

Fourth Quarter 2021 WGLT ISSUES AND PROGRAMS

October 2021 – December 2021 The following issues were addressed during WGLT Newscasts during MORNING EDITION from 5 to 9 am M-F and during ALL THINGS CONSIDERED from 3- 6PM, M-F, and during Sound Ideas, 5-5:30pm, M-F. The story lengths range from one minute to 30 minutes. Other examples of WGLT addressing community issues can be found at www.wglt.org

Politics and Government

[Sen. Barickman predicts light legislative load for spring session](#)

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 22, 2021

Election years traditionally mean lawmakers in Springfield do less than usual to avoid giving an opponent something to target in November. But the change from a winter to a June primary may change that dynamic in one way.

[State Rep. Keith Sommer to retire after redistricting; Rep. Bennett and Sen. Turner seek re-election](#)

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 22, 2021

With about six months left before the June 28 primary election, state lawmakers are firming up plans to run for office in newly-drawn districts. Or in one case, not run.

[Normal Council OKs 5-year plan to spend \\$157M on hundreds of capital projects](#)

[Michele Steinbacher](#) December 20, 2021

Normal's latest five-year Community Investment Plan, outlining about \$157 million worth of capital projects, and the plan's online dashboard, earned the Normal Town Council's stamp of approval Monday night.

Normal considers new 5-year, \$157M capital projects plan

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 17, 2021

The new five-year capital projects blueprint for the Town of Normal includes more than 400 projects and an estimated \$157 million in spending. The town council takes up the Community Investment Plan Monday evening.

Bloomington and Normal see stock market gains help trim pension liability for police and fire

[Eric Stock](#) December 17, 2021

Many state and local governments got a great return on their investments in the last year.

It's official: Taylor is named McLean County administrator on unanimous vote

[Michele Steinbacher](#) December 16, 2021

After a six-month interim stint leading McLean County government, Cassy Taylor officially became the county's administrator on Thursday.

Bloomington's city manager 'in no rush' to require staff vaccines, but wishes the rate was higher

[Eric Stock](#) December 14, 2021

The COVID vaccination rate among city of Bloomington staff is about 55%, according to City Manager Tim Gleason. That's below county and state averages.

Bloomington City Council adopts \$26.8 million combined city, library tax levies

[Michele Steinbacher](#) December 13, 2021

The Bloomington Public Library's \$25 million expansion is moving forward, after the project secured major funding Monday in the form of a tax levy, and general obligation bonds.

McLean County Board committee approves removing 'interim' from title of administrator

[Eric Stock](#) December 13, 2021

A McLean County Board committee has approved a five-year contract to remove the interim tag from Cassy Taylor's title as county administrator.

Bloomington to consider opioid settlement and tax levy increase for the library expansion

[Eric Stock](#) December 10, 2021

The City of Bloomington could get close to \$500,000 from a nationwide opioid settlement.

Unit 5 likely to issue more bonds, as temporary fix to structural deficit

[Michele Steinbacher](#) December 9, 2021

Unit 5 again plans to use working cash bonds to cut into its structural deficit, now at \$13 million. But several board members said Wednesday it's time to stop relying on that kind of temporary fix.

Q&A: New Bloomington Election Commission director preps for four elections in less than a year

[Eric Stock](#) December 8, 2021

The new Bloomington Election Commission director takes over as it prepares for the possibility of four elections in less than one year.

Normal council passes tax levy and hears ARPA spending recommendations

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 6, 2021

Town of Normal staff suggested Monday evening using \$10.8 million in federal pandemic relief dollars on a variety of initiatives, ranging from cybersecurity and new technology to health care and transit services.

Bloomington City Council learns library will reduce its proposed tax levy

[Michele Steinbacher](#) December 6, 2021

When the Bloomington City Council votes next week on its proposed \$27 million combined property tax levy, the portion dedicated to the Bloomington Public Library's levy will be slightly reduced, officials heard Monday night.

Conservative central Illinois blogger's website suspended

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 4, 2021

The website of a well-known conservative McLean County blogger has been suspended.

Town of Normal to study intersection of fatal pedestrian accident

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 3, 2021

The Town of Normal will study the intersection and crosswalk where an Illinois State University graduate student was struck and killed earlier this week.

CIRA to receive \$3.3 million to rehab airport entrance, road system

[Jerry Nowicki / Capitol News Illinois](#) December 2, 2021

Nearly 100 airports across Illinois, including the Central Illinois Regional Airport in Bloomington, will receive state funding in the coming months for projects ranging from new runways and road relocations to the purchase of mowers and snow removal equipment.

Smart Cities technologies expected to grow in central Illinois

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 1, 2021

The town of Normal is preparing to work on new technologies that will make things run smoother, faster, and at less cost. Work sessions are likely early in the new year. But it's hard to say which so-called Smart Cities initiatives will work well in any given city.

McLean County sheriff bypasses the County Board to get tablets to inmates, for a fee

[Eric Stock](#) November 30, 2021

McLean County Sheriff Jon Sandage said he approved an agreement for inmates to get tablets, after some County Board members raised concerns about the county making money off the devices.

Economic forces may delay Bloomington's O'Neil Pool reopening until 2023

[Ryan Denham](#) November 30, 2021

A summer of swimming may be the latest casualty of supply chain bottlenecks, rising prices, and a tight labor market.

McLean County considering spending \$1 million to replace election equipment

[Eric Stock](#) November 30, 2021

McLean County election officials are looking to spend close to \$1 million to upgrade voting equipment.

Bloomington council member Boelen changes course on library expansion after public pushback

[Eric Stock](#) November 29, 2021

Bloomington City Council member Donna Boelen said she may support a tax increase for the proposed Bloomington Public Library expansion if the library can

Bloomington City Council OKs tentative \$27 million tax levy, proposes flat tax rate

[Michele Steinbacher](#) November 23, 2021

The Bloomington City Council approved a tentative \$27 million combined tax levy on Monday, with plans to keep a flat tax rate of 1.4%.

Sen. Barickman contests Chris Christie's verdict on Illinois

[Charlie Schlenker](#) November 19, 2021

A Bloomington state senator is pushing back against former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's view that Illinois will not be a top-tier state next year for funding in the Republican races for governor and U.S. Senate.

