

INSIDE VERMILION COUNTY

2025 REVIEW

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progress and
partnerships

Vermilion Advantage

February
2026
1st quarter edition



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INSIDE

VERMILION COUNTY

Tracy Wahlfeldt
Interim CEO

Lisa Thompson
Data & Finance Administrator

Jodie Ingram
Workforce Education Director

Dana Rowland
Chamber of Commerce Director

Mike Levin
Vermilion County Trustee Director

Sarah Haase
Operations Assistant

Lou Mervis
Founder (In Memoriam)



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About This Issue:

This special edition highlights the initiatives and partnerships shaping Vermilion County as a community of opportunities. As we start 2026, we're celebrating the people and organizations that make Vermilion County a place we're proud to call home. Thank you for your continued commitment to Vermilion County's future.



ON THE COVER:

Vermilion Advantage was recognized as the 2025 Outstanding Chamber of the Year by the Illinois Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (IACCE), a statewide honor that celebrates excellence in leadership, innovation, and community impact.

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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 **quarterly** publication created by Vermilion Advantage to showcase our members and share meaningful stories from across Vermilion County. Our transition to a quarterly format allows us to be more intentional in highlighting impact, celebrating successes, and providing thoughtful coverage of the initiatives shaping our region. Each issue is mailed to all Vermilion Advantage members, with more than 1,000 additional copies distributed throughout the county.



From the Board Chair: Turning a Moment of Transition into Momentum

and core values, ensuring that we are aligned with who we are, why we exist, and how we serve our members and Vermilion County.

Just as important, this effort is guiding the development of a strategic plan that will provide direction, accountability, and momentum for the years ahead. That plan is being built around the many strengths that make Vermilion County a great place to live, work, and invest—our strong work ethic, affordable cost of living, agricultural roots, manufacturing capability, educational partnerships, and the pride people take in this community.

At the same time, it is more important than ever that we draw on those strengths to partner as a community—bringing together businesses, educators, local leaders, and residents to collectively reshape what we want Vermilion County to be and taking control of the narrative. Progress happens fastest when we move forward together with a shared vision and a commitment to collaboration.

This is not about starting over. It is about sharpening our focus.

By taking the time now to align on a shared vision and clear priorities, Vermilion Advantage is positioning itself to better support local businesses, attract investment, advocate effectively, and serve as a strong, stable partner in the continued growth of our county.

Change can create uncertainty, but it can also create momentum when guided by thoughtful leadership and a shared commitment to the future. I am encouraged by the engagement of our board, the resilience of our members, and the opportunity in front of us to build something even stronger.


Thank you for your continued trust and support. Together, we will use this moment not just to navigate change—but to define the path forward for Vermilion Advantage and for Vermilion County.

Gary Tucker
Chairperson, Vermilion Advantage

Periods of transition are rarely easy, but they often provide clarity and focus that strong organizations need to move forward with purpose.

Vermilion Advantage is currently in one of those moments. Rather than viewing this time as a setback, we are choosing to see it as an opportunity, an opportunity to pause, reflect, and intentionally shape the future of our organization and our community.


Over the past several weeks, our Board of Directors has been engaged in focused workshops designed to strengthen the foundation of Vermilion Advantage. This work is centered on clearly defining our vision, mission,



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From the Interim CEO:

As I reflect on 2025, I can't help but think "Oh what a year it has been", both personally and professionally. As 2025 started, I was winding down my career in fundraising and looking towards retirement. I had my retirement bucket list all planned out. I did not foresee returning to Vermilion Advantage, where I had worked over 17 years ago. I've recounted many times that in 2007, Vicki Haugen, CEO of Vermilion Advantage, asked me if I would want to be CEO when she retired. She was putting together a succession plan. I told her no, thank you. I knew that no one could fill her shoes and that it would be a tough road for her successor. Well, here I am 17 years later as CEO. I'm sure Vicki is looking down and having a good laugh. She is missed.

