

First Quarter 2021 WGLT ISSUES AND PROGRAMS
January 2021 – March 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, Noon-1pm, and 6-7pm, M-F. The story lengths range from one minute to 59 minutes. Other examples of WGLT addressing community issues can be found at www.wglt.org

ARTS AND CULTURE

Chi Omega's 45th Annual March Madness Competition Will Be Virtual

By DARNYSHA MITCHELL • MAR 31, 2021

Many know March Madness as a college basketball tournament, but among the Bloomington-Normal community, it's also a philanthropic opportunity to care for those in need.

ISU Children's Literature Scholar: Ending Dr. Seuss Publication Reflects Societal Change

By DARNYSHA MITCHELL & CHARLIE SCHLENKER • MAR 23, 2021

A children's literature expert says a publisher's decision to stop issuing several Dr. Seuss books over concerns about racism is a normal part of societal change.

McHistory: The 1914 McLean County Basketball Champions

By ARIELE JONES • FEB 15, 2021

The McLean County Basketball Tournament is one of the longest running basketball tournaments in the state of Illinois.

CIVIL RIGHTS

McLean County Board Committee Weighs Resolution Backing Police Amid Criminal Justice Reform

By DANA VOLLMER • MAR 2, 2021

With law enforcement and civil rights groups at odds over qualified immunity protections in Illinois, the McLean County Board Justice Committee on Tuesday was set to consider a resolution to reinforce the police position.

David Davis Court Opinion On Military Courts Lives On

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • FEB 26, 2021

Most people in Bloomington-Normal know David Davis as the campaign manager for Abe Lincoln. Most know him as the guy who had a big mansion built on the near east side of Bloomington. Most know him as a judge in the legal circuit where Lincoln rode before his rise to national prominence.

Pandemic Opens Door For Gay Men To Give Blood, But Outdated Policies Persist

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 14, 2021

There's a twisted silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic: Some gay and bisexual men are able to donate blood for the first time.

Law Enforcement Objects To Manner, Content Of Legal Reform Bill

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • JAN 11, 2021

Law enforcement officials and prosecutors said they feel blindsided by a massive criminal justice reform bill introduced by the Black Democratic Caucus in the Illinois House, with police saying they are shocked and surprised at the timing and sweeping scope of the measure.

CORONAVIRUS

COVID Executive Order Limits Malpractice Lawsuits

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 31, 2021

Changes made during the early stages of the pandemic are having long-lasting effects on the legal system.

Daily COVID Case Count Reaches 2-Month High In McLean County

By DANA VOLLMER • MAR 31, 2021

McLean County health officials added 106 new confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases, as the county's testing positivity rate rose half a percentage point to 5.4%.

Rep. Davis Says Reopening In Sight, As Vaccine Production Booms

By DANA VOLLMER • MAR 30, 2021

U.S. Rep. Rodney Davis sees a light at the end of the tunnel when it comes to COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

30 COVID Patients Hospitalized In McLean County

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 30, 2021

Thirty McLean County residents are hospitalized with COVID-19 -- the highest total since mid-January and continuing a six-week trend of increasing hospitalizations.

Vaccine Clinic At McLean County Jail Sees Light Turnout

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 29, 2021

Only about one-fourth of McLean County jail inmates took the COVID-19 vaccine when the county hosted a clinic at the jail last week.

McLean County COVID Caseload Grows; 142 New Cases Reported

By DANA VOLLMER • MAR 29, 2021

McLean County health officials added 142 new confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases over the weekend, as the county's testing positivity rate held at 4.9%.

ISU President: Universities Want IDPH To Require Vaccination For Fall Attendance

By RYAN DENHAM • MAR 28, 2021

Illinois State University and other public higher education institutions want the Illinois Department of Public Health to require students be vaccinated for COVID-19 if they attend classes in the fall.

Review Finds 30 More COVID-Related Deaths In McLean County

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 26, 2021

The McLean County Health Department (MCHD) announced Friday it has determined an additional 30 deaths are linked to COVID-19, with many of them happening in December when deaths tied to the pandemic peaked.

McLean County COVID Hospitalizations, Testing Positivity Trend Higher

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 25, 2021

As vaccinations increase, some of McLean County's COVID-19 data is trending in the wrong direction.

National Guard Helps ISU Run Vaccination Clinic

By DANA VOLLMER • MAR 25, 2021

Illinois State University is getting help from the National Guard to vaccinate eligible campus community members.

How COVID-19 Overshadows Other Public Health Needs

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 25, 2021

McLean County Health Department Administrator Jessica McKnight said the agency has had to scale back or delay various health promotion campaigns in the last year because COVID-19 has demanded so much time and energy.

McLean County's COVID Positivity Rate Nears 4%

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 23, 2021

McLean County's coronavirus testing positivity rate reached its highest level in nearly two months on Tuesday as active cases grow and hospitalizations remain stable.

McLean Co. Tops 15K COVID Cases, 20K Fully Vaccinated

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 22, 2021

McLean County has surpassed 15,000 confirmed and probable coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic.

COVID Vaccinations Increase; Pandemic At 'Fragile Point'

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 19, 2021

Gov. JB Pritzker announced Friday the state will expand vaccine eligibility to include more essential workers.

Illinois To Expand Vaccine Eligibility Ahead Of April 12 Universal Rollout

By PETER HANCOCK / CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS • MAR 19, 2021

The Illinois Department of Public Health announced Friday that more groups of people will be eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccinations ahead of April 12 when everyone over age 16 will become eligible.

Rep. Rodney Davis Disputes Alleged Remarks To CNN Reporter

By CHRISTINE HATFIELD • MAR 19, 2021

U.S. Rep. Rodney Davis on Friday denied reports he said there is no difference between phrases such as "UK variant" and "kung flu" or "China virus" in reference to the coronavirus.

McLean County Reports 2 COVID Deaths

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 19, 2021

McLean County reported two more COVID-related deaths on Friday to bring the county's death toll to 177.

Everyone Will Be Vaccine Eligible April 12; Reopening Changes Announced

By JERRY NOWICKI / CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS • MAR 18, 2021

All Illinoisans 16 years of age and older outside of Chicago will be eligible for COVID-19 vaccinations beginning April 12, and the state announced a "metric-based" phase-in to greater reopening Thursday.

Shelters Get COVID Vaccines; Some Homeless Hard To Reach

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 18, 2021

McLean County has started to vaccinate its homeless population against COVID-19.

McLean County Opens COVID Vaccine Appointments For Next Week

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 18, 2021

The McLean County Health Department (MCHD) has announced it will begin scheduling COVID vaccine appointments for all eligible first-dose recipients starting at 11 a.m. for its clinics next week. That includes those in Phases 1A, 1B and 1B+ populations.

McLean County's Active COVID Cases Rise; Hospitalizations Stable

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 17, 2021

McLean County has reached its highest number of active COVID-19 cases in nearly a month, while hospitalizations and testing positivity remain largely stable. The McLean County Health Department (MCHD) announced 24 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday. Twenty-three McLean County residents are hospitalized with COVID-19. That's unchanged since Friday.