Rodney Davis' 'no' vote on infrastructure should come as no surprise

[Sarah Nardi](#) November 17, 2021

U.S. Rep. Rodney Davis says support for Biden's infrastructure plan would pave the way for "reckless" social spending.

Rep. Brady pushes efficiency and customer service in Illinois Secretary of State bid

[Eric Stock](#) November 17, 2021

Bloomington State Rep. Dan Brady is making technology and customer service key themes in his campaign for Illinois Secretary of State.

McLean County approves a new budget, new maps and a COVID vaccine requirement for county staff

[Eric Stock](#) November 16, 2021

The McLean County Board on Tuesday adopted a \$129.1 million budget, marking a nearly 25% increase over the current budget.

Bloomington council members want federal COVID relief to pay for roads and sewers. Several have other wishes, too

[Eric Stock](#) November 16, 2021

Bloomington City Council members have a long list of possibilities for using \$13 million in American Rescue plan funds. The council largely says roads and sewers are top priorities, but several council members said they want the city to address social inequities that were revealed and widened during the pandemic.

Normal Town Council approves underpass design contract

[Charlie Schlenker](#) November 16, 2021

The Normal Town Council has taken the next step toward building the estimated \$23 million underpass project linking Uptown and Uptown South via a below-grade crossing of the Amtrak and Union Pacific tracks.

LaHood voted no on infrastructure bill. Labor unions aren't happy

[Sarah Nardi](#) November 12, 2021

Leaders of local labor unions weigh in on the "partisan politics" that drove Darin LaHood's "no" vote on infrastructure.

Facing water shutoffs, most B-N residents set up payment plans

[Eric Stock](#) November 12, 2021

A majority of Bloomington residents who got utility shutoff notices have set up installment plans to avoid losing water service.

Town of Normal seeks new developers for Trail East and Trail West projects

[Lyndsay Jones](#) November 11, 2021

Town of Normal officials on Thursday released a request-for-proposals seeking developers interested in one or both of the town's Trail East and Trail West redevelopment projects.

How Heartland Community College got more students to vote in the 2020 election

[Jordan Mead](#) November 10, 2021

Heartland Community college's dedication to civic engagement on campus is being carried out through the Student Government Association's and Political Science club's voter registration efforts.

Bloomington City Council supports using \$17 million in bonds to help fund library expansion

[Michele Steinbacher](#) November 8, 2021

A proposed \$23 million expansion of the Bloomington Public Library is closer to becoming a reality, with the Bloomington City Council on Monday voting overwhelmingly to support the library board's plan to use \$17 million in bonds to finance most of the project.

Rodney Davis and Darin LaHood vote against \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill

[Ryan Denham](#) November 6, 2021

After months of tense negotiations, the House of Representatives has passed a \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill, 228-206, fulfilling a major priority for President Biden's domestic agenda and cementing a political victory for Democrats.

Direct aid advocates on the Bloomington City Council say state help came too late to help many flood victims

[Eric Stock](#) November 5, 2021

A Bloomington City Council member says she's worried the city will reject direct aid to flooded-out residents without knowing the full scope of the damage.

Normal Planning Commission recommends Rivian plant addition

[Michele Steinbacher](#) November 4, 2021

Electric automaker Rivian easily gained the Normal Planning Commission's recommendation Thursday for its latest site plan that calls for a 623,000-square-foot addition to the southwest side of the plant.

Karla Bailey-Smith wants a 'do-over' in her bid for an Illinois House seat

[Eric Stock](#) November 4, 2021

A former Illinois House candidate hopes a more favorable map for Democrats will help her win election next year.

McFarland sees circuit judge post as the 'next step in leadership' as she announces her campaign

[Eric Stock](#) November 2, 2021

McLean County associate judge Amy McFarland officially announced her campaign for circuit judge for the 11th Judicial Circuit.

Normal Council approves proposal for new museum strategic plan

[Charlie Schlenker](#) November 1, 2021

Normal town staff and council members called out council member Stan Nord on Monday night on several issues when he questioned town practices, including a bill for a drainage study in Uptown.

Chair of McLean County Democrats says county's new maps should have factored in demographic data

[Eric Stock](#) November 1, 2021

Five people, including three McLean County Board members, spoke at Monday's public hearing on the county's three proposed county board maps.

LaHood blasts Illinois redistricting process and blames Biden for labor shortage and supply chain crisis

[Joe Deacon](#) November 1, 2021

U.S. Rep. Darin LaHood, R-Dunlap, says he's eager to serve new constituents in Illinois' redrawn 16th Congressional District, but labeled the process that defined the new boundaries as "not good for democracy."

Rep. Brady backs electric vehicle supplier incentives but little else in the fall session

[Eric Stock](#) November 1, 2021

State Rep. Dan Brady of Bloomington says a bill Illinois legislators approved that gives employers greater authority to enforce COVID-19 vaccine requirements should have included a COVID testing option.

McLean County's redistricting committees came up with 3 maps that look pretty similar

[Eric Stock](#) November 1, 2021

McLean County's Red, White and Blue public advisory committee that created three proposed county district maps will hear public feedback on those plans Monday night. The county formed the 24-member panel to try to remove politics from the county's drawing of board districts.

Kinzinger retires, leaving LaHood uncontested in new 16th District's GOP primary

[Tim Shelley](#) October 29, 2021

U.S. Rep. Adam Kinzinger, a noted critic of former President Donald Trump, is calling it quits rather than vying against U.S. Rep. Darin LaHood in a Republican primary next year.

Congressional redistricting plan clears General Assembly

[Peter Hancock / Capitol News Illinois](#) October 29, 2021

Illinois lawmakers gave final approval in the early hours of Friday morning to a new congressional redistricting plan that divides the state into 17 districts, one fewer than it currently has due to its loss of population since the 2010 U.S. Census.

House approves changes to Health Care Right of Conscience Act

[Jerry Nowicki / Capitol News Illinois](#) October 28, 2021

The Illinois House passed a measure Wednesday night that would give employers greater authority to enforce COVID-19 vaccine or testing requirements.