I have enjoyed being back on an interim basis and appreciate the

board's faith in my abilities to serve in this capacity. I have enjoyed this opportunity to be involved in a way that strengthens the community and creates opportunities for Vermilion County. I have missed working with area business, community and educational leaders who are passionate about the success of this area. A big bonus of returning to Vermilion Advantage is getting to know the Vermilion Advantage team. They are hardworking and passionate about supporting our members to ensure they have the resources they need and are successful. There were a lot of changes in 2025. I look at these changes as an opportunity to learn and grow as an organization, to further support area businesses and to provide opportunities for our workforce. At the heart of this community are the people who live and work here. I am a member of






AMBUCS and our motto is "Shoulders Together." When we put our shoulders together, we can accomplish anything. I look forward to 2026 and all we can accomplish together.

Tracy Wahlfeldt
Interim CEO



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thyssenkrupp DC



INTERIM CEO
Tracy Wahlfeldt
Vermilion Advantage



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Westville High School



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Fisher National Bank



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Vermilion Housing Authority



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Matt Smiley
Old National Bank



Deanna Witzel
Retired Executive



Gardner Peck
Danville Metal Stamping



John Hart
Danville District 118



Heather Tucker
Carle - Hoopeston



David Schnelle
Danville Sanitary District



Shanon McMasters
First Financial Bank



TJ Morris
Iroquois Federal



Jon Stalcup
Owens-Corning



JT Barnhart
OSF Healthcare



Dr. Randy Fletcher
DACC



Rick Elkin
Heartland Properties Group



Rickey Williams
City of Danville - Mayor



Steve Miller
Vermilion County Board



Paul Faraci
Illinois State Senator



Brandun Schweizer
Illinois State Representative

Directors 2025-2026

Aaron Goodrum	IBEW Local #538	Larry Kuchefski	Coldwell Banker
Abby Muehl	Danville Country Club	Mark Oggero	Watchfire Signs
Allison Winter	Community Foundation of ECI	Matt Grandone	Mervis Industries
Amanda McCoy	Golden Nugget	Michael Mervis	Vermilion Development
Andy Price	Aqua Illinois	Ross Darby	Trigard
Angie Lazzell	United Way	Sandy Blunier	Viscofan
Auston Suprenant	Danville Area Board of Realtors	Tara Hafner	Christie Clinic
Bill Wear	Mayor, Village of Tilton	Tim Donahoe	McLane Midwest
Brad Pintar	Ameren	Todd Lee	Retired Executive
Casey Reece	Chevron Renewable Energy Group	Tom Coursey	tk Crankshaft
Chris Warwick	AT&T	Tom Hashimoto	Hyster-Yale
Dale DeNeal	Second Church of Christ	Tonya Hill	DACC Foundation
Darren Duncan	Treasurer, Vermilion County	Tracy Carter	Village of Hoopeston
Hayley Siefert	Keller Williams Realty	Travy McClellan	IBEW Local #538
J.R. Fregia	Courtesy Ford	Tyler Zindars	Westwood Equity Partners
Julie Zimmerman	Genpact		

VA Staff: Standout Moments from 2025



Tracy's highlight: When 2025 started, I was looking towards retirement in the near future. While retirement didn't last long, I'm enjoying the opportunity to be back at Vermilion Advantage helping businesses and the community succeed.



Jodie's highlight: 2025's highlight for me was stepping into my dream role as Director of Workforce Education. We launched the VCWE Initiative, creating hands-on student experiences that connect schools with local industries. Collaborating with Vermilion Advantage, DACC, and VVEDS has shown me the power of teamwork: *WE educate. WE support. WE grow.*

Mike Levin's highlight: One of the most impactful achievements was deepening collaboration between businesses, local governments, educational institutions, and regional partners. By bringing stakeholders to the same table, we were able to align priorities, address shared challenges, and move forward with a unified vision for growth.



Lisa's highlight: My highlight of 2025 was leading multiple community tours for prospective residents and recruits, showcasing all that Vermilion County has to offer. These tours played a meaningful role in welcoming new professionals and families to our area and helping them envision a future here.



