MAY 2026 | Quarterly Magazine

INSIDE

VERMILION COUNTY

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Vermilion County: 200 Years of Stories

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VERMILION COUNTY

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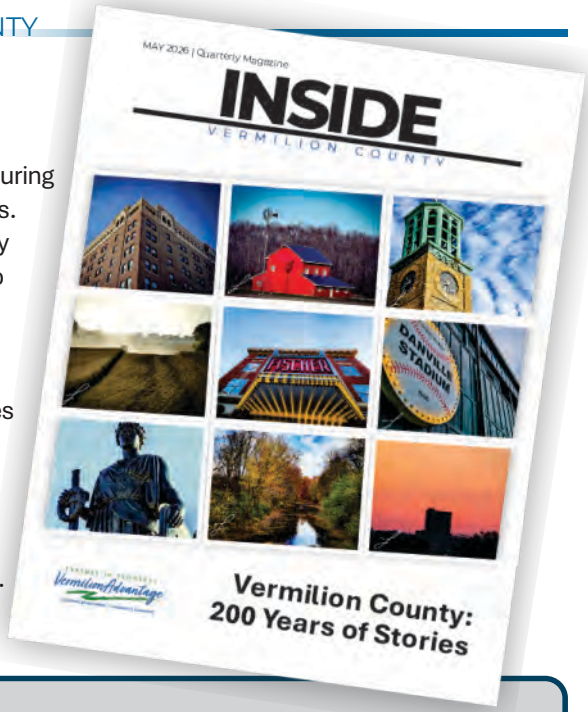

Since 2019, Jared Lowe has been capturing the beauty of the area through his lens. A lifelong admirer of both photography and nature, he turned his passion into purpose -documenting landscapes, wildlife, natural phenomena, and nostalgic scenes. Lowe's work will be featured throughout the year in a series of pop-up exhibits across the county, offering multiple opportunities for the community to experience his photography firsthand. A schedule of his exhibit locations is noted on page 4.

(Photos by Lowe 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 **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 Interim CEO:

In today's world, it is often very easy to focus on the negatives in our community. Let's face it. It is what we hear, see and read daily. But each of us has the power to change the narrative.

This isn't about sticking our heads in the sand and ignoring issues. We know there are problems. They exist everywhere. But instead of just identifying or pointing out problems, let's work to identify a solution. Positivity is about choosing to face them with resilience, optimism, and a belief in what we can accomplish together. As a community, we've proven time and again that when we lead with encouragement, support, and a sense of community, we create an environment where everyone can thrive.

Positivity starts with YOU! Your energy, your kindness, and your willingness to lift one another up make a real difference. There are so many positive things happening in our community. Let's promote those! When we celebrate each other's successes, offer help when someone is struggling, speak (or post) with kindness and choose actions that inspire, we strengthen not only our community, but the individuals within it. It doesn't take a lot of effort either. Small gestures matter: a welcoming smile, a word of encouragement, a moment of patience. These are the things that build trust and momentum.

This is my last letter as Vermilion Advantage's Interim CEO. These past six months, it has been my honor and pleasure to work alongside the Vermilion Advantage team (Dana, Jodie, Lisa, Sarah and Mike). The work they do is so important to Vermilion County's success. Amy Brown will take over in June. Vermilion Advantage will be in good hands with her leadership. I enjoyed my time back at Vermilion Advantage, but it is time to retire, again. I will still be around volunteering, supporting local business and cheering on successes.

Let's strive to find the best in all of us! Positivity actually starts with ME!

Tracy Wahlfeldt
Interim CEO

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New Members

BluSky Restoration
Scott.reynolds@goblusky.com
(217) 685-2822

Brand New Again Refinishing
brandnewagainrefinishing@gmail.com
(217) 274-2133

Coldwell Banker Real Estate Group-Amber & Nate Sales Team
amber@danvilleteam.com
(217) 442-1111

Collaborated Bookkeeping Solutions
nicole@collaboratedbks.com

Frerichs & Stillwell Insurance
jfrerichs@frerichsstillwell.com
(217) 469-2027

Katie Weston Art
katie.weston.artist@gmail.com
(217) 274-8989

Marilyn's Village, Inc.
Ryan@marilynsvillage.org
(765) 231-4035

Sovereign Lending
Andrew.Bill@sovereignlending.loans
(254) 217-0232

W&T Enterprises LP
wmburress@gmail.com
(217) 497-3710

Vermilion County 200th Celebration Includes Historical Tours and Community Events

The Vermilion County 200th anniversary celebration is bringing communities together in special ways. From small towns to larger villages, activities and events are scheduled across the county, inviting residents and visitors alike to take part in a yearlong tribute to shared history, heritage, and progress.

At the heart of the celebration is a series of events that reflect the county's theme, "200 Years of New Frontiers." Todd Lee, Co-Chair of the Vermilion County 200th Planning Committee, alongside Co-Chair Sue Richter, said the idea began with a simple, powerful goal. "Sue and Don Richter approached me with the idea of the Vermilion County Museum holding activities for the 200th Celebration," he says. "We approached the County Board with our ideas and were given approval to be the lead organization for the Celebration."