B-N, Peoria COVID Testing Sites Cut To 4 Days Per Week

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 16, 2021

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) has announced its COVID-19 testing sites in Bloomington, Peoria and eight other locations will scale back to four days a week as demand has declined.

McLean County Tops 50,000 COVID Vaccinations

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 16, 2021

More than 50,000 COVID-19 vaccines have been put in people's arms in McLean County, while nearly 11% of the county's residents have received both vaccine doses.

McLean County Expanding COVID Vaccine Eligibility This Week

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 15, 2021

The McLean County Health Department (MCHD) has announced it will begin scheduling COVID-19 vaccinations for the expanded Phase 1B+ population. The move comes weeks earlier than expected as vaccine supplies have increased across the county.

175 Flags: McLean County Museum of History Remembers Those We've Lost

By SARAH NARDI • MAR 12, 2021

There are 175 small white flags on the lawn outside the McLean County Museum of History, each representing the life of a county resident lost to COVID-19.

COVID 1 Year Later: Checking In With A COVID Long Hauler

By DANA VOLLMER • MAR 12, 2021

This story is part of a special episode of Sound Ideas airing March 12, marking the one-year anniversary of COVID's arrival in McLean County. Find more stories in the series.

COVID 1 Year Later: Impact On Domestic Violence Is Hard To See

By RYAN DENHAM • MAR 12, 2021

This story is part of a special episode of Sound Ideas airing March 12, marking the one-year anniversary of COVID's arrival in McLean County. Find more stories in the series.

McLean County Looks To Add COVID Vaccine Clinic Sites

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 11, 2021

McLean County Board Chairman John McIntyre says the county hopes to set up COVID vaccination clinics outside of Bloomington-Normal as the county's vaccine distribution efforts intensify.

McLean County To Expand COVID Vaccinations 'Very Soon'

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 11, 2021

The McLean County Health Department plans to open more appointments for COVID vaccinations at 11 a.m. Thursday for two first-dose clinics.

\$1.9 Trillion COVID-19 Relief Package Wins Final Passage; LaHood, Davis Vote 'No'

By RYAN DENHAM • MAR 10, 2021

Bloomington-Normal's two Republican congressmen voted against the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package that's now headed to President Biden's desk.

McLean County Reports 2 COVID Deaths; Positivity Rate Drops

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 10, 2021

McLean County has reported two additional COVID-related deaths to bring its death toll to 175 since the pandemic began a year ago.

Sound Health: Working From Home Can Lead To Bad Habits, Injury

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 10, 2021

It's been a year since employers sent many of their workers home to protect them from COVID-19.

Unit 5 To Expand In-School Learning To Junior High, High Schools

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 9, 2021

Unit 5 plans to expand in-person instruction to four days a week for students in grades 6-12 starting April 5.

McLean County Adds Weekend COVID Vaccine Clinic

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 9, 2021

McLean County has added its first Saturday clinic for COVID-19 vaccines after receiving an additional shipment.

District 87 To Expand In-Person Instruction For K-12

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 8, 2021

District 87 students in grades K-12 who have been going to school two days a week will receive four days of in-school instruction each week starting March 30, under a plan superintendent Barry Reilly announced on Monday.

MCHD Adds 44 COVID Cases; Positivity Rate Drops Below 2%

By DANA VOLLMER • MAR 8, 2021

The McLean County Health Department reports 44 more confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases, as the county's testing positivity rate fell nearly half a percentage point to 1.9%.

COVID Death Rates Vary Widely By Age In McLean County

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 8, 2021

Data from the McLean County Health Department (MCHD) show a much greater risk of dying from COVID-19 the older someone is.

B-N Hospitals Stay Nearly Full Despite COVID Case Drop

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 5, 2021

Hospital bed capacity remains limited in Bloomington-Normal, even as the number of COVID-19 cases has dropped.

McLean County Detects 1st UK Variant COVID Case

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 5, 2021

McLean County has its first COVID-19 case tied to the more contagious UK variant of the coronavirus.

MCHD Reports 12 More COVID Cases; Positivity Rate Inches Up

By DANA VOLLMER • MAR 4, 2021

McLean County health officials on Thursday reported 12 new confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases, as the county's testing positivity rate ticked up slightly to 2.4%.

OSF HealthCare Will Inform Patients Before Administering J&J Vaccine, Citing Moral Concerns

By TIM SHELLEY • MAR 3, 2021

At this point in the pandemic, OSF HealthCare says it will not turn away the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine "if it's the only option" available for patients.

MCHD Reports 7 New COVID Cases; Positivity Rate Dips Below 2%

By DANA VOLLMER • MAR 2, 2021

McLean County health officials are reporting seven new confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases. That marks the first time since mid-October the daily case count is in the single digits.

Federal Saliva Test Approval Too Late For Use At ISU

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • MAR 1, 2021

The federal government has issued emergency use authorization for a coronavirus saliva test developed by the University of Illinois for broader use around the state.

McLean County COVID Hospitalizations Drop Slightly

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 1, 2021

The strain on Bloomington-Normal hospitals eased slightly over the weekend due to an apparent drop in the number of COVID-19 patients.

Classes Are Online, But Many Reasons Keep College Students In Normal

By CATRINA PETERSEN • FEB 27, 2021

The hustle of running late to class, the passion students have for a course, and the persistence of earning a degree—it's all been moved online.

McLean County To Resume First-Dose COVID Vaccinations

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 26, 2021

The McLean County Health Department (MCHD) plans to resume some first-dose vaccinations next week.

Hospital Capacity Tightens; MCHD Reports 11 New COVID Cases

By DANA VOLLMER • FEB 25, 2021

McLean County's hospital bed capacity continues to constrict, even as the county's testing positivity rate and active caseload remain low.

ISU Plans Return To Campus Next Fall

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 24, 2021

Illinois State University plans for a “more traditional campus experience” starting next fall after the coronavirus pandemic pushed most classroom instruction online since last March.

B-N Hospital Capacity Limited Despite Drop In COVID Cases

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 24, 2021

Hospital bed capacity in Bloomington-Normal remains limited despite a steady decline in coronavirus cases.

McLean County Gets Delayed Vaccines; Clinics Rescheduled

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 23, 2021

The McLean County Health Department (MCHD) has rescheduled two COVID-19 vaccination clinics after receiving vaccine shipments that were delayed due to winter weather.

LaHood Tours ‘Model’ COVID Site in Bloomington; More Doses Needed

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 22, 2021

U.S. Rep. Darin LaHood said the Biden administration should negotiate with COVID-19 vaccine makers to boost production.

MCHD Reports 62 More COVID Cases; Positivity Rate Stays Below 3%

By DANA VOLLMER • FEB 22, 2021

McLean County health officials are reporting 62 new coronavirus infections, as the county’s testing positivity rate held mostly steady at 2.8%.