Dana's highlight: My highlights of 2025 included traveling to Washington, D.C. to advocate for Vermilion County, celebrating our members at our annual Golf Outing, and reaching a personal goal by becoming Director of the Chamber - doing a job I truly love for a community I care deeply about.



Sarah's highlight: Getting the opportunity to join the team has been a highlight of 2025. I've enjoyed working with a great group of people making a difference in Vermilion County.

Why Vermilion Advantage?

Our mission is the retention, expansion and recruitment of business in Vermilion County.

The Vermilion Advantage team works every day to create an environment conducive to, and competitive for new business development. Keeping our finger on the pulse of our existing businesses is a key step in that process.

Commitment to Existing Business

Full-time support for expansion and retention of local businesses and customized support for professional recruitment.

Community & Business Mediator

Full-time support for expansion and retention of local businesses and customized support for professional recruitment.

Retail Support

Encouraging businesses and individuals to think and shop locally and fill retail leakage opportunities.

Data Resource

Recognized information development and dissemination center for area businesses and prospects.

New Business Development

Daily activity and network building to attract new businesses to the area.

Educational Liaison

Providing leadership in developing and implementing workforce clusters and programs linking business and education.

First Face

For all of Vermilion County focusing on the overall economic development of the area.

Business Advocate & Catalyst for Change

Keeping Vermilion County current on local, state, & national legislative issues and business concerns. Demonstrated expertise and knowledge base for business development.

In 2002, the Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Corporation merged into the organization we now know as Vermilion Advantage. Combining 122 years of experience and dedication to Vermilion County, we are able to provide a wide range of services – no matter how small or large your business.

Learn more about how Vermilion Advantage is Vermilion County's one-stop resource for businesses. Please see our Levels of Membership.

Leadership

Host for regular meetings of councils for area mayors, intergovernmental infrastructure planning, safety managers, human resource directors, CEO's, and many others.

Link to membership application and membership levels

www.vermilionadvantage.com/member-services/membershipapplication/



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Business attraction, retention and expansion are a part of the mission for Vermilion Advantage. With the innovative combination of the membership-driven Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development agencies, Vermilion Advantage's goal is to create and sustain an environment for all individuals and businesses to succeed and grow in the Danville and Vermilion County area.

12 Businesses explored opportunities in Vermilion County

1 vetted site



Lobbying Trips

Springfield, IL
Washington D.C.



Advocating for Vermilion County



Advocacy was a key focus for Vermilion Advantage this year as we worked to ensure Vermilion County's voice was heard at both the state and federal levels. Through strategic legislative visits, we strengthened relationships with policymakers and advanced priorities that support economic development and business growth.

Our Washington, D.C. fly-in connected local leaders directly with 9 members of the Illinois Congressional delegation and discussed workforce development, infrastructure, and regional competitiveness. At the state level, visits to the Illinois Capitol allowed us to advocate on behalf of our members and promote policies that encourage investment and job creation.

By maintaining strong legislative connections and speaking with a unified voice, Vermilion Advantage continues to position Vermilion County for long-term growth and opportunity.



Grants Received

\$326,000

CEJA (Illinois Energy Transition Navigators under the Clean Energy Jobs Act)

\$250,000

EEC (Illinois Economic Empowerment Centers Program)

\$80,000

US Dept. of Commerce
EDA Investment



2025

VC

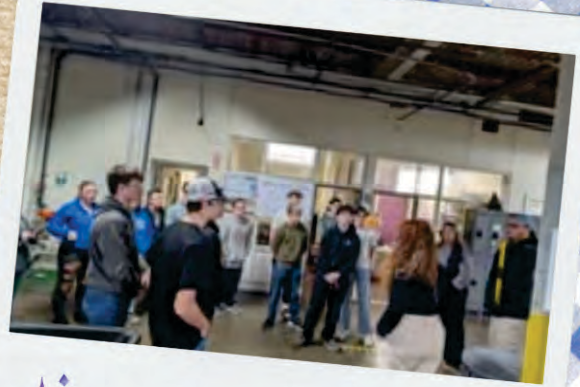
WE

HIGHLIGHTS



RECAP

- 450+ students engaged
- Career Expo: 75 employers and 700+ attendees
- Building and Construction Trades Expo: 150+ Students
- Tour of Industries: 140 Students~ 10 Schools~11 Businesses
- 150 mock interviews



“good things ahead”



**Leadership Tomorrow Class 36:
Building Engaged Leaders**

Leadership Tomorrow, a flagship program of Vermilion Advantage, is led by Monyok Leadership and is built to develop informed, connected, and committed leaders who understand Vermilion County and are prepared to shape its future. Through curated learning experiences, community exposure, and intentional relationship building, participants gain a deeper understanding of the region's assets, challenges, and opportunities.