Repeal of parental notice of abortion clears Illinois House

[Peter Hancock / Capitol News Illinois](#) October 28, 2021

The Illinois House late Wednesday gave final passage to a bill that repeals the state's Parental Notice of Abortion Act, clearing the way for Gov. JB Pritzker to sign it into law.

Broadband expansion is potential use of pandemic relief money in Normal

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 27, 2021

The Town of Normal is still asking for public feedback on how to use federal pandemic relief money, but City Manager Pam Reece said some themes are beginning to emerge. The nearly \$11 million in American Rescue Plan money for the town can be portioned to several buckets. One of those, Reece said, is public health.

Senate passes Parental Notice of Abortion Act repeal amid opposition from faith leaders and GOP

[Jerry Nowicki / Capitol News Illinois](#) October 26, 2021

The Illinois Senate advanced a measure to repeal the state's Parental Notice of Abortion Act early Tuesday evening amid staunch opposition from Republicans and religious groups.

Bloomington City Council narrowly seats Urban to represent Ward 6

[Michele Steinbacher](#) October 25, 2021

On Monday, Bloomington City Council split its vote on whether to approve the nominee for a seat unoccupied since August, but Mayor Mboka Mwilambwe's tie-breaking vote brought on business owner De Urban as Ward 6 representative.

Second draft of Illinois congressional map would put LaHood and Kinzinger in the same district

[Ryan Denham](#) October 23, 2021

Republican incumbents Darin LaHood and Adam Kinzinger would be shoved into the same congressional district under an updated version of the redistricting map released Saturday.

Mayor Mwilambwe plans to nominate business owner De Urban for city council vacancy

[Eric Stock](#) October 22, 2021

Bloomington Mayor Mboka Mwilambwe has announced plans to submit business owner De Urban's name to fill a city council vacancy in Ward 6.

Pritzker touts start of Heartland's new electric vehicle worker training program

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 21, 2021

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker came to Bloomington-Normal Thursday to celebrate the start of the Electric Vehicle Energy Storage worker training program at Heartland Community College.

'Making Democracy Work' series focuses on importance of preserving voting rights and addressing voter suppression

[Jordan Mead](#) October 20, 2021

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was enacted after more than a century of voting discrimination across the United States. However, in 2021, many Americans are still worried that recent legislation surrounding voting rights will threaten the 15th amendment that protects all citizens' right to vote regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Chair of the McLean County Democrats left unsatisfied by proposed congressional redistricting

[Jack Graue](#) October 20, 2021

The chair of the McLean County Democrats said he is not satisfied with the proposed congressional redistricting unveiled ahead of discussion in Springfield this week.

Moline Democrat enters race for the 17th Congressional District that could include Bloomington-Normal

[Joe Deacon](#) October 20, 2021

Rock Island County Board member Angie Normoyle on Wednesday became the second Democrat to announce a bid for the Illinois 17th Congressional District seat held by retiring U.S. Rep. Cheri Bustos.

Normal moves up Carden Park project for inclusive playground

[Michele Steinbacher](#) October 18, 2021

The Normal Town Council voted unanimously Monday to move up by a year a project that will make Normal's Carden Park more accessible to people with disabilities.

Lawmakers returning to Springfield to consider congressional remap and other issues

[Jerry Nowicki / Capitol News Illinois](#) October 18, 2021

Illinois' first congressional remap draft is out but changes could be in store as lawmakers return to Springfield Tuesday for the first of their final two weeks of scheduled session in 2022.

Political scientist says congressional maps shift for Bloomington-Normal may help Democrats keep a vulnerable seat

[Eric Stock](#) October 18, 2021

A political scientist says Illinois Democrats likely moved much of Bloomington-Normal into a new congressional district because they see one seat as vulnerable to a Republican challenge.

Mayor Mwilambwe says long-term 'health' of the city council is weighing on his decision for Ward 6 vacancy

[Ryan Denham](#) October 18, 2021

Bloomington Mayor Mboka Mwilambwe said Monday the long-term interpersonal "health" of the city council is one of the factors weighing on his delayed decision on the Ward 6 vacancy.

Tussle develops over inmates' use of tablets at McLean County Jail

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 16, 2021

Democrats on the McLean County Board are crying foul by Sheriff Jon Sandage over the removal of tablets that inmates can use to make phone calls, emails, and texts, and access educational content.

Mayor Koos says Town of Normal will likely seek and pay for a special census

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 15, 2021

Normal Mayor Chris Koos said Friday the town probably will seek and pay for a special census count next year because early census numbers show Normal gained only 28 people in the last decade.

Big changes for Bloomington-Normal in new congressional maps drawn by Democrats

[Eric Stock](#) October 15, 2021

Illinois' new congressional maps draw Bloomington Normal into a district with Peoria, the Quad Cities, and a portion of the Rockford area. The new 17th district is thin and winds west of Bloomington-Normal, turns north at Galesburg and then east at the top of the state.

McLean County Board delays votes on vaccine bonuses for county workers, tablet fees for jail inmates

[Eric Stock](#) October 14, 2021

McLean County wants to explore two different ways to give employees COVID-related bonuses. One would pay all essential workers. The other would pay those who get the COVID vaccine.

Water and sewer bill backlog begins to ease in Normal

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 13, 2021

Some of the more than 1,300 residents of the Town of Normal who are way behind on water and sewer utility payments, potentially because of the pandemic, have begun to take care of the problem.

Bloomington mayor criticized over handling of Ward 6 vacancy

[Michele Steinbacher](#) October 11, 2021

Of the near dozen public commenters at Monday night's Bloomington City Council meeting, more than half criticized Mayor Mboka Mwilambwe's handling of the vacant Ward 6 seat, unoccupied since Jenn Carrillo stepped down in August.

McLean County committee endorses \$1,000 COVID vaccine incentives for all county employees

[Eric Stock](#) October 11, 2021

All McLean County employees who get the COVID-19 vaccine, or present a medical or religious exemption, would get \$1,000, under a plan a County Board committee endorsed on Monday.