State Closes Book On 5 Long-Term Care Outbreaks

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • FEB 19, 2021

Five nursing homes and retirement communities in McLean County have now gone a month without a new case of COVID-19, leading the Illinois Department of Public Health to remove them from the list of active outbreaks.

Man In His 30s Among 5 New McLean County COVID Deaths

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 19, 2021

McLean County health officials reported five more COVID-related deaths Friday, including a man in his 30s.

McLean County Cancels Vaccine Clinic; 1B Expansion on Hold

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 18, 2021

About 900 McLean County residents who were set to receive their second COVID-19 vaccine dose on Friday will have to wait, while others hoping to become eligible for a first dose soon will likely have to wait for weeks.

Cleaning Staff At B-N Hospitals Are COVID's Unsung Heroes

By RYAN DENHAM • FEB 18, 2021

For Robin Dennewitz, the best part of her cleaning job at OSF Healthcare St. Joseph Medical Center is talking to the patients. And they've never needed her more.

5 More McLean County Residents Die From COVID; Positivity Rate Drops To 1.4%

By DANA VOLLMER • FEB 17, 2021

The McLean County Health Department is reporting five more COVID-19 related deaths and 96 new infections, as the county's testing positivity rate dips to 1.4%. That's the lowest it's been since early July.

Needs Soar For Homeless Youth In Bloomington-Normal

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • FEB 16, 2021

More young adults in Bloomington-Normal need shelter now than during the early part of the pandemic.

Weather Causing Federal COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery Delays

By WGLT STAFF: State officials have been notified that winter weather across much of the U.S. is causing delays in the delivery of COVID-19 vaccine shipments, according to a Tuesday release.

McLean County: Expanded Vaccinations Could Be Delayed

By WGLT STAFF: McLean County Health Department Administrator Jessica McKnight said she's not sure the county will be ready to expand COVID vaccine availability on the state's timeline.

McLean County's Positivity Rate Drops To Lowest Level In Over 4 Months

By DANA VOLLMER • FEB 11, 2021

McLean County health officials reported 34 new confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases on Thursday, as the county's rolling testing positivity rate dipped to 2.4% -- the lowest rate since Oct. 1.

Superintendent: No Easy Answers For Unit 5 Around COVID

By SARAH NARDI • FEB 10, 2021

Parents had mixed reactions when some Unit 5 elementary students returned to full-time, in-person learning earlier this month. Speaking to the school board Wednesday night, district superintendent Kristen Weikle addressed the difficulties of making decisions around COVID-19.

McLean Co. To Consider Emergency Homeless Funding For Winter

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 10, 2021

McLean County will consider providing more funding to help keep the homeless out of the cold this winter.

State To Expand Vaccine Eligibility To Individuals With Underlying Conditions

By TIM KIRSININKAS / CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS • FEB 10, 2021

Gov. JB Pritzker announced Wednesday that the state plans to expand COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to individuals of all ages who have comorbidities and underlying conditions by Feb. 25.

Bloomington Fines 6 Bars For Tax And COVID Violations

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • FEB 9, 2021

The Bloomington Liquor Commission fined two more establishments Tuesday for violating COVID-19 mitigation rules in January, and four others for tax violations.

MCHD Reports 8 More COVID Deaths, Most From Nursing Homes

By DANA VOLLMER • FEB 9, 2021

Eight more McLean County residents have died from COVID-19 complications, after about a week and a half without a reported fatality.

Nursing Homes Try To Ease Isolation During COVID

By ERIC STOCK & EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • FEB 9, 2021

Nursing home operators are grateful long-awaited COVID-19 vaccines have started to make it to their facilities.

B-N Hospital Capacity, Active COVID Caseload Improve

By DANA VOLLMER • FEB 8, 2021

McLean County's hospital capacity and active caseload are improving, with health officials reporting 100 new confirmed or probable cases over the weekend.

COVID Infections Slow At Long-Term Care Facilities In McLean County

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • FEB 8, 2021

The pace of new COVID-19 infections at long-term care facilities in McLean County has slowed as vaccinations increase in those facilities and among those over the age of 65. Seven facilities with previous active outbreaks have had no new cases in two weeks.

Pritzker: Higher Ed Unlikely To See Bump in COVID-19 Vaccine Priority Until Supply Increases

By TIM SHELLEY • FEB 5, 2021

Public university presidents recently wrote Gov. JB Pritzker, asking him to make higher education a priority area for COVID-19 vaccinations. But with only a limited number of doses available, Pritzker said he made the decision to place higher ed staff and students in the 1C class--or at least behind K-12 employees.

ISU To Allow Limited Attendance For Spring Football

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 5, 2021

Illinois State University athletics has announced it will allow up to 20% capacity for its spring football schedule at Hancock Stadium this season, but tailgating will not be allowed.

MCHD: New COVID-19 Cases Drop; More Vaccine Coming

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 5, 2021

McLean County surpassed 14,000 coronavirus cases Friday, though the rate of new infections continues to drop.

University Presidents Ask For Quicker Campus Vaccinations

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • FEB 4, 2021

The heads of colleges and universities in Illinois are asking Gov. JB Pritzker to move higher education faculty and staff up to 1B in the vaccination queue.

Deadly Cold Looms, Emergency Shelter Space Limited

By DANA VOLLMER • FEB 4, 2021

As the region braces for an arctic blast this weekend, there aren't many places for people experiencing homelessness to go.

McLean County Switches Vaccine Platforms After Notification Issues

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 4, 2021

McLean County has shifted to a new COVID-19 vaccine signup platform after many people have reported problems getting notifications about upcoming clinics.

Pandemic Causes, Of All Things, A Beer Can Shortage

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 4, 2021

The coronavirus pandemic has caused a bottleneck in the beer industry. There apparently aren't enough beer cans anymore.

McLean County Positivity Rate, Active Caseload Tick Up Slightly

By DANA VOLLMER • FEB 4, 2021

McLean County health officials are reporting 35 new confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases, as the county's testing positivity rate rose to 4.9%.

ISU Lecture On COVID Immunity Addresses FAQs

By DANA VOLLMER • FEB 3, 2021

It's been nearly two months since the first COVID-19 vaccine received emergency use authorization from the Federal Drug Administration. More than one million doses have been given in Illinois, including more than 15,000 in McLean County.

Illinois To Ramp Up Vaccine Distribution

By PETER HANCOCK / CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS • FEB 3, 2021

The state will soon start ramping up the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines as part of its effort to further limit the spread of the disease.

MCHD Reports 57 New COVID Cases; 4.5% Positivity Rate

By DANA VOLLMER • FEB 3, 2021

The McLean County Health Department reported 57 new confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, as the county's testing positivity rate ticked up slightly to 4.5%.

McLean County Gets 'Bonus' Vaccine Shipment

By ERIC STOCK • FEB 2, 2021

The McLean County Health Department has announced it expects to receive a bonus shipment of about 1,100 COVID-19 vaccine doses on Tuesday, and plans to allow for additional vaccination appointments for people in Phases 1A and 1B who are seeking their first dose.

