity to spend time with a man who represented so much of what we honor in our veteran community. Vince's service and sacrifice during World War II were extraordinary, but what I will remember just as much was the person



Vince Rolves

behind that incredible story. Even after everything he endured, he continued to give back, share his experiences, and remind future generations of the sacrifices made for the freedoms we enjoy today."

Mayor Judy Smith said the city of Carlyle residents were saddened to hear of Rolves' passing.

"We give our deepest condolences on the passing of Vince Rolves," Smith said. "His military service and sacrifices, as

the service and sacrifices of every veteran, will be remembering by those who knew and loved them."

Clinton County Board member Greg Riechman said one of the greatest privileges of being actively involved in supporting local veterans has been the opportunity to know and spend time with true American heroes like Rolves.

"Year after year, whether at Memorial Day ceremonies, Veterans Day observances, or other community events, Vince was always there, greeting everyone with a warm smile, a sharp sense of humor, and a humble spirit that never sought recognition for the extraordinary sacrifices he made," Riechman said. "Beside him, as always, was his devoted friend and trusted caregiver, Donna, whose companionship and support meant so much to him."

Rolves was one of the most decorated and celebrated veterans in southern Illinois.

He was drafted into the

ROLVES / 6A

County health plan a model for savings

By Matt Wilson
Breese Journal Reporter

Bill Schmaltz said the Clinton County employee health plan and the work of the county insurance committee is a great success story.

Schmaltz is the president and CEO of Employers Consulting Group, which manages Clinton County's employee health plan.

Schmaltz said there are many plans out there that tell organizations how much more they need to pay them because all of the costs have gone up. Schmaltz said that leaves the committee in a bind so what ends up happening is they auction off the plan to the one that will give them the lowest cost. They then wait another year for that to happen again.

What Clinton County is doing differently is they are managing their costs. They have gone to a next generation model where they look at what the reasons are for the costs going up and they address those. By lowering those costs, they are able to manage the cost of the plan. They don't have to reduce the employees benefits.

Clinton County has had the

same \$200 deductible for the last 20 years. They also haven't changed the copays.

"The focus for the committee that meets once every month is how to reduce the cost of what people are actually paying for and that will result in managing the overall cost," Schmaltz said.

Clinton County is managing their costs of what is going on within the plan — the medical and prescription costs.

"When you lower the cost of what people are using and reward the people by giving them the lower cost alternative then the cost of the plan is going to go down," Schmaltz said.

Clinton County has had the plan for 20 years. In the last 20 years, the county's average increase has been 2%. Schmaltz said that is significantly lower than the national and state average. The plans that play the renewal game are getting double digit increases per year.

"We have improved benefits and are bending the curve down," Schmaltz said.

Schmaltz said the insurance committee is actually managing the costs, where many of the other plans out there are waiting

for the premium increase.

"On one side, you have a group managing a cost, and on the other side, you have the other groups renewing and not addressing what is causing the cost to go up," Schmaltz said.

Schmaltz said the county now has so many of their health insurance benefits that employees can access at no cost.

"It is unbelievable what the employees are able to access at no cost if they use the no cost service," Schmaltz said.

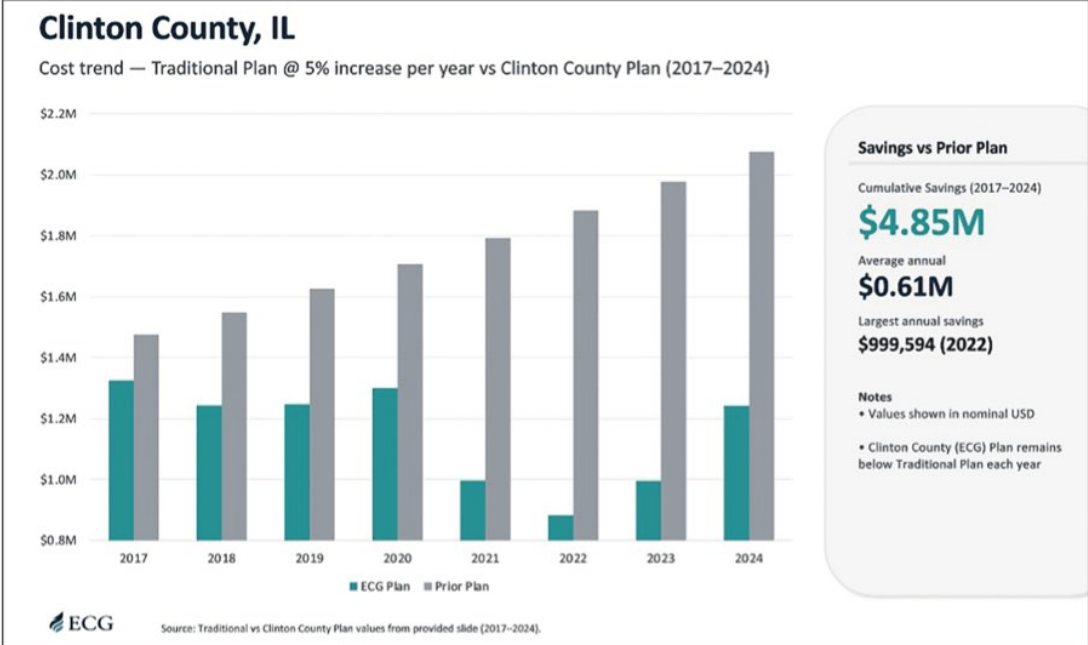
Schmaltz said Clinton County has done such a good job managing their health insurance costs that they are being recognized in books.

