

INSIDE

VERMILION COUNTY



Celebrating Vermilion County Graduates: A Bright Future Ahead!

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Balloons Over
Vermilion
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INSIDE

VERMILION COUNTY

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On the Cover:

As graduation season approaches, Vermilion County is preparing to celebrate our high school seniors' hard work and achievements.

Congratulations to the Class of 2025!

(Photo by Rossi Studios Photography)



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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.

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.

From the CEO/President

When I talk about what needs to change for this community to move forward, one of the most important is our collective ability to work together. As long as I have been involved in this community, I've heard people say, "We have to break down the silos," but a decade and a half into my experience, the silos are still here and as strong as ever. Far too often, our "leaders," when confronted with decisions, planning, or strategy, have been too willing to say, regardless of who might be available and willing to help, "I've got this, and if I need your help, I'll ask." The next step invariably is that no request for assistance comes forth, and a poor decision is made without full input from the stakeholders in the community that the decision will impact. Our community is left to deal with the fallout from those shoddy decisions and lack of planning.

Maybe it is my all too readily awareness of my limitations that has caused me never to be scared to ask for help. I know there are a great many things that my knowledge of is limited. I guess I always figured it was better to admit I didn't know anything about a critical issue I was dealing with and ask for the best help I could get to figure it out. That course of action seemed more sensible than pretending I was an expert, only to fail miserably. In my opinion, being willing to bring others in who know more

about a subject than I do is a sign of strength, not weakness.

When I was in Springfield, we had to make quick decisions on legislation that covered hundreds of topics. Our newest staff member, Mike Levin, said it best when he exclaimed that elected officials are generalists. They know a little about a lot of topics. I was certainly in that category. If the bill's subject was agriculture, a business I was raised in and have been involved in my whole life, I was probably ok to know what the bill's impact would be. If the legislation was about how changing Medicaid rates would impact healthcare facilities or how a change in tip law might affect a restaurant owner, I was going to need some help. I never had a problem calling a constituent who was a subject matter expert and asking for their help. That is what I thought the best legislators did; after all, it would be impossible for the smartest human on the planet to be an expert on every subject matter that came up. Unfortunately, not all legislators were good, and many made ill-informed decisions. That is how bad public policy is made.

We will never truly progress until we learn to come to the table. Only then will we be able to fix the things we need to fix, for example, cleaning up all the blight in the County, improving the business climate, and incentivizing



investment. Until we can all agree that is where we need to go and start working together to achieve those things, we will be mired in the past. Vermilion Advantage is excited about its EDA-funded redevelopment study of East Voorhees St., but whatever the study comes up with, it won't be successful without support and implementation from the City. Without input from the business community, decision-makers will not be able to create an environment that retains our existing businesses and attracts new, large-scale employers. Whether we like it or not, we are in this together and together is the only way we move forward to a better tomorrow.

Mike Marron
CEO/President
Vermilion Advantage



Check out the news, flyers, and events our members have to share for June on our website! Just scan the QR code!



If you'd like your flyer posted to our website, please email it to drowland@vermillionadvantage.com by the 25th of the month.

Meet Workforce Education Director Jodie Ingram

Jodie Ingram has always had a heart for community, and now she's using it to shape the future workforce of Vermilion County. Recently named the Vermilion County Workforce Education Director, Ingram brings a deep well of experience, passion, and a touch of fun to the role.

"My experience as the Community Development Coordinator has helped prepare me for the Workforce Education Director," says Ingram. "During my time in community development, I have been a part of the Workforce Education Committee, attended multiple workforce trainings, and helped coordinate Career Expos, Manufacturing Month Tours, and Tour of Industries." The position was created by and is paid for by a partnership between Vermilion Advantage, Danville Area Community College (DACC), and the Vermilion Vocational Education Delivery System (VVEDS).

What attracted her to this new role? The answer is both personal and purposeful. "As a parent, I see the value of giving students early exposure to real-world careers - it's something I'm already focused on with my daughters," she says. "This role lets me do that while also strengthening the connections between schools, businesses, and community leaders."