Town of Normal wants input on how to spend pandemic relief money

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 11, 2021

The Town of Normal said Monday it wants public feedback on how to spend pandemic relief money. The town is making an online survey available to help shape how to use \$10.8 million over the next two years.

Right of conscience and economic development may be part of fall veto session

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 11, 2021

A little known 1998 state law is the next flash point for those debating vaccine mandates with some school districts beginning to use the Health Care Right of Conscience Act to fight Gov. JB Pritzker's executive order requiring teachers and health care workers to take regular COVID tests if they don't get the vaccine.

Police officer shortages crop up in central Illinois

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 11, 2021

The Normal Police Department is down between 13% and 20% in officers, depending on how you count available bodies. Some are still in training at the police academy but cannot yet patrol.

Bloomington mayor considers former council member Karen Schmidt for the Ward 6 vacancy

[Eric Stock](#) October 10, 2021

Bloomington Mayor Mboka Mwilambwe is seeking city council feedback on whether he should appoint Karen Schmidt to fill the vacancy in Ward 6, two years after she lost her bid for a sixth term.

Flood relief grant applications to start in Bloomington

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 9, 2021

The City of Bloomington is about to open the spigot on a \$544,000 grant program that can help people with flood damages. Starting Tuesday, Oct. 12, residents can apply for money to fix flood and sewage damage, through the Illinois Housing Development Authority Single Family Rehabilitation Program.

Women's March through Normal targets Texas abortion law

[Jordan Mead](#) October 9, 2021

Bloomington-Normal residents marched through Normal on Saturday in support of women's rights and against a new Texas law that bans most abortions after six weeks.

Attorney plans to sue after Bloomington rejects settlement for 10 storm victims

[Eric Stock](#) October 8, 2021

Attorneys for the City of Bloomington have rejected an attorney's request for a settlement with nearly a dozen homeowners who experienced damage from summer flooding and sewer backups.

Mayor Mwilambwe delays the city council selection over disagreement on his preferred choice

[Eric Stock](#) October 7, 2021

Bloomington Mayor Mboka Mwilambwe has delayed submitting a nomination for a vacant city council seat because of some apparent opposition over his choice.

LaHood points at Democrats for delaying votes on infrastructure package and raising the debt ceiling

[Joe Deacon](#) October 4, 2021

Republican U.S. Rep. Darin LaHood of Peoria blames Democratic congressional leaders for holding up votes on raising the debt ceiling and passing an infrastructure package.

Technology

Planned James Webb Telescope launch thrills central Illinois stargazers

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 22, 2021

A Bloomington-Normal man is on pins and needles waiting for his best Christmas gift ever.

Bloomington-Normal electric vehicle maintenance teachers share their passion

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 21, 2021

The first crop of students has begun a course of study in the Heartland Community College Electric Vehicle Energy Storage training program. Eventually, they will go out to repair the growing number of electric vehicles in the community.

Growmark makes \$50 million investment in ag innovation technology

[Charlie Schlenker](#) November 18, 2021

Bloomington-based Growmark and St. Paul, Minn.-based CHS are investing \$50 million to make technological breakthroughs in agriculture.

Pandemic accelerates change in health care institutions

[Charlie Schlenker](#) November 8, 2021

Low vaccination rates, human behavior, and viral mutations may mean COVID-19 will never disappear. That's according to many experts, including OSF HealthCare Chief Operating Officer Mike Cruz.

Pandemic accelerates change in health care institutions

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Low vaccination rates, human behavior, and viral mutations may mean COVID-19 will never disappear. That's according to many experts, including OSF HealthCare Chief Operating Officer Mike Cruz.

Arts and Culture

[Community Players' latest asks Hughes' age-old question: 'What happens to a dream deferred?'](#)

[Lauren Warnecke](#) December 30, 2021

Community Players Theatre is gearing up to announce their 100th season in January. But with Lorraine Hansberry's landmark play, "A Raisin in the Sun," the nearly century old organization is still experiencing firsts.

[Last chance to see 'Mostly Monochrome,' a book-inspired art exhibit at the BPL](#)

Lauren Warnecke December 23, 2021

[Psych Geeks: Why 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' is the perfect bridge to the multiverse](#)

Ryan Denham December 17, 2021

[Illinois Symphony Orchestra is back on stage for 'Holiday Pops' concert in Bloomington](#)

[Ariele Jones](#) December 13, 2021

The Illinois Symphony Orchestra returns to the stage this week for the in-person "Holiday Pops in the Heartland" concert in partnership with other Twin City arts organizations.

[New book commemorates the 150th anniversary of Bloomington's historic David Davis Mansion](#)

[Lyndsay Jones](#) December 10, 2021

Historian and former site manager Marcia Young was tapped to write a detailed history of the 150-year-old home that former state senator and associate Supreme Court Justice David Davis built in 1872.

McHistory: Noted author Harold Sinclair of Bloomington

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 7, 2021

Bloomington-Normal has a tie to famed actor John Wayne and legendary filmmaker John Ford — a hardware store clerk turned noted author, Harold Sinclair.

From peppers to pop art: Local artists contribute 80+ works to be auctioned for Sunnyside Garden

[Lauren Warnecke](#) December 1, 2021

The Sunnyside Community Garden and Food Forest has grown over 1,000 pounds of produce and partnered with multiple food banks and community non-profits to provide healthy local, sustainable, affordable food sources for West Bloomington residents.

Heartland Community College art exhibit helps students discover 'A Sense of Place'

[Lauren Warnecke](#) November 27, 2021

Works by local painter Douglas C. Johnson are on display at Heartland Community College until Dec. 15. And on Tuesday, the Joe McCauley Gallery at Heartland will host an artist reception as Johnson's exhibit highlighting central Illinois landscapes enters its final weeks.

No day but Sunday: For one night only, 'Rent' stops in Bloomington

[Lauren Warnecke](#) November 18, 2021

It's been 13,140,000 minutes, give or take, since "Rent" first premiered on Broadway in 1996, and hit songs like "Seasons of Love" and "La Vie Boheme" changed the musical theater landscape in immeasurable ways. Now, Jonathan Larson's enduring rock musical is traveling the country

on a farewell tour, stopping at the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts on Nov. 21 for one night only.