Clinton County was recognized in the 2023 book, "Fixing American Healthcare: Restoring Trust in the U.S. Healthcare System for Patients, Physicians, & Payers."

County board chairman Brad Knolhoff regularly attends the monthly insurance committee meetings. Health insurance is the No. 2 cost in about any organization, with payroll being the highest cost.

Insurance committee chair-

HEALTH PLAN / 3A



Above is a graph of a traditional health plan vs. the Clinton County health plan.



106th Year • No. 26

Carlyle Lake Elevation

Friday, Aug. 21 445.61
Sunday, Aug. 23 445.59
Tuesday, Aug. 25 445.57

Precipitation Aug. 2200"
Aug. 1905" Aug. 2300"
Aug. 2005" Aug. 2400"
Aug. 2100" Aug. 2500"



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News Briefs

■ MD class of 1976 to reunite on Sept. 19

The Mater Dei High School class of 1976 is having a reunion on Saturday, Sept. 19. Mass will be celebrated at 4 p.m. at St. Augustine Church, Breese, and the 50th reunion will continue at Breese Knights of Columbus beginning at 6 p.m. Cost is \$10 per person.

Contact Sue Jansen (618-972-8470) with questions and to RSVP.

■ Tee'd Off With ALS event is Oct. 3

The Tee'd Off With ALS golf event is set for Saturday, Oct. 3, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., at Roland Barkau Memorial Golf Course in Okawville. Your participation helps support ALS research and patient care. You also can become a sponsor, dedicate a memorial garden tribute or enter the reverse drawing.

For details, go to the Tee'd Off With ALS Facebook page, or contact Matt Netemeyer at 618-550-9587 or Melissa Netemeyer at 618-691-9413.

Overdose Awareness Event Aug. 31 at Fairview Park in Centralia

Overdose Awareness Day is internationally observed on Aug. 31 each year, which aims to raise awareness of overdose and reduce the stigma of a drug-related death.

The Take Action Coalition of Clinton County is joining area organizations to remember lives lost to overdose, support those in recovery and raise awareness during an Overdose Awareness event next Monday in Centralia.

The event will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. on Monday, Aug. 31, at Fairview Park, 899 W. McCord St. in Centralia.

Organizers said overdose does not affect just one person, but can have a lasting impact on families and entire communities.

The event is designed to pro-

vide an opportunity for residents to come together to remember loved ones, support individuals in recovery and help reduce the stigma surrounding substance use and addiction.

The evening will include music, free food, tributes, a guest speaker and family-friendly activities.

The Overdose Awareness event is being hosted by the Take Action Coalition of Clinton County, Marion County Coalition Against Drug Use and the Community Resource Center.

Organizers said the gathering will focus on "honoring lives lost, supporting recovery, and building hope in our community."

The event is free and open to the public.

Residents cautioned to look out for electric scooters or bikes

By Matt Wilson
Breese Journal Reporter

With school starting again, Breese Mayor Kevin Timmermann cautioned residents to be aware there will be extra traffic and to especially be aware of kids on electric scooters or bikes.

"I am just seeing these things flying through parking lots," Timmermann said. "And they are not going through slowly, they are flying through. It's an issue."

Breese Police Chief Mark Berndsen said some parents have asked for his advice before buying electric vehicles for their kids. He has told them they are only as safe as what their kids are going to be.

"You can't ride them on the wrong side of the road, you can't run stop signs," Berndsen said. "They are just like cars, you have to obey all of the rules of the road."

Berndsen said drivers have to be licensed with insurance and registration for the electric vehicles that go 28 miles per hour or higher.

Timmermann said the use of electric vehicles should be a concern and it is something the city is going to continue to look at.

Another issue for bikes or scooters is there is a lot of loose gravel on the streets because they recently oiled and chipped the streets. In the next couple of weeks, the city crews will be going through with a street sweeper and picking up the loose rock. The rock has to be on for three or four weeks after they oil and chip so that every-

thing gets potted into the road.