That vision has grown into a countywide effort, with communities, organizations, and the Vermilion County Museum hosting events throughout the year. Festivals, exhibits, and local gatherings are taking place in nearly every corner of Vermilion County, each offering a unique way to celebrate the people and stories that have shaped the region for over two centuries.

Historical Tours

Among the most anticipated highlights are the historical tours, which bring the county's past to life in an immersive and engaging way. Developed by local historians, educators, and community partners, the tours reflect both deep research and a shared passion for storytelling. "As we considered ideas for events to celebrate our anniversary, tours were mentioned by many of our committee members," says Lee. "The Museum, Danville Area Community College, Vermilion Advantage and some of our high schools had been involved with some past historical educational tours. So, we had some experience to draw from."

Five tours are scheduled throughout June and July, each exploring a different region of the county. From the Vermilion County Fairgrounds to Westville, Bismarck, Catlin, and Hoopeston, participants will travel through historic sites, early settlements, and communities that helped define the county's growth. Stops include landmarks such as the Salt Works, Lincoln Trail Road, and the site of a World War II prisoner-of-war encampment.

What makes these tours especially compelling is the depth of storytelling. Guided by knowledgeable local historians and enhanced by historical re-enactors, each stop reveals moments of resilience, innovation, and, at times, tragedy. Participants will hear stories of early settlers, community leaders, and everyday people whose lives helped shape Vermilion County. The tours are adult-level presentations. Any child must be 12 years of age or older and accompanied by an adult. Seating is limited. A $10 registration fee is required to secure a spot.

"The tours will connect us visually to our County's roots," Lee says. "Many of our citizens will be able to recognize their own family heritage through the stories told on our tours. The 200 Years of New Frontiers tours will take us from 1826 when our first settlers formed a County, the Native American tribes and their extraction, the formation of the first settlements, the railroads and the formation of the railroad villages, mills, agriculture, mining, industry, and favorite sons and daughters who went on to make history in other areas of the nation."

Community Events

Beyond the tours, the broader celebration continues to build momentum. With events happening throughout the year in communities across the county, there are countless opportunities to connect, reflect, and celebrate together.

"Celebrating our history helps establish pride in our heritage," adds Lee. "Understanding our past helps to understand our own story."

As Vermilion County celebrates its 200th anniversary, the message is clear. This is more than a look back. It is a shared experience that honors where the county has been and inspires where it is going next.

To learn more or secure a spot on the historical tours, call the Vermilion County Museum Society at 217-442-2922.

Make Plans to Join in the Vermilion County 200th Anniversary Celebration

To see what events are happening scan the QR code below.

Vermilion Advantage Golf Outing Scheduled for August!

One of our favorite days of the year is right around the corner - the 34th Annual Vermilion Advantage Golf Outing - and we couldn't be more excited to invite you to join us.

This year's theme, *FORE the Ages: An Eras Par-Tee*, is all about bringing the decades to life -from Woodstock to TikTok and everything in between. Whether you're channeling classic vibes or something more modern, you can choose your era, join the par-tee, and play your way through the years. It's a fun twist that adds even more energy to a day that's already full of connection and camaraderie.

The outing will take place on Friday, August 14th at the beautiful Danville Country Club. We'll have two flights again this year, an 8:00 AM morning tee time and a 1:00 PM afternoon tee time, with lunch served in between. It's always a full day of activity, and the setting couldn't be better.

This event is something we truly look forward to every year. There's nothing quite like seeing so many of our members out on the course networking, building relationships, and simply enjoying time together outside of the office. It's a great reminder of the strength of our business community.

We already have several sponsors committed, and sponsorship opportunities are continuing to fill quickly. Team registration officially opens May 1, and we encourage you to sign up early, especially if you're hoping for an afternoon spot, as those will sell out!

You'll find all the details and registration information on our website (just scan the QR code below). We can't wait to see you out on the course for another unforgettable day.

CHAMBER EVENTS & GOLF OUTING

Check out upcoming Chamber events including Business Networking Luncheon, Coffee Talk, Professional Development Group and more! Scan the QR code for information and to register.

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Sponsorships Available for Rotary Memorial Way

One of the Danville Rotary Club's most visible and beloved traditions is the Rotary Memorial Way Project. Every Memorial Day weekend, Vermilion Street, from English Street to Walmart, is lined with American flags, each bearing the name of a deceased veteran, a living veteran, or a deceased loved one. The powerful display has become a moving community tribute.

"The original vision was to honor deceased veterans on Memorial Day while beautifying Vermilion Street and raising funds to support the War Museum," says Rick Rotramel, who co-chairs the project with Keith Souza. That vision began 27 years ago when Rotarian Mac Leverenz read about a similar project and brought the idea to fellow Rotarians and community leaders. With support from Rotary President Jeannie Brandenberger and Sparky Songer, the project was approved and launched. In its early years, proceeds supported the Vermilion County War Museum. Today, funds benefit several veteran-focused organizations across the county.

Even during challenging seasons, the tradition has endured. "During the first year of COVID, we did not actively solicit sponsorships, but we still placed all the flags," says Rotramel. "It was just as beautiful as ever and served as a meaningful reminder of resilience and remembrance during a difficult time."

