

# INSIDE

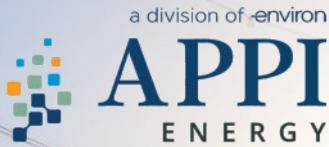
October 2023

*Vermilion County*

**Celebrating  
Manufacturing  
Month with GPI**



PARTNER IN PROGRESS  
*Vermilion Advantage*  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT | CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



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# INSIDE

Vermilion County

**Todd Lee**  
Interim CEO

**Nicole Van Hyfte**  
Chamber of Commerce Director

**Jo Doggett**  
Data & Finance Director

**Jodie Ingram**  
Community Development Coordinator

**Dana Rowland**  
Office Assistant



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Prospecting and recruitment of new businesses is an important role we play as your economic development team. The growth and expansion of existing businesses is often the most impactful driver of new jobs and investment. As they grow the local supply chain grows with them.

Big Jim Darby, with his family, moved from Michigan to Illinois in 1960. He purchased Greenwood Cemetery and began a family venture with entities today numbering six separate companies employing people in the Greater Illiana area. The Darby family story is a prime example of how the growth of small business helps grow a local economy.

The Vermilion Advantage area has many examples of businesses that have grown from existing family-owned entities to national companies. Vermilion Advantage is committed to its continued support of every business entity in our region, because we know the importance of people like Big Jim Darby.

Todd Lee  
Interim CEO, Vermilion Advantage



Vermilion Advantage, through membership value, provides strategic leadership on critical large and small business issues - leading economic and workforce development, anticipating and responding to members' needs, addressing quality of life issues and providing a network of information and business contacts. Vermilion Advantage works regionally to bring opportunities to Danville and Vermilion County.

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*Inside Vermilion County* is a monthly publication created by Vermilion Advantage to showcase our members and share good news about Vermilion County. Each issue is mailed to all Vermilion Advantage members and over 1,000 copies are distributed throughout Vermilion County.

# Vermilion Advantage's Jo Doggett Retiring After Nearly 20 Years



taking the position of Finance Manager. I jumped at it. It was still somewhat in my general area of finance, working in banks and an investment firm, but it was a little different.

### **Any recent work you're especially proud of?**

Since I was the coordinator for our only fundraiser, the annual golf outing, I wanted to go out with a bang and make this year's the biggest and best outing

so far. With the help of many sponsors, golfers, staff members, volunteers, and the cooperative weather, the outing was great. We also hit a record for the fundraising portion.

### **What have been the most significant changes in the community during your tenure?**

The new growth -the new Carle project, Golden Nugget Danville, Christie Clinic, a new strip mall area by Carle, and many more to come with the Riverfront Project.

### **What have been the most recent changes in the organization?**

The Covid years took the chamber up a bit. People wanted to get out, see people, gather, and have fun again. The chamber part of our organization boomed.

### **How can the community support the work of Vermilion Advantage?**

If you are a small business owner or a large industry, a home-based business, a retired professional, or an individual professional, we would love to have you as a member. We have around 500 members. We are a not-for-profit organization; therefore, your membership investment will help support everything we do for our

members and the county. We offer school programs, networking opportunities, marketing opportunities, professional recruitment tours, a Jobs Board for members to post open positions, and our monthly magazine, *Inside Vermilion County*. As we always say, "We work better together!"

### **What do you enjoy most about Vermilion County?**

I love the fact that there is just so much to do. Go to our website at [vermilionadvantage.com](http://vermilionadvantage.com) and look in the News & Events tab. There's something for everyone.

### **What are your plans for retirement?**

I'm a crafter. I've been stocking up on supplies, so I'm ready for just about anything. Also, my husband has been semi-retired for almost two years. We love to go camping, and we are always on the lookout for the perfect place.

**Tell us about your family.** I have a brother who is building a new home in Westville, a retired sister in Mahomet, and a brother in San Antonio, Texas. I have two beautiful, smart daughters who are married to the type of men you dream of them having. I also have a bonus daughter and son on my husband's side. We have six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Then there is my wonderful husband, Rocky, who I love very much. We have a simple but good life.

**Anything we haven't asked?** I can't go without mentioning the late Vicki Haugen. She did more for this community/county than anyone I knew. Along with her mentor, Lou Mervis' inspiration, Vicki accomplished a lot in her time with Vermilion Advantage. I wish she was back on this earth enjoying *her* retirement, something she so earned.