Leadership Tomorrow continues to evolve, and Class 36 marked a defining moment in the program's history. This cohort of 18 participants became the first class to complete the Solution Summit, a week-long, immersive problem-solving experience designed to move leadership development from theory to action.

The Solution Summit challenged Class 36 to put those lessons into practice. Participants worked in three focus areas critical to the county's long-term success: Workforce Development, Mental Health, and Community Perception. Each group identified a real community need, collaborated with local stakeholders, and delivered a solution designed for immediate use.

Rather than producing theoretical recommendations, each team completed a tangible project that is now actively contributing to the community. These efforts included workforce readiness resources, employer wellness tools, and new pathways connecting nonprofit organizations with local funders. One of the solutions has already been

18 Graduates

400 Hours Volunteer Time



adopted by a local human services organization, underscoring the real-world impact of the work.

What sets Leadership Tomorrow apart is its emphasis on responsibility and relevance. Participants are not only asked to learn about leadership, but to apply it in ways that strengthen Vermilion County. Class 36 exemplified that mission by delivering outcomes that extend beyond the classroom and into daily community life.

Applications for Leadership Tomorrow Class 37 will be available in January. Community members interested in developing their leadership skills while making a meaningful local impact are encouraged to apply.

Leadership Tomorrow Class 36 Participants

Anthony Atchison, Brooke Truscelli, Casey Toler, Nicholas Rademacher, Shayne Gettleman, Patrick Halloran, Lauren Maged, Gina Davis, Brittney Ziegler, LaTana Lillard, Theresa Miller, Zachary Fischer, Carrie Wilson, Jenny Ferrill, Tina Divan, Caleb Bryant, Colton Fauver, Tammy Pollitt
Link to Projects:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Be7OruhLtkbpP3Bfu8gc5J48KHFlj3y?usp=sharing>





Chamber Events:

- Ribbon Cuttings
- Groundbreaking
- Coffee Talk
- Business Networking Luncheons
- Business After Hours
- HR Safety
- PDGroup
- Her Advantage (Women's Networking Group)
- Her Legacy, Your Future Lunch (Recognizing Vicki Haugen)



8 Community Tours to Prospective & New Hires 



52 Events  1320 Attendees 
53 Speakers 



 + 53 New Members
487 Total Number of Members 

One of our most popular activities - The Scarecrow Contest!

VA Members created their version of a scarecrow and posted on Facebook for voting. Prizes were given for People's Choice, Most Creative and Best Scarecrow Biography. 24 Scarecrows were featured in the 2025 contest.



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Mark Your Calendar! 2026 Events

Business Networking Luncheon

11:30am - 1:00pm
Palmer Arena
Main St., Danville

- January 28** - AI in the Workplace with CTS Computers
- February 25** - Step Recovery/ROSC
- March 25** - Ross Webb, State Farm Insurance
- April 22** - OSF Healthcare
- May 27** - SERVPRO of Vermilion County
- June 24** - Spotlight Performing Arts
- July 22** - Vermilion Advantage update
- August 26** - *call our office to book!*
- September 23** - The Van Hyfte Grant Lab
- October 28** - MHCPA
- November 18** - Environ
- December 16** - Holiday Luncheon with Vermilion Advantage

Her Advantage

Presenting Sponsor:
Jessica Hogue,
Northwestern Mutual

Business After Hours

Watch for details about our upcoming quarterly events!