About Danville Rotary Club

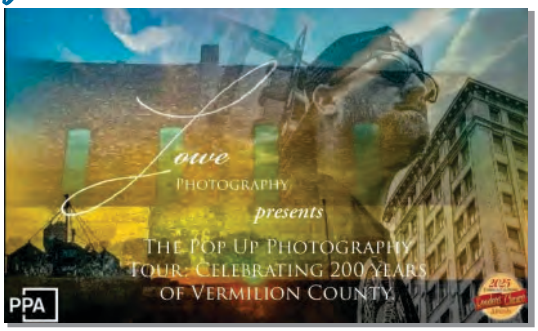
For more than a century, the Danville Rotary Club has quietly shaped the spirit and service of Vermilion County. The club was the 188th Rotary club in the world when it was chartered by Rotary International on November 1, 1915. Its first president was Thomas J. Cossey, and over the decades, the club has been led by business and professional leaders who believe service is the foundation for success and fulfillment. In 1988, former Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Rita Garman became the first female member of the Danville Rotary Club, marking another important chapter in its history.

Sponsorships

Community members are invited to take part through sponsorships. Individual flags are $5 each and may honor a different individual. Corporate sponsorships are available at $100 for 20 flags, $250 for 50 flags, $500 for 100 flags, and $1,000 for 200 flags. Sponsorships can be purchased from any Danville Rotarian, online at rotaryflag.com, or at the Vermilion County War Museum, Ross Webb State Farm, Souza Financial Group, and Iroquois Federal.

The Memorial Way reflects Rotary's motto of Service Above Self in a way the entire community can see. "Seeing Vermilion Street lined with American flags each Memorial Day weekend fills our members with pride," adds Danville Rotary President Terri Cummings. "We know we all played a part."

Lowe Photography: The Pop Up Photography Tour- Celebrating 200 Years of Vermilion County



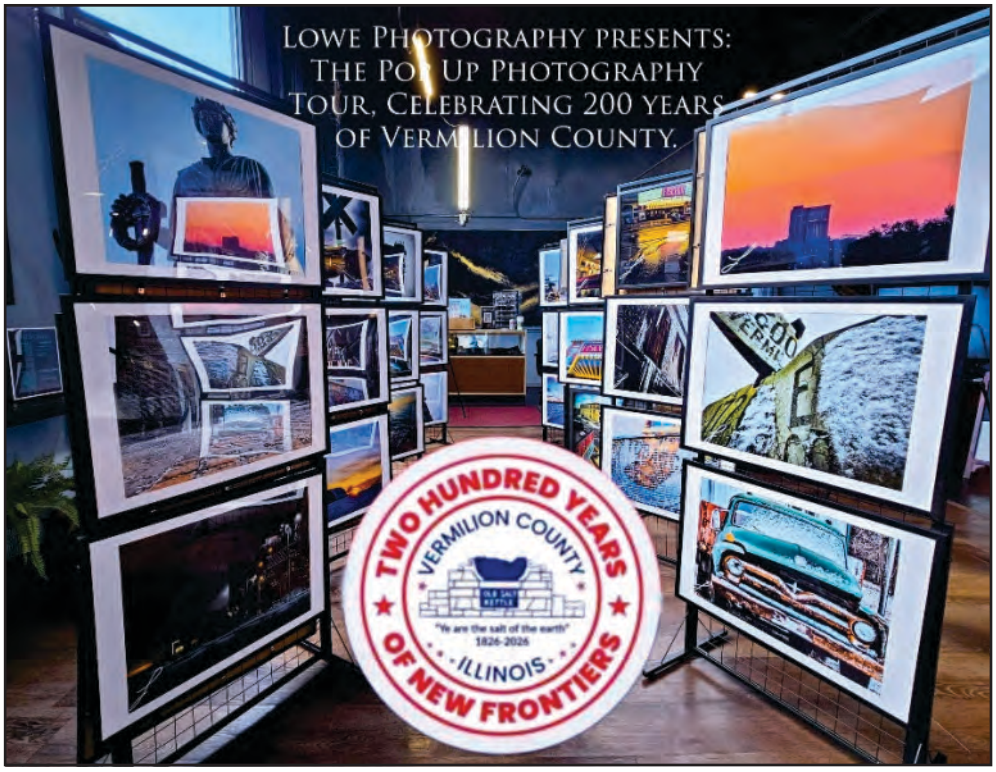
Jared Lowe of Lowe Photography is a lifelong resident of Vermilion County, attending Danville Schools and graduating DHS in 2003 where he participated as Vice President of the Local History Club and has been a advocate for local history and preservation. In 2025 he was appointed to the Board of Trustees of the Vermilion County Conservation District and also named Best Photographer in the 2025 Commercial News Readers Choice Awards. Lowe Photography's mission has been simple, advocating for preservation and conservation through photography.

Since 2019, Jared Lowe has been capturing the beauty of the area through his lens. A lifelong admirer of both photography and nature, he turned his passion into purpose - documenting landscapes, wildlife, natural phenomena, and nostalgic scenes.

Through Lowe Photography, his work highlights the quiet moments and striking details often overlooked in everyday life. His photography has been featured in exhibits and local newspapers, and with the launch of his website, Lowe aims to reach a wider audience and share his perspective with even more people.