A longtime Vermilion Advantage team member is retiring after almost 20 years. Jo Doggett, Data and Finance Director, leaves this fall with a rich legacy of supporting Vermilion County.

**Tell us about your work.** I love the job; it's been rewarding. The responsibilities have changed over and over again, but the finance part has always been the constant ingredient. I've handled accounts receivables, accounts payable, payroll, monthly financial statements, helped create the budget, and have been part of the year-end audits or compilations. The data part of my job includes setting new members up in our many systems. I love working with numbers. I have a very strong work ethic and always have.

**How did you get your start?** My Vermilion Advantage career started after working for Dottie Robinson when she passed away. I got a part-time job working for the Small Business Development Center, then housed in the same building as Vermilion Advantage. I was looking for a full-time position, and Vicki Stewart (Haugen), former President and CEO of Vermilion Advantage presented the opportunity of

# Danville Area Community College Offers New Online Program for Cancer Research

Are you looking for an exciting new healthcare career field where you help cancer patients without direct patient contact? Danville Area Community College's new Online Cancer Registry Management Certificate may be for you. The new program provides the skills needed to work in the cancer registry field and certification from the National Cancer Registrars Association (NCRA).

Cancer registrars abstract patient data to provide essential information to researchers, healthcare providers, and public health officials to monitor and advance cancer treatments, conduct research, and improve cancer prevention and screening programs.

"It is a field more on the IT side of health, and most jobs can be done remotely," explains Kelly Johnson MHIIM, RHIA, BSRS, RT(S), (VS), Director Health Information Technology and Director Cancer Registry Management Programs at DACC.

This post-associate degree program is open to anyone with an associate degree that meets several prerequisites.

Johnson believes the health information technology field is often misunderstood because the team works mainly behind the scenes. "You will never see someone in our field running down a hall in

scrubs with a bag of fluids or a stethoscope to work on an ER patient," she says. "That sometimes makes us less visible, but that does not mean our work is not vital to patients' lives. We collect, analyze, and maintain medical record information that provides the data for the important field of cancer research."

Cancer registrars serve as data information specialists, most frequently working in hospitals and central registries in various roles such as Certified Tumor Registrars (CTR), Oncology Data Analysts, or CTR Consultants. Cancer registry jobs are available nationwide. Many positions are remote, but in-person local positions at major healthcare organizations are also an option.

According to the NCRA, "On average, cancer registrars/abstractors are salaried at \$60,644 compared to mid-management positions (analyst/coordinator/supervisor/consultant) at \$75,627, or about 25% more than cancer registrars/abstractors. Registry managers/directors make \$98,230 annually, about 30% more than mid-management and 62% more than registrars/abstractors."

One of Johnson's favorite stories is about helping a student find employment. "I recently had an opportunity to help a

student find a great job at a local healthcare organization," says Johnson. "The student says she could not be happier. She says it is the career she has been looking for."