Ingram coordinates career pathway programs for students in grades 6–12—everything from job shadowing and industry tours to internships and hands-on learning experiences. Her goal is to connect students with meaningful career opportunities and support local businesses in building a skilled talent pipeline.

She knows the path ahead isn't without challenges. Helping students see the relevance of classroom learning in real-

world jobs is key. Still, she's confident that strong partnerships with DACC, VVEDS, and local employers will turn that challenge into an opportunity.

Her short-term goals are all about building trust and relationships. Long-term? "I want to see more students graduating with pathway endorsements, staying in or returning to Vermilion County, and stepping into careers they love," she says.

At home, Ingram is supported by her husband, Rich and their daughters, Jazlin and Jaycelin. And yes, workforce education is a dinner-table topic: "Let's just say my daughters and their friends have been warned there may be spontaneous interviews, pop-up brainstorming sessions, and many 'Hey, what do you think of this?' moments."

For more information about Vermilion Advantage's Workforce Education program, visit www.vermilionadvantage.com or email Jodie Ingram at jingram@vermilionadvantage.com.





Balloons Over Vermilion Returns for a Spectacular Summer Celebration

Excitement is building as the area's favorite Balloons Over Vermilion festival returns to the Vermilion Regional Airport on July 11-12, 2025. This beloved hot air balloon festival promises two days filled with breathtaking sights, family-friendly fun, and community spirit.

Gates open at 3:00 PM each day, inviting guests to experience the wonder of hot air balloons filling the sky. As the sun sets, the festival's signature nightly balloon glow will illuminate the evening, offering an unforgettable display of color and light. In addition to the awe-inspiring balloon flights and glows, attendees can enjoy tethered balloon rides, a kids' zone packed with activities, a diverse range of delicious food vendors, live music, and a fun beer tent. Admission is \$5 per person for anyone over ten years old, while children ten and under can attend for free. Parking costs \$5 per vehicle, with admission and parking fees collected at the gate.

Carly Wilson and Jackie Vinson co-chair the event. The Julius W. Hegeler II Foundation is the Title Sponsor.

Balloons Over Vermilion has become a cherished community tradition, drawing visitors from across the Midwest. "We are always amazed at

the outpouring of support we receive each year for Balloons Over Vermilion and Festival of Trees," said Pat O'Shaughnessy, Balloons Over Vermilion NFP Board Chair. "Every year, supporters from Vermilion County, along with guests from throughout the Midwest, turn out for these wonderful family events, and we sincerely appreciate that support. Everyone who buys a ticket, enjoys a snow cone or a beer, strolls through the decorated trees, visits the Festival raffle house, or brings their family out to witness the splendor of a balloon launch and glow, all become members of our Balloons Over Vermilion family."

Community Impact

The impact of Balloons Over Vermilion extends beyond the festival grounds. As a nonprofit organization, Balloons Over Vermilion NFP channels event proceeds into meaningful contributions to the community. In 2024, the organization celebrated its eighth year of presenting this summer

spectacle while also marking the fourth year of hosting the Festival of Trees, Vermilion County's annual holiday kickoff event. These community-centered efforts were recognized at the 2024 Community Impact Award celebration, where 23 organizations were awarded a combined total of \$151,000. Since its inception, Balloons Over Vermilion has contributed an impressive \$685,000 to local initiatives.

These events are only possible thanks to the dedicated contributions of the steering committee members, volunteers, and generous sponsors. The festival is a testament to Vermilion County's long-standing love for hot-air ballooning, which began in the 1980s and continues to grow today.

For more details, including a full event schedule, pilot and balloon information, and volunteer opportunities, visit www.balloonsoververmilion.com. As always, balloon-related activities are weather-dependent, so guests are encouraged to check for updates leading up to the event.

Mark your calendars, gather your family and friends, and prepare for an unforgettable experience at Balloons Over Vermilion 2025!



Bismarck-Henning CUSD: A Proud Tradition with Eyes on the Future



If you ask Superintendent Scott Watson what makes Bismarck-Henning Community Unit School District special, his answer is simple: "I believe the district's commitment to an excellent education makes us proud of what we do and where we live." And that pride runs deep - for over two decades, Watson has served in various roles across the district and surrounding schools. Since becoming superintendent in 2010, he's helped lead BH through both challenges and growth with a steady hand and a clear vision.