Celebrating 200 Years of Vermilion County Pop-Up Tour

Lowe's work will be featured throughout the year in a series of pop-up exhibits across the county, offering multiple opportunities for the community to experience his photography firsthand.



May 16–17, 2026
Big Thorn Farm & Brewery
2:00 PM – 5:00 PM

June 6, 2026
Balloons Over Vermilion – Kennekuk County Park
All-day event

June 27–28, 2026
Arts in the Park – Lincoln Park
Two-day festival

July 19, 2026
Vermilion River Beer Company
Thirsty Thursday Jazz Brunch,
11:00 AM – 3:00 PM

August 6–7, 2026
Obsidian Coffee / The First Place Co Working Space
Aug. 6: 4:00 PM – 7:00 PM
Aug. 7: 12:00 PM – 7:00 PM

September 6, 2026
Kennekuk Education Center
1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

October 6, 2026
Forest Glen County Preserve – Gannett Education Center
1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

November 2026
Danville Public Library
On display all month during business hours

December 2026 (Grand Finale – Date TBA)
Bresee Bar & Grill

VCCHC Partnering to Make Vermilion County Healthier

The Vermilion County Community Health Collaborative (VCCHC) is a powerful example of Vermilion County's cooperative, can-do spirit. The Collaborative brings together healthcare providers and community organizations to address not only medical needs, but also everyday factors that influence health. Community leaders formed VCCHC in response to persistent gaps in health outcomes, shaped by economic strain, limited access to care, and environmental pressures.

Tim Meneely, DO, Lead for VCCHC, says the initiative was created with measurable impact in mind. “The Collaborative was established to address longstanding grim health outcomes in Vermilion County. Centered around Carle Health, eight partner organizations implemented about 12 projects targeting social drivers of health, such as improving economic stability, education, nutrition, safety, and healthcare access. These efforts aim to create significant, positive impacts on the health of residents through collaborative action and targeted interventions.”

The Collaborative's work is made possible by funding from the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services.

To date, the collaborative approach includes Healthy Beginnings, supporting maternal and child health through home visits and education; Community Health Workers providing important education and bridges to vital healthcare services, community organizations and local agencies; a Mobile Clinic delivering care within Vermilion County neighborhoods; a Mobile Market improving access to fresh foods; Crosspoint Human Services providing mental health support; Carle Health Harm Reduction Mobile Unit offering outreach and resources; Heavenly Square Grocery improving food access; a Mental Health program at Danville Area Community College; and a community garden that teaches youth and provides fresh produce. Other supporters and steering team members include Step Up, Vermilion Advantage, CRIS Healthy Aging, Vermilion County Public Health Department, District 118, East Central Illinois Community Action Agency and the city of Danville

Recently, a Vermilion County resident was struggling to manage diabetes, not because of a lack of effort, but because of limited resources at home. Without proper food storage, preparing healthy meals consistently was a challenge. The individual received a deep freezer from a local organization through a connection made by one of the VCCHC partners. With that simple support, along with guidance from a home care aide on meal preparation, the person's blood sugar levels improved significantly over the course of nine months. “It is a powerful example of how coordinated community care can change the trajectory of someone's health,” says Dr. Meneely.

What sets VCCHC apart is the strength of its alliances. “This partnership allows an anchor institution (in this case, Carle Health) to engage with and support numerous community organizations that have a direct influence on health,” he says.

Those partnerships are critical in addressing some of the county's most pressing health concerns, including mental health access, addiction, maternal health, and chronic diseases linked to diet. By working together, organizations are building a stronger, more connected system of care that supports long-term success.

Dr. Meneely believes the greatest achievement so far is a shared commitment to the future. “The single greatest impact is the recognition of the long-term needs of rural communities and the willingness to tackle them together.”

Community partners remain focused on meeting people where they are, building trust, and ensuring residents have the tools, support, and access needed to improve health outcomes and quality of life across every corner of Vermilion County, going forward together in partnership today.

Vermilion County Community Health Collaborative

Transform Vermilion County

Balloons Over Vermilion and Festival of Trees Create Lasting Impact

The true value of a community event is hard to measure. It's tucked away in the memories it creates, the relationships and experiences it fosters, and the impact it leaves behind. For Balloons Over Vermilion and the Festival of Trees, that impact has changed the face of Vermilion County in ways that will be felt for generations. Through their Community Impact Awards, proceeds from the two events have grown into one of the county's most consistent and heartfelt sources of support for youth-focused organizations.

What began ten years ago with the founding of Balloons Over Vermilion has steadily expanded into a powerful force for good. In the early years, the awards were modest, but the vision was clear. Today, that vision has translated into real, measurable impact. This year alone, $180,000 was awarded to 31 organizations serving children and families, bringing the total investment to an impressive $865,000. Over 110 local organizations and agencies have benefited to date.

“These awards have grown to be a consistent source of funding for organizations working to improve the lives of our most important asset, our kids,” says Jim Anderson, Balloons Over Vermilion NFP Board Vice Chair. That commitment reflects the heart of a mission that has never wavered: “It's For the Kids.” Behind the scenes, a dedicated board of nine volunteers, along with event steering committees, work year-round to ensure the events bring a sense of quality, entertainment and more than a little magic.