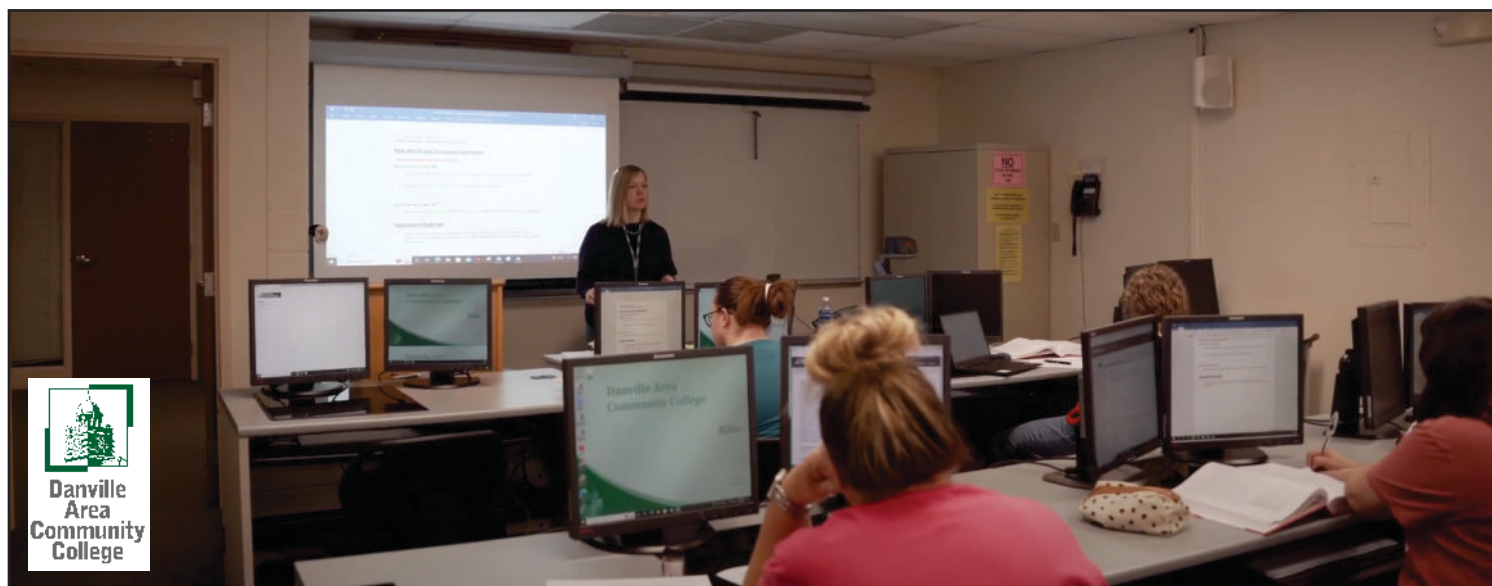
For Johnson, the work is personal. "Having recently been affected by the cancer of a loved one, I am happy to assist cancer researchers in this way," she says. "The research is vital to finding good treatments and even discovering causes of cancer to better inform the public. It is nice to know that you are helping someone affected by cancer."

Contact Kelly Johnson at 217-554-1678 or [k.johnson@dacc.edu](mailto:k.johnson@dacc.edu) to learn more about the program. More information is also available at [dacc.edu/depts/hit/cancer-registry-management](http://dacc.edu/depts/hit/cancer-registry-management).

## Mark your 2024 Calendar

The DACC Cancer Registry program starts in the Fall of each year. Applications are due by the last Friday in June at noon.

*"This is a great opportunity to get involved in a meaningful career that aids in cancer research. If you want to make a positive impact on cancer patients' lives and love data, this is the field for you."* Kelly Johnson



# Catherine Wright, DVM, Returns to Her Vermilion County Roots at East Lake Animal Hospital

A familiar face joined the staff at East Lake Hospital for Animals. Catherine Wright, DVM, is the hospital's new associate veterinarian.

East Lake Hospital for Animals Ltd. is a full-service small animal hospital providing high-quality professional health care for your pets. They have been serving the Danville area since 1966.

Dr. Wright is an associate veterinarian who counsels owners and diagnoses and treats their pets. "I support owners and pets to the best of my ability," she says. "Veterinary medicine isn't just about helping the animals; it's also about helping the owners. I try to ensure the owner is comfortable, and I've passed on my knowledge to them so they may continue caring for their pet."

She started working in kennels throughout high school. She worked at East Lake's reception desk while in undergraduate school and during the summers and would also work when she visited family over the last six years. Dr. Wright returned to Danville and East Lake as a full-time associate veterinarian in June of 2023

After graduating from Oakwood High School, she completed undergraduate studies at Olivet Nazarene University. She went on to spend the last six years in Oklahoma, completing veterinary school and working in a mixed animal practice. Her parents and one brother still reside in Danville.

The career choice was an easy one. "I have a passion for science, medicine and animals," she says. "I was looking for an opportunity to educate and help people and blend my passion for medicine and animals. Veterinary medicine was the perfect fit. Working at veterinary hospitals gave me a broad view of what it is like to be in veterinary medicine. Being part of the veterinary community since 2013, I've seen high and low points. I was able to shadow veterinarians prior to veterinary school and throughout my education. For anyone who thinks they might be interested in veterinary medicine, I recommend they shadow technicians and veterinarians or start as a kennel worker. I gained a lot of exposure by caring for the animals under the guidance of veterinarians and technicians."

When asked what she loves about her work, her ready answer is, "Everything! I love the puppies and kittens, the wild adolescent years, the calmer-more adult years and the golden years. I enjoy learning from my patients and clients. I love challenging cases because I can usually take something I've learned from them and help another pet." While she loves all animals, Dr. Wright especially enjoys working with dogs and cattle."