March 4 - Cedar & Smoke - 4:30-6:30PM

9:00 - 10:30am

Coffee Talk

- February 10** - Spotlight Performing Arts
- March 10** - Vermilion County Museum
- April 14** - Ashton Greer
- May 12** - Two Roads Wellness
- June 9** - Seven Point
- July 14** - Ross Webb, State Farm
- August 11** - Monyok Leadership
- September 8** - *call office to book*
- October 13** - U of I Community Credit Union
- November 10** - *call office to book*
- December 8** - *call office to book*

11:30am - 1:00pm
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| February 18 | July 15 |
| March 18 | August 19 |
| April 15 | September 16 |
| May 20 | October 21 |
| June 17 | November TBD |

Big Things Ahead

Events to Watch for in 2026:

- April 23:** Career Expo
- August 14:** Golf Outing



New Member Profiles:

As we transition to a quarterly publication schedule, this issue will be the final time we feature our monthly New Members section. We remain committed to welcoming and promoting new businesses through our website, social media, and member communications throughout the year. Each quarter we'll include a listing of new members in the magazine as space allows.

New Member Snapshot: Smitty's Car Wash

President: Ken Sampson

About: Smitty's Car Wash is an express car wash dedicated to fast, friendly, high-quality service. What began in East Texas has grown into a multi-state brand with locations across Texas, Illinois, and Montana. In the Vermilion County/Champaign region, we currently operate locations in Danville, IL, and Champaign, IL, bringing our signature clean and customer-first experience to both communities.

What Customers Experience: A spotless car and a great day. From the moment you pull in, our team focuses on speedy service, helpful amenities, and an easy in-and-out experience that keeps you smiling.

Ensuring Quality: We follow standardized procedures at every site, use premium chemistry, run routine equipment checks, and invest in ongoing team training. That lets us deliver the same shine—every visit, every location.

Unique Features: Our tunnels use state-of-the-art conveyor systems and



advanced application arches for a thorough clean. We reclaim and recycle water through onsite filtration to reduce waste, and we provide free vacuums to all customers, along with a well-stocked detail area featuring complimentary towels and glass cleaner.

Specials: If you're a frequent washer, check out our Unlimited Wash Club—it's the best value and the easiest way to keep your car looking its best. We're excited to keep growing in Danville and Champaign and to keep earning your business with every wash.

Local Support: We partner with local schools, teams, and nonprofits for fundraisers, donations, and volunteer initiatives. We're proud to support the communities where our team members and customers live and work.

Area's Greatest Strengths: Its people. Vermilion County shines with community pride, resilience, and a pro-business spirit—qualities that make it a fantastic place to live, work, and grow.

More Information: We'd love to connect!
 Website: www.smittyscarwash.com
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February

'Tis the season for romance scams! Keep an eye out for these red flags from your cyber-sweetheart!

They mention the idea of meeting and being together soon, yet they always cancel or "reschedule".	They quickly professes their love for you.
They claim to be notably younger than you.	They ask for you to send them money via cryptocurrency or gift cards.

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New Member Snapshot: Horizon Health



HORIZON
HEALTH

Director of Marketing & Communications for Horizon Health:
Erin Frank

About: Horizon Health is a rural health system comprising a 25-bed critical access hospital, an assisted living facility for memory care patients, an ambulance service, home health, dialysis, six rural health clinics, two EZ Care walk-in clinics, and numerous specialty practices. Specialty services range from surgical podiatry and bariatrics to urology and spine surgery. Horizon Health's primary campus is located in Paris, Illinois, with clinic locations throughout east central Illinois and west central Indiana.

What Makes Horizon Health Unique: As our president & CEO, Jay Carmichael, says, "Horizon Health is big enough to serve you, yet small enough to know you." We pride ourselves on continued growth, while promising to maintain our personalized, relationship-based care. Healthcare is tough; we work every day to make it the best to can be. We offer shorter wait times to get the care you need when you need it—both in our ER and for specialty services in the clinic setting. We promise friendly interactions with our team, whether it's our patient transport crew helping you into the building or a surgical nurse preparing you for your procedure. We're continuously optimizing our processes to make your care as easy as possible—offering a single bill, prompt pay discounts, and coordinated care between the hospital and our clinics.