Initially formed in 1964 when the communities of Bismarck and Henning consolidated their school districts, BH has grown into a thriving district with three schools: BHES (267 students), BHJH (246 students), and BHRA (Bismarck Henning Rossville Alvin) (247 BH students), supported by approximately 60 certified staff.

Watson's steady hand, along with a well-respected teaching and support staff, and a committed school board all play a role in the district's success.

"I think we've just rolled with the punches like everyone else," he says.

"State mandates dictate a lot of what we do, along with direction from the school board." That can-do attitude has guided the district through shifting enrollment trends, funding challenges, and the significant changes ushered in by the COVID-19 pandemic, including a complete transition to 1:1 technology for students.

In addition to its academic focus, BH places a strong emphasis on career readiness. Through partnerships with Vermilion Advantage and Danville Area Community College, students are exposed to local career paths early. "We want to give all kids opportunities to be successful regardless of where they go," says Watson.

Physical growth has also played a part in BH's evolution, from expansions to the elementary and junior high in the early 2000s to the recent completion of a new junior high/high school sports complex (2021-2023), giving



students more space to grow, learn, and compete.

What defines BH best is its culture of connection. "There are so many people who have positively impacted our lives here," Watson says. "For me, it's my relationship with our Board President, Dave Clapp, and my high school principal, Brent Rademacher."

Bismarck-Henning CUSD #1 is shaping the future, one student at a time.

Coffee Talk

June 10:
Danville Public Library
319 N Vermilion, Danville

July 8:
Better Days Restuarant



New Member Snapshot - Champaign County Regional Planning Commission



Early Childhood Division Director:
Brandi Granse

Organization information: The Champaign County Regional Planning Commission provides programming in regional, environmental, and transportation planning, economic, community, and workforce development, social services, early childhood education, and technical assistance in East Central Illinois. RPC administers over 140 federal and state grants and contracts in 13 locations, serving over 30,000 clients annually.

The RPC Early Childhood Education Program receives federal grant funding to serve 811 pregnant women, infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families in Champaign, Ford, Iroquois, and Vermilion Counties. Head Start promotes school readiness to income-eligible families and offers comprehensive services such as dental, health, nutrition, social-emotional support, and disability service coordination. We partner with parents to assist children in developing the knowledge and skills necessary for school success and lifelong well-being.

How does RPC impact the Vermilion County area?

RPC is rejuvenating Head Start services in Vermilion County and offering full-day, full-year early childhood education services to families and their children. RPC serves pregnant women, infants,

toddlers, and preschoolers and provides comprehensive services that include dental, disability service coordination, education, family support and resources, health, nutrition, and social-emotional support.

RPC has an intergovernmental agreement with the Vermilion County Board to provide Head Start services and connects with community businesses to coordinate services for enrolled children and families.

Key Initiatives: The RPC has spent 50 years cultivating partnerships and alliances with stakeholders ranging from the federal government to local boards, councils, and committees. The Commission collaborates with stakeholders to address community issues, create and advance comprehensive plans and strategies, and provide quality services to our region's citizens.

Future Plans: We will continue to seek new opportunities to expand and impact our community beyond the current measures of success. Our work may take shape in new and exciting ways, beyond what has been the norm in terms of our service area and programming approach. The Regional Planning Commission recently rebranded itself to represent what the next 50 years of services will bring. Our new tagline provides the context for our daily efforts: PEOPLE.POSSIBILITIES.

Exciting Aspects: It is exciting to see children learning and developing new skills. Our educational staff helps prepare children for kindergarten and

instills a love for learning. RPC also connects families to community resources such as Homeless Prevention and Workforce Development. Seeing a family walk into their new home is fulfilling!

Collaboration in Vermilion County: I see many opportunities to partner and collaborate within Vermilion County, and RPC already has partnerships in place with Danville Area Community College, Danville School District #118, and others.

How to Engage: Parents and community representatives can participate on the Policy Council, a group of Head Start parents and community members who help lead and make decisions about our program. Families and community representatives can also volunteer their time to help with activities and bring different skills, enrich the learning environment, and foster support by building connections between the program and the community.