Her approach is to take each appointment as it comes. "I try not to take 'carry over' from one appointment or case to the next," she says. "I may have to give a life-changing diagnosis in one exam room and go into the next one to celebrate the new puppy or kitten with a different owner."

Dr. Wright hopes the future includes continuing to practice at East Lake Hospital for Animals, Ltd. and providing the best care possible care for patients while supporting their owners.

In her free time, the veterinarian likes outdoor activities like hiking, biking and kayaking. She also enjoys spending time with her family, friends and dog, Tryp.

To learn more about East Lake Hospital for Animals, visit [eastlakehospitalforanimals.com](http://eastlakehospitalforanimals.com) or call 217-446-3010.

# U of I Community Credit Union Offers Free Bank At Work Benefit to Area Employers

We recently caught up with Sheri Shannon, Director of Partnership Programs for the University of Illinois Credit Union (UICCU), to learn about the organization's many offerings. Here's what she had to say.

**You have recently opened locations in Danville. What services/products do you offer Vermilion County residents?** We are a full-service financial institution providing the same products and services as banks but with unmatched service, convenience, and cost. Vermilion County residents who join UICCU will have access to a variety of savings, checking, and loan products to meet their financial needs. We also offer several Visa Credit Card options and are proud to be the official credit card provider of the University of Illinois.

**Tell us a little more about UICCU.** The University of Illinois Community Credit Union (UICCU) has served the community for over 90 years! We currently have three branches in Champaign County, two in McLean County, and two in Vermilion County. UICCU has the #1 rated digital banking app in the area, giving 24/7 access to our members (customers) where they live, work, and play. UICCU members

also have access to over 50,000 surcharge-free ATMs nationwide, making accessing their money for Free easier than ever!

**What is your business Partnership Program?** The UICCU Partnership Program allows employers to help their employees be less stressed about their finances. We know that 78% of Americans live paycheck-to-paycheck, and the stress of meeting their financial needs causes employees to be distracted at work. By offering exclusive products and services, including loan discounts, mortgage credit, on-site visits to answer financial questions and provide financial education, as well as 1:1 financial wellness counseling on-site, online, or in-branch, we bring a valuable benefit to employers. And because UICCU's mission is to Do.More.Good. for our communities and members, this program is offered completely free to employers. Once an employer signs on with us, their employees can take advantage of the free financial wellness offerings regardless of credit union membership.

**What education topics are a part of the program?** The Partnership Program designs educational

opportunities to meet the specific employee group we serve. We can bring educational offerings on-site or via live and recorded webinars. Our topics include but are not limited to Credit Score 101, Defeating Debt, Money Smart, Recognizing and Avoiding Scams, The Psychology of Spending, and how to prepare for the holidays.

**What are the advantages for companies that join the Partnership Program?** Free financial wellness for their employees.

**What makes UICCU unique?** #DoMoreGood is the motivation behind everything we do! It's the actions our team members take every day, the genuine passion we have for doing the right thing, and not being afraid to give second chances. It's consistently showing up for our members, each other, and our community when they need us most. Our earnings belong to our members, and we put them right back to work for them to give them the best deals, from better rates to lower fees.

**How can someone learn more about the Partnership Program?** Contact Sheri Shannon at 217.278.7786 (Office) or 217.621.9373 (cell) or by email at [sheri.shannon@uoficreditunion.org](mailto:sheri.shannon@uoficreditunion.org). More information is also available at [uoficreditunion.org/uiccu-partnership-program/](http://uoficreditunion.org/uiccu-partnership-program/).

*"You can bank with us! We are open to anyone who lives or works in the 11 counties we serve...and we are here for Vermilion County residents and workers. We have been around for 90 years, and we are here to stay!"* Sheri Shannon



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- On-site visits to answer financial questions and to enroll your employees
- Free online and on-site Financial Fitness Seminars available to your employees
- 11 Financial wellness counseling on-site, on-line, or in-branch



**Sheri Shannon**

Director of Partnership Programs  
217-621-9373

[Sheri.Shannon@uoficreditunion.org](mailto:Sheri.Shannon@uoficreditunion.org)



5:00-7:00PM

**October 12, 2023**

**Fischer Theatre**  
158 N. Vermilion, Danville

**October 25, 2023**

**Luella's Lodge**  
7397 E 1500 North Rd, Oakwood

**November 3, 2023**

**Big Thorn Farm & Brewery**  
14274 600 North Rd, Georgetown

Please RSVP to Dana at  
[drowland@vermilionadvantage.com](mailto:drowland@vermilionadvantage.com)