Growth: In addition to adding locations and services, we have elevated our quality initiatives. The American Heart Association has recently recognized these efforts through its Commitment to Quality program. Horizon Health is one

of only 158 sites nationwide to receive this award. In addition to the Commitment to Quality Award, we received seven other excellence awards for inpatient care, ambulance service, emergency department, laboratory services, radiology services, and quality improvement program.

What's New: Our Tilton Clinic celebrated its grand opening in October! They're offering full family medicine services with same-day appointments.

This fall, our Center for Weight Management received accreditation from the American College of Surgeons as a Surgical Quality Partner & Metabolic & Bariatric Surgery & Quality Improvement Center. This distinction recognizes the program's commitment to delivering high-quality, safe, and effective bariatric surgery care through a rigorous review process, including an on-site visit. Horizon Health is one of only a dozen Illinois bariatric health centers outside the Chicagoland area designated as an MBSAQIP-accredited center.

Our Emergency Room just completed a two-year renovation project aimed at improving patient care, safety, and capacity. The physical improvements include three additional exam rooms to accommodate more complex and critical patients who often stay longer in

the ER. Upgraded technology, expanded staffing, and 100% board-certified emergency physicians are also notable attributes. Wait times are well below the national average, and patient experience scores exceed national benchmarks.

The Mammography suite has been entirely updated to include the latest technology, advanced lighting, customizable screens, and innovative elements designed to enhance the patient experience.

Connection: Horizon Health stays connected to the communities we serve through partnership and support of health-related organizations and initiatives. This is a broad description of an ongoing effort to meet people where they are. Commonly, you can find us sponsoring sporting events, walking in parades, and hosting community education programs.

Learn More:

- MyHorizonHealth.org
- Horizon Health, Paris, IL, across Facebook at other social channels
- Horizon Health hospital & main campus in Paris 217-465-4141; 721 East Court Street, Paris
- Horizon Health's Tilton Clinic 217-655-4362; 2 Illiana Drive, Suite C, Tilton (adjacent to the Toyota dealership)



New Member Snapshot: Brittney's Counseling

Owner & Therapist: Brittney Enos, LCSW

About: I've always had a passion for helping others find their voice and navigate life's challenges. I earned a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Anthropology with a focus on Human Services from Monmouth College and a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Indianapolis. Before becoming a therapist, I worked closely with children in educational settings, which deepened my understanding of how emotional and social development impacts every stage of life.

After working in the field, I felt called to create a space where therapy could feel deeply personal, where each client's story, pace, and goals guide the process. Opening Brittney's Counseling allowed me to build an environment that feels warm, authentic, and focused on individualized care. I aim to provide a space where you can simply be you: your story, your growth, your journey, uniquely yours.

Services and Clients: Individual, couples, and family therapy — both



in-person and via telehealth. I work with adults, teens, and adolescents facing challenges such as anxiety, depression, trauma, ADHD, life transitions, relationship concerns, and more. My approach mostly integrates Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), mindfulness, reality therapy, and strengths-based strategies to promote growth, balance, and healing.

Something to Know: Therapy isn't just for times of crisis. It's a space to grow, heal, and better understand yourself, no matter where you are in life. You don't have to have everything

“falling apart” to benefit from therapy; sometimes it's about having a place to process, reflect, rediscover, and reconnect with what matters most.

Best Part of Doing Business in Vermilion County: The opportunity to build meaningful relationships and contribute to a community that values care and connection. It's fulfilling to be part of a local network of professionals and residents who share the same goal of helping our community thrive.

Final Thoughts: Reaching out for therapy is a brave and meaningful step. My goal at Brittney's Counseling is to make that step feel welcoming, comfortable, and personal — because everyone deserves a space where they can be heard and supported on their journey toward healing.

Learn More: To learn more or schedule an appointment, visit www.brittneycounselingpllc.com, email brittneycounseling@gmail.com call/text 217-308-8595. You can also follow along on Facebook or Instagram at Brittney's Counseling PLLC.





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