Beyond the financial support, the Community Impact Awards offer something equally valuable: recognition. Many of the recipient organizations operate quietly, making a difference without seeking the spotlight. “Many recipient groups feel like they have been 'flying below the radar' and are extremely grateful for the recognition and credibility which accompany the awards,” says Anderson. That moment of acknowledgment often becomes a turning point, affirming their work and strengthening their connection to the broader community.

Mark Your Calendar

10th Annual Balloons Over Vermilion
June 5 & 6, 2026
NEW Location:
Kennekuk County Park

30th Annual Festival of Trees
November 14-18, 2026
David S. Palmer Arena

The awards themselves are made possible through the collective efforts of sponsors, volunteers, and attendees. Organizers often remind supporters that their participation extends far beyond the event experience. Every ticket purchased, every sponsorship secured, and every volunteer hour given becomes part of something larger. In many ways, the Community Impact Awards are a direct reflection of that shared generosity, a way for the entire community to give back to those serving its youngest members.

The events themselves continue to evolve and grow. Balloons Over Vermilion will celebrate its 10th anniversary on June 5 and 6, 2026, with an exciting new setting at Kennekuk County Park. The scenic landscape will provide a beautiful backdrop for balloon launches and evening glows, while new additions, including a drone show and a professional kite exhibition, promise to elevate the experience even further.

Later in the year, the Festival of Trees will mark its 30th holiday season from November 14 through 18, 2026, at the David S. Palmer Arena. Guests can once again expect more than 150 beautifully decorated trees and wreaths, along with fresh entertainment, family-friendly activities, and new surprises that continue to bring the spirit of the season to life.

Together, these events represent the best of Vermilion County: creativity, generosity, and a shared commitment to making a difference.

Member of the Month

Congratulations to our Member of the Month Recipients:

- ***January - none***
- ***February - Ross Webb, State Farm Insurance***
- ***March - The Van Hyfte Grant Lab***
- ***April - Danville Area Visitors Bureau***

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:

- ☑ **A featured spotlight on our social media and website**
- ☑ **Recognition in our newsletter**
- ☑ **A creative consultation with Tyler Burress, of BRBH Media to highlight your**
- ☑ **A guest spot on WITY Radio to share more about your services.**
- ☑ **One event pass for a networking event!**

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10 Positive Things About Vermilion County

Vermilion County's story isn't defined by just one thing. It's a collection of strengths working together to move the area forward. Across business, education, healthcare, agriculture, quality of life, and so much more, positive momentum is taking shape in both visible and behind-the-scenes ways. Here is a snapshot of ten areas where progress is most evident, as told through the insights of local leaders who are helping drive it. Their perspectives offer a closer look at what's working, what's growing, and why Vermilion County continues to be a place of opportunity and pride.

1. **Strong Agricultural Heritage:** Fertile farmland drives the local economy, supporting multi-generation farms and agribusiness innovation.

The agriculture industry in Vermilion County is alive and well, and constantly evolving. Whether it is livestock farming, grain farming, vineyards, organic produce, etc., there is strength in numbers and quality of product being produced in our county. The Vermilion County Farm Bureau does a wonderful job of keeping farmers and other Ag workers informed about the changing world in Agriculture.

Agriculture has shaped my family over the last five generations in Vermilion County dramatically. From starting with a small 38-acre field (home place), to now running a successful cattle and grain farming business, is impressive considering small family farms in the US are folding every year. Vermilion County still has many family farms that have similar stories to ours, and I am very thankful. Farming is more than just a job; it is a lifestyle and a frame of mind.

Agribusiness has taken giant leaps over the last 50 years. Technology has played a huge role in this. Whether it is GPS systems in the equipment, advancement in seed science, precision planting, drone chemical application, or advanced grain storage facilities, these advancements are helping the Vermilion County farmer raise record yielding crops. Yields that are some of the best in the world.

If you were to look around Vermilion County, you can see agriculture everywhere such as truckers hauling grain, seed salespeople meeting a farmer for lunch at Gross Burger, heavy machine operators working for fertilizer companies, and grain elevator workers. Not to mention some of my personal favorites Big Thorn Farm & Brewery, Sleepy Creek Vineyards, and Butler Strawberry Acres.

I am proud to be a Vermilion County farmer. Vermilion County puts out some of the best corn and soybeans in all the US. The sense of community in all of Vermilion County is special.

Alan Baldwin, Vermilion County Farmer

2. **Small Business Momentum:** Through new business openings and collaborative promotion, small business strengthens the heart of the county.

Downtown Development - Danville

Downtown Danville today reflects a clear upward shift with more open storefronts. A series of highly visible infrastructure investments by the city has transformed Downtown Danville's appearance and energy, from upgraded sidewalks, parking, lighting, and landscaping to the creation of more accessible public spaces that invite people to visit the downtown area.

First Friday events have grown stronger and now draw significantly higher visitor traffic, reinforcing downtown as a regional destination. Two years ago, Downtown Danville Inc restructured the organization and developed a strategic plan focusing on economic development and small business development for the downtown district. Together with the city's plan these changes have created a growing sense of momentum and community pride. The work isn't finished, but the trajectory is unmistakably upward. For the first quarter of 2026, four new businesses opened in the downtown area.