11:30AM-1:00PM

**October 18, 2023**

**Two Roads Wellness**  
3545 N. Vermilion, Danville  
Lunch by Mimi's Kitchen

**November 8, 2023**

**Hall of Fame Plaques & Signs**  
3550 N. Vermilion, Danville

Please RSVP to Dana at  
[drowland@vermilionadvantage.com](mailto:drowland@vermilionadvantage.com)



11:30AM-1:00PM

**October 25, 2023**

**APPI**  
at Palmer Arena

**November 15, 2023**

**Illini Radio Group**  
at DACC with the Jaquar Café catering

Please RSVP to Dana at  
[drowland@vermilionadvantage.com](mailto:drowland@vermilionadvantage.com)

# Celebrating Manufacturing Month with Greenwood Plastics Inc.



There's never been a better time to consider a career in manufacturing. Long a staple of Vermilion County employment, local manufacturing career options abound in companies large and small.

One example is Greenwood Plastics Industries (GPI), a division of Greenwood Inc. The company's Danville location employs about 60 people who provide custom plastic products worldwide.

GPI uses rotational vacuum thermoforming machines to form custom plastic products. "We can form many different sizes, shapes, colors and materials of plastics," explains Ross Darby, Chief Operating Officer. "It all depends on what the customer needs."

The company started as the brainchild of a local legend, Ross' grandfather, Jim

"Big Jim" Darby. "He is an inventor and has a desire to help people, so he wanted to invent products to help serve the needs of others and help them be successful," explains Ross.

GPI started in part to diversify into the plastics industry's limitless possibilities. "We love all of our company's brands and are very loyal to those customers, but we didn't want to be behind in figuring out how to be successful in other industries if the time ever came for that to happen," says Ross.

Like many manufacturers, GPI has been on a rollercoaster in the last five years due to fluid markets and the effects of the pandemic. Providing excellent service is a hallmark of all the Darby family's companies. "That became difficult when we could not get what we needed, or it would take two or

three times longer than usual to get everything we needed to get a job done," says Ross. "We countered the delays by being transparent and flexible with our customers, and it was well received. As the markets have settled down, we have taken the flexibility and transparency tools we learned into each new job."

GPI can take a concept from its inception and create a part. This core competency translates to work in many industries. The company has provided creative solutions for sectors that span agriculture, airline, funeral, aerosol, railroad, aerospace, industrial dunnage and many more. One unique example is the company's production of luggage containers utilized by airlines including Southwest, American and Delta. These containers are used to transport luggage through the terminal. "Southwest is a newer airline for us, and our current

project with them will result in our containers being in all terminals in the United States," adds Ross.

Ross says the whole GPI team brings a high level of dedication to helping customers succeed. "For me, the most rewarding part is the interest our team has people when it comes to a new part. To many people, it is just plastics. To us, it is fulfilling someone's huge need to help them grow a business. Looking at it through that lens helps us stay connected to each job."

GPI is a family-owned and operated business that works hard to provide employees with a dynamic workplace. "We take our role of employing people in this community very seriously," he says. "We pour back into our employees, and our success as a company is a shared success from the teamwork of everyone around us."

He says not many people know GPI is in Vermilion County, a fact they are working hard to change. The team enjoys bringing potential employees into the facility to show them what the

company offers. Visitors see much more than equipment. Guests see the entire operation, spending much of the visit discussing company culture. Ross says this helps people choose the right place, looking at all the factors, not just pay.

### Family Business

The Darby family of companies has evolved into many brands under the corporate name of Greenwood Inc. They own and operate seven funeral homes, Sunset Memorial Park and its pet care division, Cherished Companions. Local manufacturing facilities include Trigard, Trigard Memorials and GPI. The newest addition is Hall of Fame Plaques & Signs, which creates custom trophies, plaques and more.

To learn more about Greenwood Plastics Industries, visit [gpi-plastics.com](http://gpi-plastics.com) or call 217-387-9936.



*"Manufacturing is important across the world, not just in our area. It provides people with an opportunity and all walks of life are welcome."*

*"What I love most about a career in manufacturing is you and your choices are the only limit to where you go and how successful you are. We have entry-level employees empowering themselves - and earning supervisory and director-level positions. The choice is truly theirs!"* Ross Darby

### Fast Manufacturing Facts

\*Manufacturing jobs provide over \$74,000 in average annual wages.