Learn More:

Website - www.ccrpc.org

Facebook -

www.facebook.com/ChampaignCountyRPC

Instagram -

www.instagram.com/champaigncountyrpc/

Phone: (217) 328-3313

Email: info@ccrpc.org



Kruger's ATA Martial Arts Celebrating 30 Years of Impact

This year marks a remarkable 30-year legacy for the martial arts school now known as Kruger's ATA Martial Arts, an organization whose name is linked with discipline, growth, and community. What began in 1995 on the second floor of The Roselawn Fitness Center as Dolan's ATA Black Belt Academy has transformed into a full-fledged Martial Arts Academy under the dedicated leadership of Jen and John Kruger, both Certified Instructors and high-ranking Black Belts (3rd and 5th Degree, respectively).

The journey has not been without its challenges or changes. The Krugers purchased the school in 2008, renamed it to reflect their growing offerings, and relocated it to its current home at 440 N. Walnut Street, formerly the Barrick Funeral Home. "We went from 1,500-2,000 square feet total in our other locations to over 8,000 square feet in our current facility," says Jen. From serving 40 students and evening-only classes, the school now serves nearly 200 students with full weekday hours, an after-school program, and an expansive Summer Camp.

Behind the scenes, what has made the difference is a relentless dedication to students of all abilities. "Success is what you make it, and we believe every child who comes through our program writes their own personal success story. That's why we say we are *Changing Lives, One Black Belt At A Time*," says Jen. The school's commitment to inclusive instruction by embracing students with ADHD, Down Syndrome, and other special abilities has earned the





Kruger's ATA Martial Arts

30TH ANNIVERSARY OPEN HOUSE

Join us to celebrate 30 YEARS of providing quality Martial Arts Instruction, Self Defense, and a Safe Environment for our youth in the Danville community!

SATURDAY, JUNE 14TH, 10AM-1PM

- ✔ FREE food, drinks & snacks
- ✔ FREE bounce house for the kids
- ✔ FREE seminars, demos & classes
- ✔ Meet & Greet with the owners, past owners & special guests.

organization a reputation as more than just a martial arts facility. It's a family.

The stories of success are inspiring. Jen tells the story of a now adult 3rd Degree Black Belt who fought his parents to attend classes when he was only nine. "He had a reverse walker and Mitochondrial Disease, and his parents told him he couldn't do Taekwondo," she remembers. "He showed them! He became a World Champion and an instructor. We also had a child with muscular and balance issues that therapy had given up on. With patience and repetition in class, my husband had him standing on one leg, doing jump switch kicks. His mom was in tears as she watched.

"There are the children who had no friends because they have Down Syndrome, but in our place, they have best friends, childhood crushes, and are treated like just another kid. Or the ones that are defiant in school and at home, but with goal setting, a few physical workouts, and accountability by everyone, they turn themselves around."

To celebrate this anniversary, Kruger's ATA is hosting an Open House and ATA Reunion on Saturday, June 14th from 10 am - 1 pm, complete with food from Dogg Pound BBQ, games, free classes, and even a judo seminar by a former student turned police officer. Past owners, Grand Master instructors, and hundreds of alums have been invited.

Their success is not just built on kicks and forms—it's grounded in community. "Without the support of our community, we wouldn't have made it this far," Jen says. And after three decades, that community continues to grow, one student, one family, and one Black Belt at a time.

To learn more, visit www.krugerata.com. Follow them on Facebook @Kruger's ATA Martial Arts-Danville or call 217-442-2ATA (2282).



Celebrating Vermilion County Graduates: A Bright Future Ahead!

As graduation season approaches, Vermilion County is preparing to celebrate our high school seniors' hard work and achievements. This year, local public schools anticipate 629 graduates, with an additional 27 from parochial schools. The numbers represent something important - a bright, dedicated group of local students ready to take their next steps.

"Our schools are full of exceptional students who are not only excelling academically but also making a difference in their communities," says Aaron Hird, Vermilion County Regional Superintendent of Schools. Hird, who has held his position since July 2020, is passionate about the programs and opportunities shaping the future of these students.