Downtown Danville's momentum has been driven by a surge in small business growth, TIF reinvestment

10 Positive Things About Vermilion County *(continued)*

grants, and small business development support. This progress has been amplified by more intentional marketing of the district with consistent branding, stronger digital storytelling, shop local campaigns, and coordinated promotion with community partners have elevated downtown's visibility and helped showcase its unique character.

New businesses have brought a noticeable spark to Downtown Danville. Each new storefront adds activity on the sidewalks and more reasons for people to come downtown whether to shop, dine, explore, or attend events. These businesses have diversified what downtown offers, attracting different age groups and creating more consistent foot traffic throughout the week.

The next phase of Downtown Danville's revitalization builds on the City's long range revitalization plan and focuses on catalytic projects that strengthen the district's economic core and attract new investment.

Kim Kuchenbrod, Executive Director, Downtown Danville, Inc.

Downtown Development - Hoopeston

In Hoopeston, many new small businesses opened in the last few years, particularly in the Downtown Area. This has sparked the development of Visit Downtown Hoopeston, a non-profit organization that works to support small business throughout Hoopeston. This organization has been responsible for bringing festivals, farmers' markets, and fun shop hop events to the community.

The community has been very excited about all the events that we are holding throughout the year and they have shown their support. All the new businesses bring energy. When we have our monthly VDH meetings, we work together, share ideas, support one another, and plan all the events. We know that when one of us succeeds we all succeed together.

I believe the biggest impact has been working together with common goals. There is strength in numbers, and many hands make the workload a little more manageable.

Small businesses employ local people, support local organizations, provide needed services, create entertainment and things to do in town. The more small businesses we have, the less likely people are to leave the county to shop elsewhere. Small business owners are investing their life savings in many cases to offer their goods and services to the community; it is imperative that we consider local first when making any kind of purchase.

We hosted a Shop Hop on March 27-28 throughout town. Our Spring Fest is May 30 with vendors, live music and much more. Farmers' Markets will be the second and fourth Friday of July, August, and September from 4-7pm in Downtown Hoopeston. We are looking forward to a great year ahead.

Emily Brown, Visit Downtown Hoopeston

3. **Workforce Development Is Aligned with Industry:** Partnerships between Danville Area Community College, K-12 education, manufacturers, healthcare providers, and regional leaders are building a skilled talent pipeline.

"Coming together is the beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success." This quote by Henry Ford really reflects where we are right now in workforce development.

Over the last couple of years, Vermilion County has seen a real shift in how education, employers, and community leaders work together. The focus has moved from separate efforts to more intentional collaboration.

A big part of that shift is simply better communication and consistency. Employers and education partners are staying more connected, having ongoing conversations, and working through what skills are needed now and in the future.

That collaboration is helping create more alignment between what students are learning and what local

10 Positive Things About Vermilion County *(continued)*

employers are actually looking for. It's less about individual programs working alone and more about building a shared direction.

Across the region, there's also been a stronger emphasis on hands-on learning and industry-recognized credentials, especially in healthcare, manufacturing, and the skilled trades where demand remains high.

What stands out most is that this isn't a one-time effort; it's ongoing. People are showing up, staying engaged, and continuing to build on the progress being made together.

At the end of the day, that's what's driving the change: coming together, staying together, and working together to build a stronger local workforce.

Jodie Ingram, Workforce Development, Vermilion Advantage

4. **Manufacturing & Industrial Base:** A resilient manufacturing sector provides stable employment and contributes significantly to the county's economic foundation.

In Vermilion County, increased investments in technology and automation along with increased collaboration with education and workforce have helped strengthen our region. These efforts are positioning local manufacturers to remain competitive while adapting to an everchanging industry.

A key factor in this resilience is the people. We have many outstanding employees in the community that have adapted well to the everchanging environment we all face today. The local workforce is highly critical to our continued success, helping us stay highly competitive in our market while also contributing to numerous achievement awards.

Operating in Vermilion County also offers clear advantages compared to larger metro areas. Lower costs, a more stable and loyal workforce, and stronger community partnerships all contribute to long-term success for manufacturers in the region. These strengths allow companies to remain rooted locally while continuing to grow and evolve.

Manufacturers have adapted to industry changes by investing in technology, developing our people, and continuously improving our operations while remaining committed to the community. This balanced approach ensures that innovation does not come at the expense of local connection.

Manufacturing plays a vital role in the overall stability of Vermilion County by providing quality jobs, economic growth, and strong support for the local community. Looking ahead, the biggest opportunity lies in strengthening the talent pipeline and reshaping how manufacturing careers are perceived, ensuring the next generation is ready to carry this momentum forward.

Gary Tucker, Chief Executive Officer, Management – thyssenkrupp Dynamic Components Danville, LLC

5. **Healthcare Remains a Major Economic Anchor:** Healthcare continues to provide advanced services and stable employment, supporting both quality of life and economic stability.

Christie Clinic

Vermilion County has seen a significant shift toward more localized, comprehensive care, reducing the need for patients to travel outside the region. New developments like The Riverfront campus have centralized primary and specialty services, improving convenience and patient experience.

Christie Clinic plays a key role as a physician-led, multi-specialty practice, bringing a broad range of services into one convenient location. We help ensure continuity of care—from primary care to specialty services—keep patients within the community and close to their support systems. As part of the regional healthcare network, we collaborate with hospital systems and community partners to expand access and strengthen care delivery

10 Positive Things About Vermilion County *(continued)*

across Vermilion County.