\*Illinois manufacturers directly employ more than 662,000 people on factory floors, earning an average wage of more than \$79,400.

\*92% of manufacturing employees get employer-sponsored health care.

*Source: Illinois Manufacturers Association*



The Darby Family

# Tractor Supply Opens In Hoopeston

Don't let the name fool you. Hoopeston's new Tractor Supply store has something for nearly everyone. "We are more than a tractor store! In fact, we do not sell tractors," says Zachary Hebert, Store Manager. "We appeal to general homeowners and even carry things like gardening tools, clothing, decor, and around 150,000 more items on our website available for delivery right to store or to your home!"

Tractor Supply Co. provides farm supplies, pet and animal feed and supplies, clothing, tools, fencing, and so much more. The company targets an "Out Here Lifestyle" audience while having something in store all year round, especially seasonally, to appeal to any shopper.

The company has about 50,000 employees in total and 2200 locations in 49 states, with a goal to reach 3,000 stores in 50 states in the upcoming years.

*"Vermilion County's greatest strengths are the country style and friendly folk we see in the store! The community is awesome!" Zachary Hebert*

Tractor Supply's choice to locate in Hoopeston factored in several pieces of information, including nearby towns and the need for products that fit the company's "Out There" motto. "And, we had a lot of help from former Hoopeston resident Mary Lawley," says Hebert. "She was born and raised in Hoopeston and is now the Vice President of Store Operations for Tractor Supply Co.!"

In 1938, Charles E. Schmidt Sr. of Chicago, Illinois, established a mail-order tractor parts business from his kitchen table. By 1939, it had grown into a successful Minot, North Dakota retail store. Today, Tractor Supply is the largest operator of rural lifestyle retail stores in the United States and is committed to being the most dependable supplier of basic maintenance products to home, land, pet and animal owners.



"As a company focused on living out our Mission and Values, Tractor Supply is committed to 'work hard, have fun and make money by providing legendary service and great products at everyday low prices,' says Hebert. "This mission statement is supported by ten values – ethics, respect, balance, winning attitude, communication, development, teamwork, change, initiative, and accountability – that drive every business decision and how we interact with our customers and team members. Today, we say the Mission and Values are the 'secret sauce' to our success as they empower our team members and drive Tractor Supply's future."

Hebert says the company has been surprised by how easy the local working relationships have been. "Working with Tractor Supply and Vermilion County has been the smoothest process ever!" he says. "We are happy to be available for our customers here and provide the town a little uplifting shopping center."

To learn more about positions available with Tractor Supply, text "applytsc" to 36323.

For more information about the company, visit [tractorsupply.com](http://tractorsupply.com). Pet owners can visit [tractorsupplyrx.com](http://tractorsupplyrx.com) to have pet prescriptions delivered to your door.

## Welcome New Members

- Adecco
- All Source and Exit 210
- Country Financial - Amanda Galloway
- MASH-C Farms & Livestock
- Spotless Auto Detailing
- Turner Virtual Solutions
- Alexander Concession & Catering
- American Legion Dornblaser Post #203
- Danville Technology Services
- Rustic Charm/RC Boutique
- Thompson's T-Shirts

# Gao Grotto of Danville Delivers Charitable Support and Fun for the Whole Community

We recently talked with Dan Sexton, Monarch of the GAO Grotto, about the local organization, events open to the public, and a partnership with the local AMBUCS.

**First, explain a little more about the Gao Grotto.** The Mystic Order of Veiled Prophets of the Enchanted Realm (MOVPER), whose subordinate bodies are the Grottoes, is an organization by and for Master Masons. While not connected with Masonry, its membership is restricted to Master Masons in good standing. We are an organization for good, wholesome fun but also have a serious side. Our slogan is "Good Fellowship."

**What would surprise people most about Danville's Gao Grotto?** Our lounge, outdoor patio, Friday night dinner/live music/dancing, and events are open to the public. Additionally, the public can rent our dance hall for weddings, retirements, and celebrations.

**Tell us about your charitable work.** Through Grottoes International, we support the Cerebral Palsy Child, a charitable trust. Funds are given annually to the United Cerebral Palsy Research and Educational Foundation. Our great humanitarian project is Dental Care for Children with Special Needs.

**How long has the organization been in Vermilion County, and how many members do you have?** The GAO Grotto was established in 1925. We have over 200 members and are growing.