During public comment, Grand Knight Marty Diekemper said the Knights of Columbus Tootsie Roll Drive will be Sept. 18-20. All of the proceeds go to local organizations. They will be at some of the banks on Sept. 18, the four-way stop at U.S. 50 and St. Rose Road and other businesses on Sept. 19, and local churches on Sept. 20.

Kerry Porter with the Breese Chamber of Commerce talked about the upcoming Pumpkin Trail and Business After Hours.

Business After Hours on Sept. 24 from 5-7 p.m. will be hosted between Optimized Nutrition, VFit, Moonbird Yoga, Thrive Physical Therapy and Clinton County Chiropractic. The street will be shut down from VFit to the end of the block.

The Pumpkin Trail will be on Oct. 24. Main Street, starting at Turf Bar and Banquet and ending at Dutchmen's on Main Bar and Grill, will be shut down from noon to 6 p.m. Owners of businesses are responsible for cleanup of hay bale displays.

Starting next year, there will be a special event form that organizations will have to fill out before any events that will shut down streets.

There will be a public hearing for the city's comprehensive plan at 7 p.m. Sept. 14 at Breese City Hall.

The council approved a resolution for a volunteer golf course marshal policy.

The Breese City Pool will be open on Saturdays and Sundays until Aug. 30. There are parties booked through that time. There are not enough lifeguards to



Breese Mayor Kevin Timmermann, LEFT, gives money to Breese Knights of Columbus Grand Knight Marty Diekemper for the upcoming Tootsie Roll Drive. The Tootsie Roll Drive will be held Sept. 18-20.
Photo by Matt Wilson

keep the pool open Monday through Friday, so parties can only be on Saturdays and Sundays.

There was a town hall meeting for the new Breese Nature Amphitheater on Aug. 25 at the Breese American Legion. It was the first of three town hall meetings the city is required to do for the Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) grant. The application has to be sent in by Aug. 31.

The flooring in the back entry way at the Breese Public Library has been repaired. The library is having a book signing at 6:30 p.m. on Aug. 27.

A city-wide cleanup is planned for Oct. 10. There will be more details to come on the

event.

During his report, Timmermann said the 2027 consolidated election is April 6, 2027. Candidates began circulating petitions on Aug. 25. Packets are available on the county clerk's website and at Breese City Hall.

He said with the start of schools, there is a lot of activity in town and the restaurants are being utilized, which is a good thing.

"Good luck to all of our kids," Timmermann said. "It seems that everywhere we go, Breese is recognized for their sports. We have a lot to be proud of. The schools represent this area well."

The next city council meeting is Tuesday, Sept. 1.

◆ Health plan (Continued from 1A)

man Nelson Heinzmann, Knolhoff, and the rest of the insurance committee are talking every month about new ways and new innovations on addressing health care costs. They talk about how to address rising health insurance costs, and strategies are discussed every meeting. The insurance committee consists of Heinzmann, Joe Jansen, Curt Haselhorst, Mike Hilmes Mike Stricker and Jeff Crisel.

Knolhoff said employee health insurance is one of the largest costs employers face and for most, it has been increasing substantially year after year. The insurance committee meets each month to have extensive conversations about the county's health plan.

They have two primary goals in every decision they make. They want to have affordable and quality options so the county can recruit and retain great employees, but also ensure the tax payers of Clinton County can realize tax savings.

"It is no accident that the costs are so low, some years it even goes down," Schmaltz said. "It is all of these innovative strategies that the committee comes up with."

The committee adopts innovations long before they become main stream. They are at the spears edge of the innovations and adopting them.

"That keeps the costs down and keeps the money in the tax payers pockets," Schmaltz said.

The employees are never impacted and their benefits have improved in the last 20 years while their deductibles have stayed the same. There are many zero out of pocket benefits that the employees can take advantage of, so it keeps the money in their pockets.

Pharmacy scripts that are ad-

vertised can be thousands of dollars. Clinton County has come up with strategies that have lowered those costs. The county has saved over \$800,000 just on pharmacy.

"That is because we are using very innovative strategies for addressing that," Schmaltz said.

Those strategies include going directly to the manufacturer and getting 98% of the scripts at no cost for the employees because it is available to the county at wholesale. If the employee takes advantage of the mail order system, they get the generics at no cost.

The same applies to the more expensive drugs. The county has a partner that looks at all scripts over \$350 and looks at all of the alternatives for getting a lower cost script.

"We are buying scripts at a third of the price for the county than what's available in the insurance system," Schmaltz said.

Sometimes they can get the expensive scripts at no cost if they go to the manufacturer.