Exciting Initiatives Across the County

Vermilion County schools continue to introduce innovative programs to equip students with valuable skills. Here are a few examples. Armstrong High School's "Prairieland CEO" program allows

students to explore entrepreneurship and learn to run their own businesses. Danville High School has transformed its learning spaces with state-of-the-art science and art classrooms, including a media center that rivals professional television studios. Meanwhile, Hoopeston Area High School's business class teaches students apparel design and screen printing, providing hands-on business experience.

At Salt Fork High School, students in the FFA program have earned a 3-star national chapter ranking, placing them among the top 1% of FFA chapters nationwide. Westville students are broadening their horizons with the "Traveling Tigers" program, preparing for trips to Washington, D.C., Paris, and London. Oakwood Grade School implemented the Ron Clark House system, which promotes a strong sense of community and belonging among students. Bismarck-Henning Rossville-Alvin High School has a mentorship program where some students have weekly check-in sessions with

Bismarck-Henning Junior High students needing peer support. They focus on academics, organization, social skills, self-esteem, and confidence.

Supporting Students and Teachers

The Regional Office of Education (ROE) plays a crucial role in supporting students and teachers through professional development initiatives. The ROE's teacher coaching model has been highly effective in improving instruction in subjects like math, language arts, and ESL support. Additionally, a recent grant has allowed the office to expand its efforts in addressing truancy, hiring two new staff members to support students and families.

Community engagement remains a cornerstone of Vermilion County schools. Danville Area Community College (DACC) works closely with local high schools to provide dual enrollment opportunities. The Step Program partners with job coaches to prepare students with IEPs and 504

plans for the workforce, offering job training and placement.

Preparing for the Future

Schools across the county are ensuring students graduate with skills for the workforce, college, and technical careers. Many schools have upgraded their shop classes to include woodworking, welding, and small engine repair. Others have launched media and technology courses, giving students real-world experience in digital marketing and content creation. Through DACC's College Express program, students can earn certifications in fields like nursing, criminal justice, and culinary arts.

Hird has also witnessed significant facility improvements in local schools, from updated auditoriums to modernized classrooms and enhanced athletic fields. "Schools have been very intentional in designing learning spaces

that best meet students' academic needs," he says.

A Community Effort

The success of Vermilion County schools is made possible through strong community partnerships. Local businesses support schools with sponsorships and mentorship programs, while organizations like Vermilion Advantage and VVEDS host career expos to connect students with future employers. Public libraries collaborate with schools to promote literacy, and churches provide programs like backpack food assistance and after-school support.

Hird says one of the most heartwarming community initiatives is the annual shoe and coat drive, led by the Regional Office. "The generosity of individuals and businesses in Vermilion County ensures that students in need have essential items, from shoes to hygiene products."

Looking Ahead

Vermilion County schools continue to flourish, thanks to the dedication of educators and community members, despite challenges like the ongoing teacher shortage. Retired teachers have stepped up to fill gaps, and school districts are working together to share resources and staff.

"What I appreciate most about our education system is the collaboration among our districts," says Hird. "We work together, share services, and truly support each other in ways that are not typical across the state."

The future looks bright as Vermilion County prepares to send off our graduating seniors.

Congratulations to the Class of 2025!



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Recap: Her Legacy, Your Future Luncheon Honors Vicki Haugen

On May 1, Vermilion Advantage proudly hosted the *Her Legacy, Your Future* luncheon at Salt Grass in honor of Vicki Haugen and her remarkable contributions to our community. Over 60 attendees gathered to celebrate Vicki's trailblazing career, her leadership, and the path she's paved for future generations of women in business.

The event featured heartfelt and inspiring remarks from three dynamic speakers: Terri White, Diana Stewart, and Rheanna Ollis. Each shared personal reflections and stories that highlighted the impact Vicki has had not only on economic development in Vermilion County but also on their own journeys as female professionals.



Themes of resilience, mentorship, and the importance of work-life balance resonated throughout the event, offering encouragement and motivation to all who attended.



As we honored Vicki's legacy, the luncheon served as a powerful reminder that her influence will continue shaping the future of women in leadership for years to come.