**How has the club changed in the last few years?** We have upgraded our Marina, expanded our campgrounds, added gambling machines in our lounge, expanded our hall rental, and our renovated restrooms will be completed soon.

**Tell us about the recent partnership with AMBUCS.** Since 1963, the GAO

Grotto and AMBUCS have partnered in giving to kids who need help.

We are honored to open our facility to AMBUCS to support their summer camp. We take great pride in offering kids boat rides, an outdoor playground, an ice cream social, and use of our kitchen and indoor hall. Additionally, AMBUCS's contributions towards our new handicap-accessible restrooms are much appreciated.

**Tell us about your dining options.** We offer a Friday night dinner (burgers, fries, onion rings, coleslaw, beans, and chicken tenders), fried fish during Lent, the first Friday of the month steak night (May - October), and occasional Friday night dinner specials.

*"It's my honor to be part of a group of men that bring a quality of sympathy and good fellowship into life not only to member Prophets but to everybody."* Dan Sexton

**What activities do you offer members?** Boating, camping, dancing, Fourth of July fireworks, kids holiday celebration for Christmas and Easter, and holiday dinner dances. We also host

a spring professional boat race weekend, 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks, an annual members garage sale, and our Christmas and New Year parties.

**What events are coming soon?** The October Master Mason night (masons only), weekly Friday dinner dance (county line dancing and 50\60's music), Christmas and New Year's Eve Party (open to the public with tickets available for purchase starting in November).

**What are the advantages of being a member of the Gao Grotto?** The opportunity to meet with your fellow Prophets - many of whom are professional, business, and civic leaders - and to make lasting friendships in a peaceful, welcoming setting. We enjoy a real sense of brotherhood and community not found in many organizations. We all volunteer our time and work hard to keep it going strong. Also, we have a stunning view of Lake Vermilion, where we sit out on our patio and enjoy great conversation.

To learn more, search "Gao Grotto" on Facebook.



# Birth to Five Illinois: A Focus On Early Childhood Education and Care

Hearing local families' and caregivers' stories has been the best part of Tammy Pollitt's work with the new Birth to Five Illinois system. "We have heard stories about how hard it was (or has been) for people to get their children into a child care program," she says. "One parent shared she had to quit her job due to the lack of child care facilities accepting infants."

Birth to Five Illinois works in every Illinois community to determine why families are not able to access Early Childhood Education and Care services and tell decisionmakers which services local families say they need to thrive. The organization ensures all communities have a platform for local families, Early Childhood experts, and community members to say what is best for their children's futures and full and equitable access to the services families and Early Childhood educators say are needed.

"Our mission is to create a statewide, regional infrastructure that will amplify community input in developing policies and funding priorities," says Pollitt, Region 54 Council Manager, Birth to Five Illinois. "We support the mobilization of communities to build and sustain equitable access to inclusive, high-quality early childhood services for all Illinois children and families."

The Region 54 office supports all of Vermilion County. Each Birth to Five Illinois Region aligns with the Regional Office of Education.

Birth to Five Illinois is a department of the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). 128 staff work in 40 offices across the State. The Birth to Five Illinois Region 54 office is staffed

by a Regional Council Manager, Family & Community Engagement Specialist, and Administrative Support.

Pollitt is exceptionally proud of the organization's Action Council and Family Council, who met regularly over the past year to help complete the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment. The assessment features key findings, regional strengths, family- and community-identified needs, and recommendations for making this Region's Early Childhood Education and Care programs more accessible and equitable. The findings are available at [birthtofiveil.com/region54/#report](http://birthtofiveil.com/region54/#report).

Some of the data in the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment for Region 54 (Vermilion County) is surprising. "We have 5,622 children under the age of six and only have enough early childhood spots for

23% of that population," says Pollitt. "Region 54 also has 1,647 children under five without publicly funded Early Childhood Education and Care slots. We also found that 86% of children and families are eligible for Child Care Assistance Programs (CCAP) to help with the cost of child care but are not receiving assistance. This data begs the question, 'What are these families doing for child care?'"

Amplifying local voices and mapping the next steps will be much of next year's work. "We will gather community input and create an Action Plan to begin addressing the needs and recommendations identified in each Region," says Pollitt. "Please contact me if you want to get involved!"