Datebook: 'Human Terrain' is about three women's intersecting lives, with war in the background

[Lauren Warnecke](#) November 17, 2021

Heartland Theatre closes its latest production this weekend, a rendition of Jennifer Blackmer's 2014 play, "Human Terrain," based on the real Human Terrain System.

Kicking off the holiday season with The Baby Fold's Festival of Trees

[Ariele Jones](#) November 16, 2021

The Festival of Trees returns to the Interstate Center beginning Thursday, Nov. 18, and runs through Sunday, Nov. 21, with the giant silent auction that supports families and children in need.

Datebook: Community Players Theatre is bringing 'Elf' to the stage

[Ariele Jones](#) November 5, 2021

The tale of Buddy the Elf is a holiday classic for many, and just in time for the holiday season the Community Players Theatre in Bloomington are bringing the holiday cheer to the stage.

Datebook: Rousing Rachmaninoff and world premiere from local composer mark ISO's 2nd concert of the season

[Lauren Warnecke](#) October 29, 2021

The Illinois Symphony recently returned to live performances and will play a dynamic program for its second concert of the season on Nov. 7. In selecting the 2021-22 line-up, music director Ken Lam had the

Illinois Symphony's audiences top of mind, many of whom haven't experienced live music in more than 18 months.

ISU Planetarium entertains with 'Ghostly Tales Under the Stars' this Halloween

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 28, 2021

Halloween is here and the nights are lengthening. That makes it easier to look at the stars in the sky.

Unit 5 high school musicians return to Hauntcert with another wild theme

[Ryan Denham](#) October 22, 2021

Normal West and Normal Community high schools are proving there's a lot more to music this Halloween than "The Addams Family" and "Monster Mash."

Datebook: Coalescence Theatre Project presents 'Black Lives Black Words Showcase'

[Ariele Jones](#) October 20, 2021

The Central Illinois Black Lives Black Words Showcase will feature Black playwrights, directors and talent from all over the country touching on the question, "Do Black lives really matter?"

Datebook: It's a Grimm Fantasy for ArtGasm at the Bloomington Center for Performing Arts

[Ariele Jones](#) October 8, 2021

ArtGasm returns to the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts on Oct. 16, bringing the fantastical fairy tales and characters from the

Brothers' Grimm tales to the ballroom with this year's theme, "Grimm Fantasy."

Datebook: It's a Grimm Fantasy for ArtGasm at the Bloomington Center for Performing Arts

[Ariele Jones](#) October 8, 2021

ArtGasm returns to the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts on Oct. 16, bringing the fantastical fairy tales and characters from the Brothers' Grimm tales to the ballroom with this year's theme, "Grimm Fantasy."

Stone and Snow: We were made for these times

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 6, 2021

You might think that the titular song, 'We Were Made for These Times,' on the new album from Bloomington-Normal based singer-songwriter duo Stone and Snow would be a nod to the pandemic. You'd be only partly right. The song, and the rest of the songs on the new offering from Karen Bridges and Clint Thomson were written in 2017, along with the material for their last album.

Miller Park Zoo opens monkey exhibit; superintendent refocuses on role

[Eric Stock](#) October 1, 2021

Miller Park Zoo has introduced its newest residents. The zoo in Bloomington officially opened its DeBrazza monkey exhibit on Friday.

After prison, Bloomington-Normal rapper aspires for career in music — and a fresh start

[Ryan Denham](#) October 1, 2021

Two years ago, prosecutors used Rich Sims' own music video to help put him behind bars. Now on parole, Rich says music will be what puts him on a brighter path.

[Datebook: A comedy, a tragedy and the Bard's complete \(abridged\) works are all at 2022 Shakespeare Fest](#)

[Lauren Warnecke](#) October 1, 2021

The Illinois Shakespeare Festival is announcing its 45th season, returning to a full slate of three plays for the first time in two years. Summers at Ewing Cultural Center will feel a lot more normal as the festival resumes pre-pandemic operations.

Health and Medicine

[McLean County reports its 299th COVID-related death as hospitalizations increase](#)

[Eric Stock](#) December 21, 2021

McLean County health officials on Tuesday reported the county's 299th COVID-related death, a woman in her 70s, who was not associated with long-term care.

[Carle BroMenn 'absolutely at capacity' as COVID defers elective surgeries and wears down staff](#)

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 17, 2021

The latest COVID-19 surge is pushing hospitals like Carle BroMenn Medical Center to the brink.

[McLean County reports 4 more COVID-related deaths](#)

[Eric Stock](#) December 13, 2021

Four more McLean County residents have died of COVID-19. The McLean County Health Department said Monday the latest deaths include two men in their 60s and two women — one in her 70s and one over 100.

COVID hospitalizations maintain a 2-month high in McLean County as active cases rise

[Eric Stock](#) December 9, 2021

McLean County health officials announced 116 daily coronavirus cases on Thursday, pushing the county's active caseload past 1,200 for the first time in nearly a year.

McLean County sees its highest weekly COVID caseload of 2021; no omicron detected yet

[Eric Stock](#) December 8, 2021

Nearly 1,000 McLean County residents tested positive for the coronavirus in the last week. That's five times the rate of new infections from early November.

Sound Health: COVID makes long-term planning difficult for public health

[Eric Stock](#) December 7, 2021

The head of public health in McLean County says it's too soon to tell what the agency's staffing needs will be in the future, because it's unclear what COVID-19's long-term impacts might be.

McLean County tops 26,000 coronavirus cases while hospitalizations jump to 31

[Eric Stock](#) December 7, 2021

McLean County topped 1,000 active coronavirus cases on Tuesday, including 31 people who are hospitalized with COVID-19.

McLean County reports 3 more COVID deaths and nears 1,000 active cases

[Eric Stock](#) December 6, 2021

Three more McLean County residents have died of COVID-19. The McLean County Health Department reports the latest deaths include a man in his 40s, a man in his 60s and another in his 90s.

McLean County sees a 1-day spike in COVID vaccinations as concern grows over the omicron virus

[Eric Stock](#) December 3, 2021

McLean County's active coronavirus caseload has dropped, even as the county announced 135 new daily cases.