Parents Divided Over Returning To Unit 5 Classrooms

By SARAH NARDI • FEB 2, 2021

Unit 5 plans to bring its elementary students back to the classroom five days a week, starting later this week.

Health Department Chief Addresses Confusion, Frustration Surrounding Vaccine

By SARAH NARDI • FEB 1, 2021

McLean County Health Department Administrator Jessica McKnight says she knows the public is tired of the frustration and confusion surrounding vaccine distribution.

MCHD Reports 83 New COVID Cases; 4.3% Positivity Rate

By DANA VOLLMER • FEB 1, 2021

The McLean County Health Department on Monday reported 83 new confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases, as the county's testing positivity rate ticked down to 4.3%. That's the lowest it's been since Oct. 20.

Illinois State University Vaccinates 300 People

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • JAN 30, 2021

Illinois State University's Department of Health Sciences and Health Services workers administered about 300 coronavirus vaccines on Friday, according to a university spokesperson.

'Vaccine Envy' And Some Frustration Amid Slow Rollout In McLean County

By RYAN DENHAM & ERIC STOCK • JAN 29, 2021

Larry Sears has been on a wild goose chase this week.

The 75-year-old retired teacher from Normal wants his first COVID vaccine dose—and he is eligible to get one. So he's stalking the McLean County Health Department website. He stayed up till midnight hoping to be first in the digital line for an appointment at Hy-Vee. He checked in with his doctor's office.

Joe's Station House Faces Fine For Ignoring COVID Restrictions

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • JAN 29, 2021

A bar and restaurant in Normal faces a \$1,750 fine for violating COVID-19 mitigation protocols. Joe's Station House, located at the Shoppes at College Hills, refused to halt indoor service when Gov. JB Pritzker's executive orders called for that measure.

McLean County Ties Record For Monthly COVID Deaths

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 29, 2021

McLean County has matched December's record number of 51 COVID-related deaths in January as the county reported six more deaths on Friday.

Pritzker Pushes Back On Criticisms Of State's COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout

By TIM KIRSININKAS / CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS • JAN 28, 2021

Gov. JB Pritzker pushed back Thursday on criticisms of the state's COVID-19 vaccine rollout, saying state officials are "doing everything we can" to ensure timely delivery of doses.

IHSA: 'Groundswell' Of Protests Moved State To Allow Return To Play

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 28, 2021

The head of the Illinois High School Association says political pressure may have helped prompt state public health officials and the Pritzker administration to allow basketball and other high-risk sports to resume.

COVID Cases Keep Falling In McLean County; 12 New Cases Added

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 28, 2021

McLean County continues to see a drop in new coronavirus cases as health officials report their lowest one-day total since Oct. 15.

Game On: IHSA Sets Sports Calendar For Rest Of School Year

By JOE DEACON • JAN 27, 2021

The start of high school basketball in central Illinois is on the horizon, and a timetable has been set for football, volleyball, soccer and other sports.

How To Get A COVID Vaccine In McLean County

By WGLT STAFF • JAN 27, 2021

COVID-19 vaccines are becoming available at more locations in McLean County, although supplies are limited.

McKnight Reflects On 1st Year Leading McLean Co. Health, COVID Response

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 27, 2021

Starting any new job in the midst of a pandemic is a challenge, especially if you are responsible for managing public health.

McLean County Adds 30 COVID Cases; Hospitalizations Steady

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 27, 2021

The rate of new coronavirus cases continues to slow in McLean County, while COVID-19 hospitalizations are mostly unchanged.

McLean County's COVID Caseload Drops; More Vaccine Locations Announced

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 26, 2021

McLean County's active COVID-19 caseload continues to fall, though available bed space in Bloomington-Normal hospitals remains limited.

Unit 5 Grade Schools To Shift Hybrid Learning To All In-School

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 25, 2021

Unit 5 plans to phase in more classroom days for its pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students who have been learning in a hybrid format.

McLean County Moves To Phase 4 COVID Mitigations

By TIM SHELLEY, ERIC STOCK & JOE DEACON • JAN 25, 2021

Central Illinois is officially moving out of additional mitigations as the region's COVID-19 statistics continue to improve.

Region 2 Returns To Phase 4 Of Restore Illinois COVID Plan

By TIM SHELLEY • JAN 25, 2021

Central Illinois is officially moving out of additional mitigations as the region's COVID-19 statistics continue to improve.

IWU Alum Leading Mayo Clinic Vaccine Research On COVID Misconceptions

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 23, 2021

A Mayo Clinic vaccine researcher and Illinois Wesleyan University graduate says he's not surprised some people don't want to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

A December survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found about one in four Americans (27%) probably or definitely didn't plan on getting the shots, even if they were available for free and are deemed safe by scientists.

ISU Women's Basketball Wins By Forfeit

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 22, 2021

The Illinois State University women's basketball team picked up a win Friday and didn't have to take the floor.

Superintendent: Few Problems As Unit 5 Returns To Hybrid

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • JAN 22, 2021

Unit 5 students made a good transition back to hybrid learning after the holiday break, according to district administrators.

McLean County Adds 10 COVID Deaths; Positivity Rate Drops

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 22, 2021

UPDATED 9:45 P.M. | McLean County health officials announced 10 new COVID-related deaths Friday, marking the largest single-day increase since the start of the pandemic.

McLean County COVID Positivity Rate Ticks Up; 66 New Cases Confirmed

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 21, 2021

McLean County's COVID-19 testing positivity rate ticked up slightly to 7.5%, as health officials reported 66 new cases Thursday. That brings the total number of confirmed and probable cases to 13,310 since the start of the pandemic.

McLean County Announces 2 COVID Deaths, 89 New Cases

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 20, 2021

UPDATED 1:00 P.M. | McLean County health officials announced the county's first two COVID-related deaths in a week on Wednesday. The drop in fatalities comes following a surge of 33 deaths in the first two weeks of 2021.

McLean County's Positivity Rate Drops To 6.5%; 180 New Cases Reported

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 19, 2021

McLean County's COVID-19 testing positivity rate, active caseload and intensive care bed capacity are at their best levels in nearly 2 1/2 months.

McLean County Begins 1B Vaccinations; Opens COVID Call Center

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 15, 2021

McLean County will start COVID vaccinations next week for those in Phase 1b that includes essential workers and people 65 and older. That's one week ahead of the state of Illinois' vaccination timeline.

McLean County Improves Into Tier 2 COVID Mitigations

By JERRY NOWICKI / CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS • JAN 15, 2021

Gov. JB Pritzker announced revisions to his COVID-19 mitigation tiers Friday that would allow earlier indoor dining, but no regions have thus far met the requirements.

How's Your 'Zoom Room' Looking? Interior Designers Offer Tips

By OLIVIA STREETER & ERIC STOCK • JAN 15, 2021

Have you ever wondered what the person on the other side of the screen thinks of your home during a Zoom meeting? Until now, a lot of us haven't.