To learn more about Birth to Five Illinois, visit [birthtofiveil.com/region54](http://birthtofiveil.com/region54). Tammy



# New C.O.R.E. Re-Entry Inc. Helping with Community and Employment Re-entry

Michael Brawn's belief in his new organization's mission is personal. The Founder/ Executive Director of C.O.R.E. (Community, Opportunities, Resources and Employment) Re-Entry Inc. knows how hard it can be to reenter the community.

C.O.R.E. is a community-based re-entry program in Danville that serves justice-involved individuals in Vermilion County. Currently, the organization has two employees – Brawn and C.O.R.E.'s Head Coach, Martice Hanible - both of whom were formerly incarcerated.

The overall goal for C.O.R.E. is to create a nexus of support services for anyone in Vermilion County who has been impacted by the criminal justice system. This includes connecting people to other community-based organizations and offering a peer coach to help them through the process.

The organization has big plans for the future. “Currently, we are working along with Vermilion Advantage to sponsor a town hall-style forum to discuss what it looks like to develop a re-entry model that includes local businesses, continuing education opportunities and other community-based organizations who work with this population,” says Brawn. “We want to create a model that takes a holistic approach to help individuals and their families who continue to suffer from the negative consequences of being justice-involved, sometimes years after their time has been served.”

Brawn knows his organization's work can benefit businesses and individuals. "Recently, I was called by a gentleman who



C.O.R.E. Head Coach Martice Williams at the Violence Prevention Task Force Wash Away Violence Event (W.A.V.E.) July 29th, 2023

served 12 years in prison, has been home for five months and got a job at one of the local manufacturing companies,” he says. “The H.R. person at the company referred the gentleman to C.O.R.E. so he had people he could talk to about this transition home, people with the same life experience. That one example really speaks to what we are trying to create.”

The local leader is not originally from Danville or Vermilion County, but he recognized “this is a community that already has a robust helping network. The community did not have a specific organization that focused on justice-involved individuals. That is what led me to develop C.O.R.E. here and what led to a meeting with Nicole Van Hyfte and Tim Dudley of Vermilion Advantage while I was still incarcerated at the Danville Correctional Center. This program would not have happened if not for their belief in this vision and the help of Dale DeNeal from Second Church, now the President of the C.O.R.E. board. Through them, I have developed great relationships with other groups and organizations in the community.”

C.O.R.E. is currently working with clients, and we will soon start to offer workshops that focus on specific areas that clients have indicated are essential to their continued success and overall wellness.

To learn more about C.O.R.E. Re-Entry, visit the organization's website at [corereentry.org](http://corereentry.org). Or they can be reached by email at [michaelbrawn@corereentry.org](mailto:michaelbrawn@corereentry.org) or [marticehanible@corereentry.org](mailto:marticehanible@corereentry.org).



l-r: Orlando Mayorga from the Office of the Lt. Governor's JEO Initiative, McCormick Re-entry Policy Coordinator Michael Brawn – Founder / Executive Director Dale DeNeal – Board President C.O.R.E. Re-Entry Inc Ricky Williams Sr.- Board Member C.O.R.E Re-Entry Inc

# ALL A's ACCOLADES, ACCOMPLISHMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS

**Don and Deanna Witzel,  
Owner/Operators of the Witzel  
Family McDonald's have  
announced Employees, Students  
and Athletes of the Month**



### September Employee of the Month:

Hometown Stars McDonald's.....Alicia Angus  
 Classic Rock-n-Roll.....William Powell  
 Oakwood.....Bryson McDaniel  
 Georgetown.....Kiley Knight  
 Hoopeston.....Christian Kirts  
 Neighborhood McDonald's.....Mandy Caraballo  
 Covington, IN.....Kelly Yang

### September Student/Athlete of the Month:

DHS Student of the Month.....Anna Gonzalez  
 DHS Athlete of the Month.....Cale Osborn  
 Schlarman Academy North Student of the Month.....Anna Lehmann  
 Schlarman Academy North Athlete of the Month.....Owen Jones  
 OHS Student of the Month.....Brody Taflinger  
 OHS Athlete of the Month.....Nikita Taylor  
 GRFHS Student of the Month.....Kaylee Peterson  
 GRFHS Athlete of the Month.....Simonas Ankstutis  
 HAH School Student of the Month.....Emmalee Bruens  
 HAH School Athlete of the Month.....Felix Cantu  
 Covington HS Student of the Month.....Nickt Shah  
 Covington HS Athlete of the Month.....Levin Marcinko

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