All ICU beds in B-N are full and the county health director expects COVID hospitalizations will increase

[Eric Stock](#) December 2, 2021

McLean County has nearly 900 active coronavirus cases. That's the county's highest mark since January.

McLean County's COVID caseload climbs with 673 weekly cases; 21 people are hospitalized

[Eric Stock](#) December 1, 2021

McLean County health officials have announced 219 daily coronavirus cases. The county has averaged nearly 100 cases each day in the last week for the highest weekly total since January.

McLean County reports 3 more COVID-related deaths, including a man in his 20s

[Eric Stock](#) November 30, 2021

A man in his 20s is among the latest COVID-related deaths in McLean County. The McLean County Health Department (MCHD) also announced the deaths of two women in their 70s.

McLean County's active COVID caseload reaches its highest mark since April

[Eric Stock](#) November 29, 2021

The McLean County Health Department (MCHD) announced 383 new coronavirus cases over the Thanksgiving weekend while the county's seven-day testing positivity rate reached its highest mark, 6.2%, since January.

COVID cases reach their highest mark since January in McLean County

[Eric Stock](#) November 24, 2021

McLean County has added an average of 80 daily coronavirus cases in the last week. That's the county's highest rate of new infections since mid-January when access to COVID vaccines were greatly limited.

Politics, religion, and now COVID vaccines: How to avoid conversational landmines at holiday gatherings

[Ryan Denham](#) November 23, 2021

The COVID-19 vaccine is making it possible for families to gather once again this holiday season. And it's also one of the reasons those get-togethers might get uncomfortable.

McLean County reports its 1st COVID death under age 30

[Eric Stock](#) November 12, 2021

A man in his 20s has become the youngest person to die of COVID-19 in McLean County. The county health department on Friday announced two more deaths due to COVID complications.

Young adults contribute to the latest rise in COVID cases in McLean County

[Eric Stock](#) November 10, 2021

Young adults are contributing to an increase in new coronavirus cases in McLean County.

McLean County reports 2 more COVID deaths; schools see slight rise in new cases

[Eric Stock](#) November 8, 2021

McLean County health officials have reported six COVID-related deaths so far this month.

McLean County announces its first COVID vaccination clinics for children ages 5 to 11

[Eric Stock](#) November 5, 2021

The McLean County Health Department has announced its first COVID vaccination clinics for children ages 5 to 11 will be held on Nov. 9 and Nov. 16.

McLean County reports 2 more COVID-19 deaths

[Eric Stock](#) November 4, 2021

Two more McLean County residents have died of COVID-19. That brings the county's death toll from the pandemic to 278.

Parental concern may limit public health benefit from younger child vaccinations

[Charlie Schlenker](#) November 4, 2021

There might actually be more vaccination hesitancy by parents considering the COVID shots for their kids than for any other group. At least one school district estimates just 20-30% of children ages 5-11 will get the vaccine.

McLean County's COVID caseload drops as vaccines await for younger children

[Eric Stock](#) November 3, 2021

Children younger than 12 remain the leading group in new coronavirus cases in McLean County.

McLean County residents are getting their COVID boosters as 1st and 2nd doses stall

[Eric Stock](#) November 2, 2021

Many McLean County residents are getting their COVID vaccine boosters, but the number of people getting their first and second shots has stalled.

McLean County reports its 276th COVID-related death as new cases drop

[Eric Stock](#) November 1, 2021

The McLean County Health Department says a man in his 90s is the latest to die of COVID-19 complications in the county.

McLean County reports 3 more COVID-related deaths, reaching 18 for October

[Eric Stock](#) October 28, 2021

McLean County health officials have announced three more COVID-related deaths. The McLean County Health Department says the deaths include two women in their 80s and a man in his 70s.

An OSF administrator expects greater hesitancy once COVID vaccines become available for younger kids

[Eric Stock](#) October 27, 2021

Rick Anderson, chief medical officer at OSF St. Joseph Medical Center in Bloomington, said he's concerned vaccine hesitancy will be even greater when it comes to getting younger children vaccinated.

New coronavirus cases reach a 5-month low in McLean County, but 2 more deaths reported

[Eric Stock](#) October 20, 2021

New coronavirus cases in McLean County have dropped to their lowest level since early May, but the county announced two more COVID-related deaths on Wednesday.

New coronavirus cases increase in Unit 5 and District 87 after weeks of declines

[Eric Stock](#) October 18, 2021

Unit 5 saw an increase in coronavirus caseloads this week due to an outbreak at one of its grade schools.

McLean County reports 2 more COVID deaths; 10 deaths in October

[Eric Stock](#) October 14, 2021

McLean County reported two more COVID-related deaths on Wednesday, a female in her 40s who was not associated with long-term care and a male in his 70s who was in long-term care.

McLean County sees drops in new COVID cases, hospitalizations and 2 more deaths

[Eric Stock](#) October 13, 2021

Active coronavirus cases in McLean County have fallen to their lowest level in two months.

90 percent of OSF HealthCare employees fully vaccinated against COVID-19 as mandate takes effect

[Tim Shelley](#) October 13, 2021

Ninety percent of OSF HealthCare's more than 24,000 employees systemwide are vaccinated against COVID-19.

Pro-vaccine messages touting safety & scary COVID stats can backfire, new study suggests

[Christine Herman](#) October 8, 2021

The messages that worked to persuade unvaccinated people to roll up their sleeves this spring may not work anymore. That's according to new survey research, which also finds some pro-vaccine messages can backfire and lead to greater hesitancy.

McLean County's COVID caseload drops to 7-week low, but hospitalizations tick up

[Eric Stock](#) October 1, 2021

McLean County's coronavirus caseload has dropped to its lowest level in nearly two months, following a late summer surge. But COVID hospitalizations are still rising.

Education and Schools

[ISU moving to remote learning for first 2 weeks of classes in 2022](#)

[Lyndsay Jones](#) December 21, 2021

Illinois State University president Terri Goss Kinzy said the move is aimed at keeping students in class after a return from winter break that could be accompanied by a spike in COVID-19 cases.