MCHD Confirms 146 COVID-19 Cases; Positivity Rate Drops To 8.1%

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 15, 2021

The McLean County Health Department is reporting 146 new confirmed COVID-19 cases on Friday, as the county's testing positivity rate fell nearly two percentage points to 8.1%.

Pandemic Opens Door For Gay Men To Give Blood, But Outdated Policies Persist

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 14, 2021

There's a twisted silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic: Some gay and bisexual men are able to donate blood for the first time.

Hospital Capacity Improves, County Adds 32 COVID Cases

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 14, 2021

Bloomington-Normal hospital capacity showed some improvement Thursday as McLean County health officials announced 32 new coronavirus cases.

MCHD Reports 3 More COVID Deaths, Including Man In His 40s

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 13, 2021

Three more McLean County residents have died from COVID-19 complications, the McLean County Health Department reported Wednesday.

COVID Among Leading Causes Of Death In Central Illinois

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • JAN 12, 2021

Heart disease and cancer usually top the list of the reasons people die each year in central Illinois and throughout the state. The numbers tell a grim story: 48 weeks into the pandemic, you can add COVID-19 to the list.

McLean Co. Trails Priority Counties In Early COVID Vaccinations

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 12, 2021

Nearly 4,000 people in McLean County have received their first dose of the COVID vaccine, based on new vaccination data provided by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH).

State Grants Offer Some Relief For Struggling B-N Hotels

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 12, 2021

Bloomington-Normal hotels saw a \$25 million drop in revenue over the last year with the pandemic drastically reducing travel.

Mayor Renner: It's Time To Allow Indoor Dining At 25% Capacity

By RYAN DENHAM • JAN 12, 2021

Bloomington Mayor Tari Renner said he thinks the governor should allow a limited amount of indoor dining starting now.

B-N Hospital Capacity Shrinks; Arena To Host Vaccinations

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 12, 2021

Hospital beds in Bloomington-Normal have reached 92% capacity, even as the number of McLean County residents hospitalized due to coronavirus complications has remained stable.

Some Counties Entering Next Phase Of Vaccine Distribution

By GRACE BARBIC / CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS • JAN 11, 2021

Some regions of the state could see loosened COVID-19 restrictions as early as Friday as some counties have already transitioned to the next phase of vaccine distribution, Gov. JB Pritzker announced Monday.

MCHD Confirms 10 More COVID Deaths; 30 Since Start Of 2021

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 11, 2021

The McLean County Health Department is reporting 10 more COVID-19 related deaths and 278 new confirmed cases.

Nursing Homes Struggle To Keep COVID Out As Deaths Rise

By ERIC STOCK & EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • JAN 10, 2021

Nursing home operators say once the coronavirus is in a community, it's nearly impossible to keep it out of their facilities.

New Deadliest Outbreak At McLean County Long-Term Care Facility

By CHARLIE SCHLENKER • JAN 9, 2021

A COVID-19 outbreak at Heritage Health in Normal has become the deadliest such event at a long-term care facility in McLean County.

Why Some Health Care Workers Hesitate To Take Vaccine—And Why That's OK

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 8, 2021

Health care workers were given top priority when COVID-19 vaccines were rolled out across the country. But not all who are eligible are jumping at the opportunity.

Consumer Group Wants Another Round Of Refunds From Auto Insurers

By RYAN DENHAM • JAN 8, 2021

A consumer advocacy group wants auto insurers like State Farm to give back even more money to their customers who are driving less because of the pandemic.

McLean County Sets New One-Day High For COVID Cases

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 8, 2021

McLean County health officials reported a new one-day record of 222 coronavirus cases on Friday, while the county's rolling testing positivity rate surged to its highest level since early December.

MCHD Confirms 50 New COVID Cases; Hospitalizations Continue To Climb

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 7, 2021

The McLean County Health Department confirmed 50 new COVID-19 cases on Thursday, as the county's testing positivity rate dropped to its lowest level in more than a week.

McLean County Nursing Home Disputes COVID-19 Data

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 7, 2021

The head of the McLean County Nursing Home says the state and the media are reporting incorrect COVID-19 data related to the facility in north Normal.

COVID Treatment At OSF Reduces Hospitalizations

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 6, 2021

A new COVID treatment has shown promising results for some patients in central Illinois.

McLean County Adds 3 More COVID Deaths; 72 Cases

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 6, 2021

The McLean County Health Department is reporting three more COVID-19 related deaths. They include a woman in her 80s who lived in a long-term care facility, as well as two men—one in his 50s and one in his 80s—who did not.

Nursing Homes In McLean County Begin COVID-19 Vaccinations

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 5, 2021

Some nursing homes in McLean County have started doling out long-awaited COVID-19 vaccines, but many health care workers are refusing to participate.

McLean County Reaches New COVID Hospitalization Record; Nursing Homes Continue To Get Hit Hard

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 5, 2021

The number of McLean County residents hospitalized with COVID-19 more than doubled overnight, up to 37 patients.

Lawsuit Claims 'Gross Negligence' In COVID Death At Bloomington Nursing Home

By ERIC STOCK • JAN 4, 2021

The family of a Bloomington nursing home resident who died of COVID-19 is suing the facility's owner, claiming gross negligence for failing to prevent a coronavirus outbreak that led to 11 deaths at the long-term care facility.

MCHD Reports 12 More COVID Deaths; 299 New Cases

By DANA VOLLMER • JAN 4, 2021

The McLean County Health Department is reporting 12 more COVID-19 related deaths and 299 new confirmed cases over the holiday weekend.

Vaccine Arrives At Deadliest Moment For McLean County's Long-Term Care Facilities

By RYAN DENHAM • JAN 2, 2021

The first COVID vaccines are arriving at McLean County's long-term care facilities at the pandemic's deadliest moment.

EDUCATION AND FAMILY

YWCA Strive Helps Underserved Job Seekers Overcome Employment Barriers

By DARNYSHA MITCHELL • FEB 4, 2021

In a time when employment and opportunities appear dim, YWCA Strive of Bloomington-Normal offers hope for those determined to seek redirection toward purpose.

Election 2021: Unit 5 School Board Candidates On Issues Of Race, Equity

By DANA VOLLMER • MAR 31, 2021

Issues of diversity and equity are top of mind after a year of renewed calls for civil rights and social justice reform. Some of those conversations center on American schools -- what students are taught, how they're treated, and what their teachers look like.

Illinois Education Association President Discusses Challenges For Teachers, Students During Pandemic

By CHRISTINE HATFIELD • MAR 23, 2021

The pandemic has reduced the number of students who want to become teachers.

Mandatory Sex Education Bill Advances In Illinois House

By CHRISTINE HATFIELD • MAR 17, 2021

A bill requiring updated sex education standards in Illinois public schools has advanced out of the Elementary and Secondary Education Committee on School Curriculum and Policies in the Illinois House. The vote fell along party lines.