Many residents may not be aware that Vermilion County offers specialty care and advanced technology typically found in much larger metro areas. This includes specialty care across multiple disciplines, advanced diagnostic services, and coordinated chronic disease management. The growth of integrated campuses and partnerships means patients can now access high-quality, specialized care close to home rather than traveling to larger cities.

Healthcare is one of the largest and most stable employment sectors in Vermilion County. In broader workforce data, healthcare organizations are part of a group of employers representing thousands of jobs across the county's labor force.

Access to strong healthcare is a major driver of economic growth and workforce attraction. Employers look for communities where their workforce has access to reliable, high-quality care, and Vermilion County is increasingly competitive in that space.

Tara Hafner, R.T.(R)., Clinical Manager, Christie Clinic

OSF Healthcare

One of the investments we're most proud of is our $10 million renovation of the labor and delivery unit. This significant investment reflects our commitment to families in Vermilion County by enhancing the environment where some of life's most important moments happen. The renovation will support high-quality, compassionate care for mothers and newborns, modernize facilities for safety and comfort, and ensure expecting families can receive excellent care close to home. OSF Healthcare employs nearly 500 Mission Partners in Vermilion County.

OSF HealthCare is dedicated to improving the quality and access to health care in Vermilion County. We are ramping up services across several specialties, including general surgery, orthopedics, and cardiology. Our cancer center offers state-of-the-art treatment close to home, with the quality of care you'd expect from a major city.

Importantly, we are increasing access to health care with our mobile health unit, the OSF Care-A-Van. It offers physicals, well visits, vaccinations, access to behavioral health services and so much more. Transportation is a huge barrier to access health care locally, and the Care-A-Van makes frequent stops at local locations, bringing the doctor's office directly to the people.

From every step of your health journey, OSF HealthCare is here for you in Vermilion County. No matter what your health needs are, you'll find the highest quality care and support through a range of comprehensive programs and services, all tailored to you.

Access to quality healthcare is a critical driver of economic development because it supports a healthier, more productive population. In this way, investing in community health strengthens not only individual well-being but also the local economy as a whole.

JT Barnhart, President, OSF HealthCare Sacred Heart Medical Center

6. **Education Presence:** Area educators at all levels prepare students well for life after graduation. Students are ready for their next step – whether they choose to enter the workforce immediately, pursue technical training, or continue their education.

Education – K-12

When I think about the positive things happening in Vermilion County schools, it starts with the people we have working with the kids. We are fortunate to have teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, kitchen staff, bus drivers, and many others who love what they do. Our educators model this daily through their actions.

10 Positive Things About Vermilion County *(continued)*

One of the things that separates Vermilion County from other places is how our school districts work together. We share many of the same programs and services, such as DACC, College Express and the Vermilion Association for Special Education (VASE), which fosters a strong sense of mutual reliance.

Vermilion County schools have moved forward in the years following the pandemic, with a focus on returning to the classroom and on curricular initiatives that allow teachers to help students overcome academic gaps. Additionally, Vermilion County schools have responded proactively to the national teacher shortage. Many people within our own communities have taken steps to return to college, complete degrees, and enter the field of teaching. Vermilion County embodies the spirit of small-town America; when our people see a need, they step up to help kids.

As K-12 educators, we want to prepare our students for whatever their plans may be when they graduate. For some students, that means attending a 4-year university. For others, it could be a 2-year program at a community college. However, I believe there is also a strong commitment in Vermilion County schools to offer programs for students who dream of careers in the trades.

Partnerships with local businesses and organizations enhance students' opportunities by connecting classroom learning to real-world experiences. Through internships, job shadowing, and mentorship programs, students gain practical skills and a better understanding of potential careers.

The thing that gives me the most optimism about education in Vermilion County is the dedication of our current educators and their desire to grow, learn, and be the best they can be.

Aaron Hird, Regional Superintendent of Schools

7. **Natural Assets & Outdoor Recreation:** Vermilion County Parks offer scenic beauty, kayaking, fishing, and outdoor recreation that enhances quality of life.

Vermilion County has the highest number of public acres per capita in the state of Illinois.

Almost every outdoor recreational opportunity is offered at one of the public parks in Vermilion County. Whether at Illinois Department of Natural Resources' properties or Vermilion County Conservation District properties, people can go camping (both primitive and electric), bike riding (mountain or road), running, walking, fishing, birding, hiking (even overnight backpack-hiking), water or jet skiing, sail boating, horseback riding, hunting, canoeing and kayaking (on either rivers or lakes/ponds), wildlife viewing, picnicking, or simply just relax outdoors.

We have added solar panels at both Kennekuk County Park and Forest Glen Preserve. Using renewable solar energy has lowered our utility costs, allowing us to re-allocate money into other areas of the park. The solar panels were funded by the Dynegy-Middle Fork River Coal Ash Settlement and the Vermilion County Conservation Foundation.

Anytime spent outdoors provides both mental and physical health benefits. There are countless studies showing how access to public parks can lower our stress and anxiety levels, depression symptoms, and blood pressure. Outdoor activities can improve our attention and focus, cardiovascular health, vitamin D levels, and more.