[Federal health authorities say test-to-stay option could keep kids out of quarantine. Bloomington-Normal schools weigh-in.](#)

December 20, 2021

[Regional office of education looks to start a Bridge Academy to help students with mental health needs](#)

December 20, 2021

[United Way of McLean County will offer counseling for students in 3 rural districts](#)

December 17, 2021

[Tri-Valley names its high school principal to fill the superintendent role](#)

[Eric Stock](#) December 17, 2021

Tri-Valley schools in Downs have found a new superintendent. Tri-Valley plans to name its high school principal, Ben Derges, to the district's top job at its next meeting in January.

Beyond the culture wars: A Bloomington-Normal historian talks culture and economic divide

[Lyndsay Jones](#) December 17, 2021

Illinois State University history professor Andrew Hartman says the culture wars we're seeing today — sometimes exemplified at school board meetings — are a byproduct of social change, and, possibly a distraction from a larger issue: growing economic inequality.

'How much more can we take?': Pandemic and politics takes a toll on Bloomington-Normal teachers

[Colleen Reynolds](#) December 16, 2021

The lack of civility is something so many children and adults are re-learning as they adjust to being back in community with others, and one Bloomington teacher says that reality is not only impacting schools, but every sector of public life.

Federal grant to develop school principals in central Illinois and other regions

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 14, 2021

The Regional Office of Education covering McLean, Logan, Dewitt, and Livingston counties has received a \$4 million federal grant to make new school principals better at their jobs. The hope is it will find ways to address a looming shortage of school administrators.

Illinois Board of Higher Education approves new degree programs for Heartland Community College

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 14, 2021

The Illinois Board of Higher Education has approved two new degree programs at Heartland Community College in Normal.

ISU trustees endorse \$11.5M indoor athletic practice facility

[Colleen Reynolds](#) December 11, 2021

The Illinois State University Board of Trustees on Saturday voted unanimously to authorize the Athletics Department to proceed with an \$11.5 million indoor domed practice facility.

In a new book, 2 ISU professors examine how some school practices unfairly target girls

[Sarah Nardi](#) December 10, 2021

The book, "Distraction: Girls, School, and Sexuality," explores how policies like dress codes sexualize and dismiss female students.

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District 87 approves \$45.6 million tax levy and the new superintendent's contract

[Eric Stock](#) December 9, 2021

District 87 has approved a property tax levy that assumes more growth than the district has seen in several years.

Unit 5 likely to issue more bonds, as temporary fix to structural deficit

[Michele Steinbacher](#) December 9, 2021

Unit 5 again plans to use working cash bonds to cut into its structural deficit, now at \$13 million. But several board members said Wednesday it's time to stop relying on that kind of temporary fix.

Strong enrollment, financial health improve ISU's credit outlook

[Charlie Schlenker](#) December 7, 2021

At a time many colleges and universities are under increased financial pressure, a credit profile agency has upgraded the rating for Illinois State University. S and P Global Ratings has changed the outlook from stable to positive on ISU's A- rating.

Bloomington Public Library gets \$5.7 million state grant for expansion

[Eric Stock](#) December 6, 2021

Bloomington Public Library officials are retooling their planned expansion after the project was awarded a \$5.7 million grant.

In a Eureka College class, students do the teaching about social justice

[Lyndsay Jones](#) December 3, 2021

A core class at Eureka College was upended this semester as students and a professor tried out a new method of handling the course.

Normal students push for curriculum reform, say state diversity bills are 'not enough'

[Lyndsay Jones](#) December 2, 2021

A group with ties to Unit 5 schools is calling for an increased effort to diversify public school curriculums. The Inclusive Education Coalition

is raising money for books and materials aimed at broadening what voices are heard — and taught — in local schools.

International students in college battle homesickness, and not just around the holidays

[Jordan Mead](#) November 29, 2021

Even though travel restrictions eased earlier this month, many international students at Illinois State University say they won't be going home for the holidays.

Normal Marching Band heads to Chicago Thanksgiving Parade

[Lyndsay Jones](#) November 23, 2021

The 120-member Normal Marching Band received its first-ever invitation to march in the Chicago Thanksgiving Day Parade a few weeks ago.

Tri-Valley's David Mouser to head District 87 schools

[Charlie Schlenker](#) November 22, 2021

David Mouser will be the next superintendent of Bloomington Public Schools, according to District 87 Board President Mark Wylie. Mouser will replace Barry Reilly when Reilly retires in July 2022.

ISU and Eureka College are among 22 schools piloting diversification effort in teacher prep programs

[Lyndsay Jones](#) November 19, 2021

Ahead of a statewide mandate for Illinois colleges and universities to make plans to recruit and retain students of color into its teacher education programs, Illinois State University and Eureka College will

join 22 other schools in a pilot program aimed at identifying best practices.

Improving relationships with insects includes an open mind to an insect-inclusive diet

[Jordan Mead](#) November 17, 2021

Insects are becoming more popular in global diets with more than two billion people regularly eating insects. Gina Hunter from ISU says the idea that eating bugs is gross is learned.

Dressing for success: Bloomington foundation, menswear store combat stigmas toward young Black men

[Tiffani Jackson](#) November 12, 2021

A teen enrichment program in Bloomington is helping young Black men dress for success.

Bloomington Public Library expansion was years (and cutbacks) in the making

[Eric Stock](#) November 11, 2021

A Bloomington Public Library expansion that's been in the works for over a decade could begin early next year, now that the city council has signaled its support for the nearly \$23 million project.

Tri-Valley schools chief is among 3 finalists for District 87 superintendent job

[Ryan Denham](#) November 11, 2021

The superintendent of the Tri-Valley school district in Downs is one of three finalists for the top job in Bloomington's District 87.

Q&A: How libraries have adapted to meet community needs

[Eric Stock](#) November 11, 2021

An advocate for public libraries says the new features included in the Bloomington Public Library's planned expansion fit the concept of a modern library.

A librarian recommends talking about books, not banning them

[Sarah Nardi](#) November 11, 2021

Holly Eberle is a teen librarian who recognizes the power of books. She says parents should talk to their kids about difficult topics rather than trying to ban certain books altogether.