The secret of lowering health insurance costs is lowering what the medical costs are.

"If you lower the costs of prescriptions, then naturally all of your costs are going to go down," Schmaltz said. "You don't ever have to be concerned about raising deductibles and co pays. The county plan doesn't do that because they are so involved and focused on lowering pharmacy and medical costs."

The employee premiums have only gone up \$2 over the last 20 years for the employee only plan.

The plan has been duplicated. Bond County adopted the plan and in the first six months they have \$342,000.

"It is really remarkable what the county is doing," Schmaltz

said. "It should be seen as no surprise because you have one plan where you are just letting the insurance system dictate how much the costs are, then you have the county plan that lowers the cost of what makes up the costs of the health plan - which is the pharmacy and medical costs - then it's no accident that the county plan is being managed properly and the costs are going down and stabilized."

Knolhoff said he maintains close relationships with board members from other counties. While they have been getting double digit increases, Clinton County has remained flat. Last year Knolhoff worked with the Bond County Board. He also provided the Employers Consulting Group information to the vice chairman of the Washington County Board and they were able to save over \$336,000 when compared to the renewal they were being offered.

The county has found that when they uncover what medical procedures cost and they can compare those costs to competing procedures at different facilities and can find it at a fraction of the cost. They incentivise the employees to use the low cost, but high quality care, and that can save \$20,000.

"The employees can either go where they want to go and not know what the cost is, or they can use the alternatives and pay nothing out of pocket," Schmaltz said.

New innovations are always being discussed. Anytime there are new innovations in pharmacy, the county is the first to hear about it. They discuss the pros and cons and determine if that is something they want to implement or not.

"The county is always at the forefront of the various strate-

gies and it's been very successful," Schmaltz said.

Schmaltz has close to 40 plans that they manage. Different plans have different commitments by management. The most successful plans they have are the ones where management is most involved.

"Clinton County is the most involved in managing the health care costs than any other plan I have," Schmaltz said. "So it is no surprise, they are the most successful. Brad and Nelson demand that we meet once a month and they challenge the status quo and the costs and that always produces more and more ideas that help reduce costs for the county tax payers and keep the benefits the same or better for the employees."

Schmaltz said many organizations are waiting for the government to come up with the solution in health care. Clinton County is not waiting for the federal government, they are coming up with ideas that are fixing health care costs every month.

"I love success stories, and this is the leader. This is the one that is really doing a great job," Schmaltz said. "I'm just very impressed with what the county is doing."

Knolhoff looks for that success to continue.

"Tax payers in Illinois are hurting and are feeling the burden of high property taxes," Knolhoff said. "In 2026, Clinton County will lower its property tax levy for the sixth consecutive year. This is due in part to the hard work of the insurance committee and the results we are getting with our employee health plan. If there are elected boards that offer health insurance to their employees and they are not regularly discussing this topic, they should be."

Coping 4 Life marks 10 years with book signing on Aug. 27

Coping 4 Life will celebrate a decade of supporting children, families and others navigating grief with a special 10th anniversary event Thursday, Aug. 27, at Breese Public Library.

The celebration will begin at 6:30 p.m. and will feature a book signing, discussion and the display of a community-created Coping quilt.

Dr. Kris Fulkerson, author of "Grief in the Middle of Nowhere: Special Considerations for Rural Grieving Children," and Dr. Brie Overton, author of "My Grief Comfort Book," will discuss their respective works and sign copies for those attending.

In addition, Beth Ricciardi will display the Coping quilt, which was created in partnership with Horizon Line Studios as part of Coping 4 Life's school

outreach efforts earlier this year.

The event provides an opportunity to celebrate the work and growth of Coping 4 Life, which has spent the past 10 years providing support and resources for children, those experiencing grief and others working through difficult circumstances.

The anniversary event is being offered in partnership with the New York Life Foundation.

Those attending may bring their own copies of Fulkerson's and Overton's books to have signed. The books are available through Amazon, and a limited number of copies will also be available for purchase during the event.

The celebration is open to the community and will take place at 6:30 p.m. on Aug. 27 at Breese Public Library.

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Open house on Sept. 4

Niemeyer Agency celebrates 20 years

The Knights of Columbus Niemeyer Agency will celebrate 20 years of service to faith, families and the community with an open house next month in Breese.

The 20th anniversary celebration will be held Friday, Sept. 4, from noon to 3 p.m. at the Niemeyer Agency, located at 541 Mason Drive in Breese.

Community members are invited to stop by during the open

house to meet the Niemeyer Agency team, enjoy food and learn more about the agency, including what it has accomplished over the past two decades and its plans for the future.

The agency is marking the milestone "Celebrating 20 Years of Service to Faith, Families, and Community."

The open house is free and open to the community.

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