Member of the Month – May 2025

Congratulations to Lakeview College of Nursing, our Member of the Month!

We're proud to recognize Lakeview College of Nursing for their long-standing commitment to excellence in nursing education and their positive impact on our community.

Lakeview offers a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree that leads to RN licensure. Nursing education has been their entire focus since 1894! Learn more about Lakeview College of Nursing at www.lcn.edu or call 217-655-6816.

Thank you for all you do to shape the future of healthcare in Vermilion County and beyond!

The Member of the Month Program is a fantastic opportunity to spotlight and celebrate the outstanding businesses and individuals that contribute to Vermilion County.

How to Qualify: Businesses and individuals are automatically entered in the drawing when they participate in any of the following:

- Attend networking events
- Attend board meetings (for current board members)
- Partner through initiatives such as catering an event, joining the Career Expo, posting on the Jobs Board, and more

For more information about the Member of the Month Program, contact Dana at Vermilion Advantage at (217) 442-6201 or drowland@VermilionAdvantage.com.

Perks of Being Member of the Month:

- **Week 1:** Announcement of the winner and a social media spotlight featuring the official Member of the Month sign.
- **Week 2:** A dedicated feature in Member Announcements and on the Vermilion Advantage website.
- **Week 3:** A featured radio interview with WITY.
- **Week 4:** A creative consultation with Tyler Burress of BRBH Media.
- An event pass for one of Vermilion Advantage's networking events-on us!

Someone to Know: Kimberly David

Kimberly David never expected to spend 25 years at Project Success when she first applied for an administrative assistant position fresh out of college. "I wasn't sure what Project Success was or what grants were," she says. "I knew that I needed a job that would make a difference in people's lives in order to enjoy my job, so I thought this may be a good start." That leap of faith turned into a career filled with impact, leadership, and unwavering commitment to the students of Vermilion County.

Now serving as the CEO of Project Success, David oversees financial and programmatic operations, staff development, grant writing, and community relationships. Under her leadership, the organization touches the lives of 1,500 to 1,700 students annually, providing afterschool programs that support academic success, personal development, and community engagement.

One of the moments that stands out in her career involves a student who

started the program withdrawn and silent, always keeping her hood up in class. Encouraged to join the afterschool program, she slowly began to trust staff and peers, eventually participating in activities, speaking up in school, and even attending the program's post-prom event—an unthinkable step for her at the beginning of the year. "All students have potential, and we just have to be patient enough to tap into it," David says. "This is one of the great things about our afterschool programs."

David's deep connection to Vermilion County stems from her roots. Raised in Potomac, she chose to build her career in the area she calls home despite a daily 40-minute commute from Edgar County. "My commute seems minimal compared to the reward of my work in this community," she says. Her dedication is evident in initiatives like the Christmas Wish List program, which provides warm clothing, hygiene essentials, and gifts for children not served by other holiday programs. Last year alone, it helped



219 children, thanks to a network of donors, businesses, and volunteers.

Her leadership has steered Project Success toward growth through challenges like funding cuts, including expanded mental health services and reopened programs. Her guiding philosophy? Advice from Program Director Abby Boen: "If we think positively and work hard, everything will work out." And, as David's journey proves, it certainly has.

HR & Safety Council

11:30AM-1:00PM

July 9, 2025
Legislative Round Table
 Danville Country Club
 2718 Denmark Rd, Danville

Please RSVP to Dana at drowland@vermilionadvantage.com

Professional Development Group

11:30AM-1:00PM

June 18, 2025
Social Media Content
 Alicia Moody & Casey Toler
 Vermilion Advantage, 2 E Main, Suite #120

July 16, 2025
Mike Marron
 Vermilion Advantage, 2 E Main, Suite #120

Please RSVP to Dana at drowland@vermilionadvantage.com

BUSINESS & NETWORKING LUNCHEON

11:30AM-1:00PM

June 25, 2025
State Farm
 Ross Webb at Palmer Arena

July 23, 2025
Two Roads Wellness
 at Palmer Arena

Please RSVP to Dana at drowland@vermilionadvantage.com

thyssenkrupp Crankshaft Forging Futures in Manufacturing

After a five-year pause, thyssenkrupp Crankshaft Machining in Danville has proudly relaunched its Youth Apprenticeship Program, opening doors for high school students to gain real-world experience in advanced manufacturing.