The Vermilion County Conservation District has started several conservation projects to remove invasive honeysuckle and autumn olive bushes in the hopes of establishing natural populations of woodcocks and pheasants. There will also be new sections of the Kickapoo Rail Trail constructed from Fithian to Oakwood in 2026.

10 Positive Things About Vermilion County *(continued)*

I am looking forward to more miles being added to the Kickapoo Rail Trail. The linear connection the KRT will provide to Fithian, Muncie, Oakwood, and Kickapoo State Park will only continue to benefit our county.

Lara Danzl, Environmental Education Supervisor/Volunteer Coordinator, Vermilion County Conservation District

8. **Quality of Life and Affordable Cost of Living:** Housing and commercial real estate remain competitively priced compared to larger metro areas, attracting families and entrepreneurs. The overall cost of living is lower than most areas across the US.

I think the most positive aspect is that we have the most affordable housing market in the country, with homes that are a fraction of the cost of even nearby cities. You won't find a city in the Midwest that is more affordable, with the amenities Danville is developing or is slated to develop. If you look at overall housing costs, living in Danville, either renting or owning, can create significant savings.

We have many attractions, including three golf courses, a highly rated state park, and beautiful Lake Vermilion, along with several new businesses and restaurants opening locally this year. We are also building a new family entertainment center in the center of town.

I have seen many millennials moving into the area from large metropolitan areas due to the affordability, often with remote jobs. You can live in Danville and afford your rent and/or even buy a home, and, in many cases, you can find a home for under $100,000.

I think the fact that we have very affordable spaces for rent gives entrepreneurs additional resources to invest in their communities without breaking the bank. Downtown Danville has a number of opportunities for entrepreneurs to get started, with at least 4 new businesses opening this year.

The City of Danville has been very responsive in trying to demolish and remove blight to encourage new development, including clearing 60-70 lots in the Madison neighborhood. I think that over the long term, living in an affordable market makes it easier to recruit employees, expand your business, and enjoy activities with friends and family. Danville has a lot of untapped potential. We have a number of engaged partners, including small entrepreneurs, local city officials, and developers, who all want to see a better and brighter future for Danville.

Tyler Zindars, Principal, Westwood Equity Partners

9. **Community Pride & History:** With roots dating back to 1826, Vermilion County carries nearly two centuries of resilience and civic pride.

The history of Vermilion County is wide and varied. It is exemplified in its people, places, and events throughout history. This history has included manufacturing, transportation, education, medicine, the arts, politics, sports, and agriculture. In all these fields it is possible to find new inventions, ideas, and accomplishments.

The most significant building blocks to me are the residents of the county. By working together, educating our youth, and offering endless possibilities for growth and entrepreneurship, we can build on our past to accomplish much in the future. Dare to Try was what the county was built on and we can do the same today and tomorrow.

We are tasked with preserving the past, which will enable us to plan for the future. If the old adage holds true, and history repeats itself, we can learn from past mistakes and expand on the county's history to make it better. As the Vermilion County Museum Society has said in the past, History is Everyone, and You are Part of That History.

What excites me most is seeing and hearing about all the accomplishments of the youth of Vermilion

10 Positive Things About Vermilion County *(continued)*

County. Even today they are making strides in all the categories mentioned above. We can dream with them about what they can accomplish in the future.

I would challenge everyone to learn one or two new historical facts about their county during this celebratory year. Visit one of the many towns that dot the countryside and partake in your heritage. You might be surprised at what you will learn and the interesting people you will meet. Find out why We are the Salt of the Earth.

Sue Richter, Director, Vermilion County Museum & Co-Chair, Vermilion County 200th Anniversary Celebration

10. **Business & Civic Leadership:** Community leadership actively supports entrepreneurs, established companies, and economic growth initiatives.

Over the past few years, one of the most positive shifts has been the diversification of our business base. We are seeing growth not only in traditional industries like manufacturing and agriculture, but also in healthcare, logistics, small-business development, and entrepreneurship. Investment in workforce development and partnerships with education providers has also strengthened the pipeline of local talent.

Vermilion Advantage plays a central role in this progress by serving as a connector, advocate, and resource for the business community. By aligning public and private partners, we help create an environment where businesses can start, grow, and thrive. Our work ranges from supporting site selection and expansion efforts to promoting the community and advocating for pro-business policies.

Vermilion Advantage continues to support entrepreneurs and established companies by connecting them with resources, offering one-on-one guidance, and creating opportunities to network and grow. Whether it's helping a startup take its first steps or assisting an existing company with expansion, our goal is to make doing business in Vermilion County easier and more successful.

We are seeing encouraging trends in small business growth and community investment. One of the greatest assets in Vermilion County's future is the people, business owners, leaders, and partners, who are deeply committed to this community. That shared passion and collaboration are driving our momentum forward. There is a shared commitment across sectors to move Vermilion County forward, and that collaboration is turning ideas into real, measurable growth.

Examples of development in the last few years include FedEx, Golden Nugget Casino and Salt Grass Steakhouse, Sonic, Culver's – Tilton, and Vetted Site.

Dana Rowland, Chamber of Commerce Director, Vermilion Advantage

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