Baby Fold Embraces Digital Family Services Amid COVID

By DANA VOLLMER • MAR 10, 2021

Social service agencies have had to integrate more technology into their outreach amid COVID. Some of those changes could stick, even after the pandemic ends.

Unit 5 To Expand In-School Learning To Junior High, High Schools

By ERIC STOCK • MAR 9, 2021

Unit 5 plans to expand in-person instruction to four days a week for students in grades 6-12 starting April 5.

New Study Shows Illinois Teacher Shortage Far From Over

By CHRISTINE HATFIELD • MAR 2, 2021

A new study shows Illinois is still struggling with a teacher shortage as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

Q&A: Rep. Brady Criticizes 'Culturally Responsive' Teaching Standards

By CHRISTINE HATFIELD • FEB 10, 2021

Republican lawmakers have been speaking out against new standards for teacher education being proposed by the Illinois State Board of Education.

Superintendents: 'Ambitious' Education Bill Would Create Challenges For Districts

By CHRISTINE HATFIELD • FEB 4, 2021

An education bill with wide-ranging provisions is drawing mixed reaction from central Illinois school superintendents.

Democratic State Legislators Reintroduce Mandatory Sex Education Bill

By CHRISTINE HATFIELD • FEB 2, 2021

Sexual health education could soon be mandatory in Illinois public schools under reintroduced legislation from Democrats in the General Assembly.

Black Legislative Caucus Education Bill Headed For Governor's Desk

By CHRISTINE HATFIELD • JAN 11, 2021

An education reform bill would force schools to test children even before they enter kindergarten. The Illinois Legislative Black Caucus spearheaded the measure, which passed through both houses of the General Assembly on Monday.

ELECTION 2021

Bloomington Mayoral Candidates Divided Over Cannabis, Public Safety

SARAH NARDI • The three candidates for Bloomington mayor agree on the importance of supporting small businesses and encouraging economic development. But they are starkly divided over how recreational cannabis should figure in the city's economic future.

Election 2021: Unit 5 School Board Candidates On Issues Of Race, Equity

DANA VOLLMER • AP PHOTO / JESSICA HILL

Issues of diversity and equity are top of mind after a year of renewed calls for civil rights and social justice reform. Some of those conversations center on American schools -- what students are taught, how they're treated, and what their teachers look like.

Election 2021: Normal Town Council Candidate Priorities

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • STAFF / WGLT

The job of a Normal Town Council member doesn't pay much. It comes with a lot of headaches. It takes a lot of work to listen to residents and translate that into policy. Yet nine people are running for election to three positions on April 6.

Finding Consensus: How Bloomington City Council Candidates Would Tackle Relationship-Building

RYAN DENHAM • STAFF / WGLT

You don't have to look to Washington, D.C., to find policymakers who just don't seem to get along politically or personally.

Normal Council Member Stan Nord Alleges Discrimination; Independent Lawyer Disagrees

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • STAFF / WGLT

Normal Town Council member Stan Nord has accused City Manager Pam Reece and Mayor Chris Koos of discriminating against him.

District 87 Candidates Focus On Superintendent Search, Diversity

ERIC STOCK • COURTESY

UPDATED 8:10 P.M. | Voters in District 87 don't have a lot of choices when they make their school board selections on election day, but the new board will have one of its most important decisions to make soon after it is sworn in this spring.

Election 2021: Putting Normal Property Tax Claims In Context

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

Tax rates are a campaign theme in most elections no matter the level of the contest. This year's race for mayor of Normal is no exception.

Koos, Tiritilli Discuss Leadership, Fiscal Policy In Mayoral Debate

ERIC STOCK • COURTESY

Marc Tiritilli used two recent Illinois attorney general rulings against the Town of Normal's previous public comment policy to accuse Mayor Chris Koos of a "failure of leadership" during a virtual debate in the mayor's race on Tuesday.

Meet The Candidates: Unit 5 School Board

DANA VOLLMER • Nearly half of the Unit 5 school board will turn over after the April 6 election. Three seats are up for grabs, with no incumbents running.

Heartland Board Candidates Discuss Pandemic, Enrollment, Equity In Forum

SARAH NARDI • The pandemic and issues surrounding social equity loomed large during a Thursday night forum attended by candidates for the Heartland Community College board of trustees.

New Attorney General Ruling On Town Of Normal Meetings

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • BREANNA GROW / WGLT

The Illinois attorney general has ruled the Town of Normal should not have barred citizen comment on an issue back in 2019. It's the second such ruling in a month.

Bloomington Council Candidates Discuss Priorities, Police Funding In Forum

SARAH NARDI • The Pantagraph on Wednesday evening hosted a virtual forum for Bloomington City Council candidates. With contested seats in four wards, eight candidates fielded questions from moderator and central Illinois editor Chris Coates.

District 87 Candidate 'Disgusted' With Former Ally's Posts

ERIC STOCK • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

A District 87 school board candidate has distanced himself from another candidate who dropped out of the race after a history of offensive social media posts surfaced.

Attorney General Rules Town Of Normal Violated Open Meetings Act

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

The Illinois attorney general has ruled the Town of Normal violated the Open Meetings Act in mid-September 2019 by denying Marc Tiritilli the right to speak to the council about public transit because the topic was not on the agenda.

Where Bloomington City Council Candidates Stand On Social, Economic Justice Issues

RYAN DENHAM • Whether and how the Bloomington City Council tackles some of the thorniest social justice issues in the community may hinge on the outcome of the April 6 election.

District 87 School Board Candidate Jon Reed Formally Withdraws From Race

RYAN DENHAM • UPDATED 12:30 p.m. | District 87 school board candidate Jon Reed has formally withdrawn from the race, election officials said Tuesday.

District 87 School Board Candidate Suspends Campaign After Offensive Posts Resurface

RYAN DENHAM • A District 87 school board candidate apparently suspended his campaign Friday after his history of posting racist and misogynist content to social media came to light.

Normal Town Council Hopefuls Differ On Social Issues

ERIC STOCK • WGLT FILE PHOTO

Much of the debate in the Normal Town Council and mayor's races has centered on taxes, debt and town essentials, including roads and water. But several town council candidates say town government also has a role in fostering diversity and inclusion.

Fact Check: Tiritilli's COVID Criticism Of Koos Misses The Mark

RYAN DENHAM • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

Normal Mayor Chris Koos and his challenger, Marc Tiritilli, disagree on what's the most important issue facing the community. During a WGLT debate this week, Koos argued that it's COVID-19. Tiritilli said "COVID is a crisis, but it's not the most important issue facing the community. The most important is division. That subsumes all of the other issues."

Normal Town Council Races: Development Incentives

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • STAFF / WGLT

The nine candidates running for Normal Town Council split down the middle on the proper role of government in building the tax base and offering development incentives.

Rivian To Add 1,800 Jobs In Next 9 Months At Normal Plant

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • RIVIAN

Rivian continues to ramp up hiring as the start of production approaches in June. The electric vehicle maker will begin manufacturing vans, trucks, and SUVs over the summer and early autumn.