The Danville facility, which has been part of the community since 1992 and currently employs around 250 people, specializes in machining large diesel crankshafts—many of which power over-the-road semi-trucks across the country.

Apprenticeship Opportunity

Initially launched in 2014, the apprenticeship program grew quickly

from five juniors to 20 students participating annually. While COVID-related challenges led to its suspension in 2019, conversations among local educators and industry leaders never stopped. "We are proud to say those efforts, along with a commitment to the program from our leadership... the program started again in January 2025 with three seniors," says Bradley (Brad) Kent, Technical Training Manager for thyssenkrupp Crankshaft Machining.

The program, a two-year partnership with Danville Area Community College (DACC) and VVEDS College Express, offers students paid part-time positions, hands-on mentoring, and up to 14 college credit hours and 10 industry certifications. Students rotate

through departments like production, quality, maintenance, and engineering—all while earning \$15/hour and gaining valuable insight into modern manufacturing.

Benefits

"This program benefits students who already show interest in being machinists... an opportunity to see machining in action with a worldwide leader in this field," says Kent. The curriculum aligns DACC classroom learning with real work at thyssenkrupp, giving students a well-rounded introduction to the industry.

Beyond providing students with essential skills and career opportunities, the program plays a critical role in strengthening the local workforce. About 30% of past participants have been hired full-time, with some advancing to leadership roles or pursuing college degrees through company tuition reimbursement.

thyssenkrupp plans to expand the program with five incoming juniors in August 2025—and to continue building a steady pipeline of skilled, work-ready talent in Vermilion County.

More Information

Interested students and parents can contact their high school counselor, Brad Kent at brad.kent@thyssenkrupp.com or Todd Flessner at t.flessner@dacc.edu for more information.

The future of manufacturing in Danville looks bright, thanks to employers like thyssenkrupp and education partners like DACC and the area school districts!



Photo caption: l-r
Gavyn Miller, Hoopeston; Jeffrey Dines, Salt Fork; Ethan Hall, Bismarck

Spotlight Performing Arts Co. Expands Into New Home in Danville

Danville's Spotlight Performing Arts Co. is stepping into the spotlight in more ways than one this year, celebrating a significant milestone with the opening of its brand-new location in the former Laurel School of Dance building. The nonprofit children's theatre company, led by Executive Director Bailey Thompson, has quickly become a beloved fixture in the community for its mission to help kids "build confidence, creativity, and community through the performing arts."

Thompson and her husband founded the company from a vision rooted in local needs and personal passion. "Growing up here, I saw a real need for creative outlets and high-quality performance opportunities for kids," she says. "My husband and I wanted to build something meaningful and accessible that could bring families together and give children a place to grow."

That dream has taken a bold new form in a space perfectly suited to creativity. With ample natural light, mirrored studios, and flexible rooms for rehearsal and performance, the new location marks a significant upgrade from the company's previous, borrowed spaces. "We needed a home—a place where we could build consistency, expand our offerings, and give kids a space that truly felt like theirs," Thompson says.

Now, with more room and resources, Spotlight is expanding its programming to include not only its popular Spotlight



Singers and youth musicals but also new offerings like seasonal theatre camps, acting workshops, and a toddler program. A music class for homeschool families is also in the works, along with the much-anticipated Summer Theatre Camp launching this June.

The community has already shown overwhelming enthusiasm for the growth. "From sold-out shows to supportive local businesses and families reaching out to volunteer or enroll, we've felt a real sense of momentum," Thompson says. "People are excited, and so are we."

Next up: a magical production of *Disney's Dare to Dream Jr.* on July 5th and 6th at the historic Fischer Theatre, featuring a talented cast of local youth. Auditions begin in May, with tickets available in June.

For those looking to get involved - whether through classes, volunteering, or sponsorship opportunities - visit www.spotlightperformingarts.org or follow Spotlight Performing Arts on Facebook.

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