Unit 5 proposes \$131.7 million tax levy, nearly identical to last year's

[Michele Steinbacher](#) November 10, 2021

The Unit 5 school board on Wednesday night discussed a tentative \$131.7 million levy, similar in size to 2020's levy, as well as how the district projects its tax rate to slightly decrease.

Substitute teacher shortage prompts central Illinois school districts to consider hiring permanent staffers to fill gaps

[Lyndsay Jones](#) November 10, 2021

Substitute teaching but make it full time. That's the idea that at least two area school districts are testing as a solution to an ongoing shortage of teachers and the substitutes who cover their absences.

McLean County educators want to get more high school students thinking about cybersecurity careers

[Eric Stock](#) November 2, 2021

A task force of educators in McLean County has planned a cybersecurity academy to help steer high school students toward one of the fastest-growing industries.

Normal Community High School is a state finalist in, of all things, pork chop sandwiches

[Charlie Schlenker](#) November 1, 2021

You probably haven't heard of the state high school championship that has a golden spatula as a trophy. It's the first year for the IHSA Pork and Pigskins championship that recognizes the best concession stand pork chop sandwich.

Controversial book brings passionate speakers to Unit 5 board meeting

[Michele Steinbacher](#) October 27, 2021

A Unit 5 school board meeting with a light agenda ended up lasting more than two hours Wednesday night, after social media attention to an illustrated LGBTQ memoir led to passionate public commenters sharing views on the matter.

District 87 plans for \$45 million tax levy, flat tax rate

[Maritza Navar-Lopez](#) October 27, 2021

The District 87 school board approved a tax levy plan of more than \$45 million at Wednesday night's meeting. The levy provides roughly 60% of the district's revenue. Compared to the 2020 extension, the proposed 2021 tax levy reflects a 4.26% increase.

Unit 5 gets ready to set vaccine clinics for younger children

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 26, 2021

Unit 5 schools had been getting ready for Tuesday's FDA approval of the coronavirus vaccine for kids ages 5-11 with superintendent Kristen Weikle saying there are plans for vaccination clinics.

Deficit reduction still takes a back seat to pandemic in Unit 5

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 25, 2021

The Unit 5 school district was supposed to be considering deficit reduction measures this fall but has pushed that off until the spring. Two superintendents and at least three board presidents have avoided dealing with a structural imbalance that now stands at \$13 million.

NCHS senior earns national STEM award for service work with global impact

[Jordan Mead](#) October 22, 2021

A Normal Community High School senior is making a strong local and international impact.

Bloomington-Normal electric vehicle maintenance teachers share their passion

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 21, 2021

The first crop of students have begun a course of study at the Heartland Community College Electric Vehicle Energy Storage training program. Eventually they will go out to repair the growing number of electric vehicles in the community.

An ISU professor explores the troubling effects of school suspensions

[Sarah Nardi](#) October 21, 2021

Charles Bell is the author of a new book that explores the disproportionate effects of suspensions on Black students.

Beyond Sports: IWU's Colleen Palczynski seeks to help others through racial and social justice causes

[Eric Stock](#) October 18, 2021

An Illinois Wesleyan University softball player says she missed out on an entire season and two opportunities to study abroad because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Heartland Community College to grow apprentice program to train workers

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 18, 2021

After a \$75 million candy plant expansion goes into operation in Bloomington, Heartland Community College will expand a program to train workers for Ferrero North America.

ISU dedicates new Multicultural Center to foster diversity and inclusion

[Eric Stock](#) October 15, 2021

Illinois State University officially dedicated its new Multicultural Center on Friday. The site includes meeting spaces for cultural events, a social justice library and reflection room. The center also will have a counselor on site.

Unit 5 diversity chief: Plan's goal is equal access to academic success

[Michele Steinbacher](#) October 15, 2021

A Unit 5 administrator hired this year to focus on educational disparities told the school board this week the district's Equity Action Plan — approved this fall — is moving forward on several fronts.

Unit 5 staff shortages go well beyond bus drivers

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 13, 2021

Unit 5 Superintendent Kristen Weikle says one of the biggest challenges the district faces is staffing shortages, telling the school board Wednesday evening that even at the end of the first quarter of the year, there aren't enough bus drivers to run the full number of routes to get kids to school on time.

ISU trustees to consider robust campus renovations roster

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 13, 2021

Illinois State University planners are asking the board of trustees to approve up to \$39.7 million in renovations and financing for projects across the campus.

Heyworth schools partially back in person Thursday after online pause from COVID spike

[Charlie Schlenker](#)

The superintendent of Heyworth Schools said Tuesday the district will move ahead with plans to bring back junior and senior high school students to in person classes on Thursday.

Heyworth schools make temporary move online amid COVID-19 outbreak and staff shortage

[Charlie Schlenker](#) October 11, 2021

Heyworth Community Unit School District 4 has pivoted to remote learning because of a coronavirus outbreak. Superintendent Lisa Taylor informed parents of the 934 students in the district on Monday that students will learn online for the rest of the week.

ISU's cybersecurity chief says COVID-19 can bring online threats with more people working from home

[Eric Stock](#) October 11, 2021

Companies that have a large percentage of remote workers are more susceptible to online security breaches, according to a cybersecurity expert at Illinois State University.

On statewide tour, University of Illinois president meets with Rivian on EV hiring needs

[Sarah Nardi](#) October 7, 2021

University of Illinois System President Tim Killeen is on a statewide tour to discuss ways to spur and support innovation.

Illinois Wesleyan University gets a lead gift to build a new idea center

[Eric Stock](#) October 5, 2021

Illinois Wesleyan University has received a lead gift for a new building the university hopes will inspire creativity and innovation.

Graduate workers union leaders support ISU's final contract offer

[Eric Stock](#) October 4, 2021

Graduate student workers at Illinois State University have started to vote on a new contract after two years of negotiations. The union's bargaining

unit recommends the union vote for the two-year contract rather than strike.

Bloomington woman honored for expanding diversity in 4-H

[Tiffani Jackson](#) October 4, 2021

A longtime 4-H leader in McLean County says many young people of color have little exposure to farming and don't get to see the benefits it can have in their daily lives.