Bloomington Police Union Enters Council Races With Big Campaign Contributions

RYAN DENHAM • The union that represents Bloomington Police officers has made two big-dollar campaign contributions to city council candidates, in the latest sign that local police reform efforts may hinge in part on the outcome of the April 6 election.

Bloomington Mayoral Candidates Outline Pandemic Recovery Priorities

RYAN DENHAM • RYAN DENHAM / WGLT

The three candidates for Bloomington mayor agree that the economic recovery from the pandemic will demand a lot of attention if they're elected. They have different views of what the city government's role should be in supporting that recovery.

Bloomington Council Candidates Talk Pandemic Recovery

RYAN DENHAM • NAM Y. HUH / AP

The candidates running for mayor and city council in Bloomington mostly praise what city government has done so far in providing relief to residents and small businesses.

Why Town Borrowing Is A Key Issue In Race For Normal Mayor

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • COURTESY

This story is about debt, specifically Town of Normal debt; what's healthy and what's not. It's a campaign issue in this year's mayoral and city council contests.

B-N Council Candidates Have Few Fixes For Rising Public Safety Pension Costs

ERIC STOCKCHARLIE SCHLENKER • WGLT FILE PHOTO

It's an issue that doesn't get much play in political campaigns, but it could have major impacts on how Bloomington and Normal governments operate for decades to come.

Bloomington Council Candidates Lay Out Economic Development Goals

DANA VOLLMER • WGLT FILE PHOTO

Business development and revenue generation are big parts of city government. Candidates for Bloomington City Council offer different ideas on how to achieve that.

How Bloomington's Mayoral Candidates Would Balance Core Services, Economic Growth and Social Justice

RYAN DENHAM • Bloomington voters this spring will choose their first new mayor in eight years. The choice is between a low-key veteran city council member and two political newcomers with very different backgrounds. One of them will replace Tari Renner, who is not seeking a third term.

Cumpston, Ward Claim Victory in Bloomington's Ward 7 Primary

MICHELE STEINBACHER • Unofficial results show Kelby Cumpston and Mollie Ward have won Tuesday's primary election for Bloomington's Ward 7 seat.

Meet The Candidates: Bloomington Ward 7

DANA VOLLMER

Five candidates are vying for the Ward 7 seat on the Bloomington City Council. But only two will appear on the ballot in the April 6 municipal election. This week, voters will determine who those finalists will be.

2 Normal Township Candidates Removed From Ballot

ERIC STOCK • KEN CHUI

A McLean County judge has removed from the ballot two Republican candidates in Normal Township races in the spring municipal election.

2 Candidates Withdraw From Unit 5 School Board Race

ERIC STOCK • GOOGLE MAPS

Two candidates have withdrawn their candidacies for Unit 5 school board, following a challenge to their petitions.

Trump Supporter, Normal Council Candidate Hosts Bus Trip To DC Ahead Of Riot

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • FACEBOOK

A candidate for Normal Town Council participated in the events that became an insurrection and riot at the nation's capital on Wednesday.

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

College Students Await COVID-19 Vaccine In Hopes Of Return To Normalcy

DARNYSHA MITCHELL • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

As COVID-19 vaccines roll out across the country, many people slated to receive their shots later say they look forward to a more normal version of life—college students, for instance.

30 COVID Patients Hospitalized In McLean County

ERIC STOCK • WGLT FILE PHOTO / WGLT

Thirty McLean County residents are hospitalized with COVID-19 -- the highest total since mid-January and continuing a six-week trend of increasing hospitalizations.

Review Finds 30 More COVID-Related Deaths In McLean County

ERIC STOCK • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

UPDATED 4:20 p.m. | The McLean County Health Department (MCHD) announced Friday it has determined an additional 30 deaths are linked to COVID-19, with many them happening in December when deaths tied to the pandemic peaked.

Illinois Medical Group Urges Veto Of Pretrial Interest Bill

ERIC STOCK • SETH PERLMAN / AP

The Illinois Senate has approved a bill that would increase payouts for verdicts in personal injury and wrongful death lawsuits.

McLean County's COVID Positivity Rate Nears 4%

ERIC STOCK • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

McLean County's coronavirus testing positivity rate reached its highest level in nearly two months on Tuesday as active cases grow and hospitalizations remain stable.

McLean Co. Tops 15K COVID Cases, 20K Fully Vaccinated

ERIC STOCK • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

McLean County has surpassed 15,000 confirmed and probable coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic.

COVID Vaccinations Increase; Pandemic At 'Fragile Point'

ERIC STOCK • ILLINOIS ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE

Gov. JB Pritzker announced Friday the state will expand vaccine eligibility to include more essential workers.

McLean County Reports 2 COVID Deaths

ERIC STOCK • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

McLean County reported two more COVID-related deaths on Friday to bring the county's death toll to 177.

Black Legislative Caucus Health Care Bill Heads To Illinois Senate

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • A health care bill spearheaded by the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus has passed out of the State House on a party line vote.

McLean County Opens COVID Vaccine Appointments For Next Week

ERIC STOCK • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

The McLean County Health Department (MCHD) has announced it will begin scheduling COVID vaccine appointments for all eligible first-dose recipients starting at 11 a.m. for its clinics next week. That includes those in Phases 1A, 1B and 1B+ populations.

McLean County's Active COVID Cases Rise; Hospitalizations Stable

ERIC STOCK • COURTESY

McLean County has reached its highest number of active COVID-19 cases in nearly a month, while hospitalizations and testing positivity remain largely stable.

The McLean County Health Department (MCHD) announced 24 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday. Twenty-three McLean County residents are hospitalized with COVID-19. That's unchanged since Friday.

Bloomington-Normal hospitals report 87% of their beds are occupied and 65% of intensive care beds are in use. Both numbers are down since Tuesday. Those hospitals have eight COVID-19 patients.

McLean County Tops 50,000 COVID Vaccinations

ERIC STOCK • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

More than 50,000 COVID-19 vaccines have been put in people's arms in McLean County, while nearly 11% of the county's residents have received both vaccine doses.

McLean County Expanding COVID Vaccine Eligibility This Week

ERIC STOCK • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

The McLean County Health Department (MCHD) has announced it will begin scheduling COVID-19 vaccinations for the expanded Phase 1B+ population. The move comes weeks earlier than expected as vaccine supplies have increased across the county.

COVID 1 Year Later: Checking In With A COVID Long Hauler

DANA VOLLMER • COURTESY PATTI WELANDER

This story is part of a special episode of Sound Ideas airing March 12, marking the one-year anniversary of COVID's arrival in McLean County. Find more stories in the series.

McLean County To Expand COVID Vaccinations ‘Very Soon’

ERIC STOCK • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

The McLean County Health Department plans to open more appointments for COVID vaccinations at 11 a.m. Thursday for two first-dose clinics.

McLean County Reports 2 COVID Deaths; Positivity Rate Drops

ERIC STOCK • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

McLean County has reported two additional COVID-related deaths to bring its death toll to 175 since the pandemic began a year ago.

Volunteers Help Seniors Sign Up For COVID Vaccines

ERIC STOCK • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

A volunteer group in McLean County is providing a shot in the arm for COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

COVID Death Rates Vary Widely By Age In McLean County

ERIC STOCK • ROBERT F. BUKATY / AP

Data from the McLean County Health Department (MCHD) show a much greater risk of dying from COVID-19 the older someone is.

Federal Saliva Test Approval Too Late For Use At ISU

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

The federal government has issued emergency use authorization for a coronavirus saliva test developed by the University of Illinois for broader use around the state.

B-N Hospital Capacity Limited Despite Drop In COVID Cases

ERIC STOCK • WGLT FILE PHOTO / WGLT

UPDATED 12:10 P.M. | Hospital bed capacity in Bloomington-Normal remains limited despite a steady decline in coronavirus cases.

State Closes Book On 5 Long-Term Care Outbreaks

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

Five nursing homes and retirement communities in McLean County have now gone a month without a new case of COVID-19, leading the Illinois Department of Public Health to remove them from the list of active outbreaks.

Cleaning Staff At B-N Hospitals Are COVID's Unsung Heroes

RYAN DENHAM • OSF HEALTHCARE / COURTESY

For Robin Dennewitz, the best part of her cleaning job at OSF Healthcare St. Joseph Medical Center is talking to the patients. And they've never needed her more.

Needs Soar For Homeless Youth In Bloomington-Normal

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • PROJECT OZ

More young adults in Bloomington-Normal need shelter now than during the early part of the pandemic.

Project Oz Youth Service Director Cheris Larson said at the start of the pandemic, many vulnerable youth had jobs, but friends stopped letting them couch surf because they feared the virus. Larson said there are now longer term homeless young people.

McLean County: Expanded Vaccinations Could Be Delayed

ERIC STOCK • TIM SHELLEY / WGLT

UPDATED 4:25 P.M. | McLean County Health Department Administrator Jessica McKnight said she's not sure the county will be ready to expand COVID vaccine availability on the state's timeline.

COVID Infections Slow At Long-Term Care Facilities In McLean County

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • The pace of new COVID-19 infections at long-term care facilities in McLean County has slowed as vaccinations increase in those facilities and among those over the age of 65. Seven facilities with previous active outbreaks have had no new cases in two weeks.

MCHD: New COVID-19 Cases Drop; More Vaccine Coming

ERIC STOCK • ROBERT F. BUKATY / AP

UPDATED 5:05 P.M. | McLean County surpassed 14,000 coronavirus cases Friday, though the rate of new infections continues to drop.

University Presidents Ask For Quicker Campus Vaccinations

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • WGLT

The heads of colleges and universities in Illinois are asking Gov. JB Pritzker to move higher education faculty and staff up to 1B in the vaccination queue.

McLean County Switches Vaccine Platforms After Notification Issues

ERIC STOCK • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

McLean County has shifted to a new COVID-19 vaccine signup platform after many people have reported problems getting notifications about upcoming clinics.

ISU Lecture On COVID Immunity Addresses FAQs

DANA VOLLMER • AP PHOTO/JOHN LOCHER, FILE

It's been nearly two months since the first COVID-19 vaccine received emergency use authorization from the Federal Drug Administration. More than one million doses have been given in Illinois, including more than 15,000 in McLean County.

McLean County Gets 'Bonus' Vaccine Shipment

ERIC STOCK • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

Black Immunologist Shares Ins And Outs Of COVID Vaccines

BREANNA GROW • BREANNA GROW / WGLT

Dr. James A. Thompson is one of many Black physicians who have taken up the mantle of educating communities of color about the new COVID-19 vaccines.

McLean County Ties Record For Monthly COVID Deaths

ERIC STOCK • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

UPDATED 5:30 P.M. | McLean County has matched December's record number of 51 COVID-related deaths in January as the county reported six more deaths on Friday.

COVID Cases Keep Falling In McLean County; 12 New Cases Added

ERIC STOCK • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

McLean County continues to see a drop in new coronavirus cases as health officials report their lowest one-day total since Oct. 15.

McLean County Adds 30 COVID Cases; Hospitalizations Steady

ERIC STOCK • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

UPDATED 12:15 P.M. | The rate of new coronavirus cases continues to slow in McLean County, while COVID-19 hospitalizations are mostly unchanged.

McLean County's COVID Caseload Drops; More Vaccine Locations Announced

ERIC STOCK • JENNY KANE / AP

UPDATED 12:15 P.M. | McLean County's active COVID-19 caseload continues to fall, though available bed space in Bloomington-Normal hospitals remains limited.

IWU Alum Leading Mayo Clinic Vaccine Research On COVID Misconceptions

DANA VOLLMER • MAYO CLINIC

A Mayo Clinic vaccine researcher and Illinois Wesleyan University graduate says he's not surprised some people don't want to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

A December survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found about one in four Americans (27%) probably or definitely didn't plan on getting the shots, even if they were available for free and are deemed safe by scientists.

The survey found vaccine hesitancy was highest among Republicans (42%), people ages 30-49 (36%), and rural residents (35%). Black Americans also demonstrated more hesitancy than the general population (35%).

McLean County Announces 2 COVID Deaths, 89 New Cases

ERIC STOCK • STAFF / WGLT

UPDATED 1:00 P.M. | McLean County health officials announced the county's first two COVID-related deaths in a week on Wednesday. The drop in fatalities comes following a surge of 33 deaths in the first two weeks of 2021.

Pandemic Opens Door For Gay Men To Give Blood, But Outdated Policies Persist

DANA VOLLMER • AP PHOTO/JENS MEYER

There's a twisted silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic: Some gay and bisexual men are able to donate blood for the first time.

Federal Drug Administration (FDA) rules long forbid men who have sex with other men from donating blood. The policy dates back to the height of the the AIDS crisis, when HIV was not well understood and there was fear of a "contaminated" blood supply.

COVID Among Leading Causes Of Death In Central Illinois

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • REDDIT

Heart disease and cancer usually top the list of the reasons people die each year in central Illinois and throughout the state. The numbers tell a grim story: 48 weeks into the pandemic, you can add COVID-19 to the list.

COVID-19 is the third leading cause of death statewide and in most central Illinois counties, including McLean, Peoria, Woodford, and Tazewell.

B-N Hospital Capacity Shrinks; Arena To Host Vaccinations

ERIC STOCK • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

Hospital beds in Bloomington-Normal have reached 92% capacity, even as the number of McLean County residents hospitalized due to coronavirus complications has remained stable.

New Deadliest Outbreak At McLean County Long-Term Care Facility

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • A COVID-19 outbreak at Heritage Health in Normal has become the deadliest such event at a long-term care facility in McLean County.

Why Some Health Care Workers Hesitate To Take Vaccine—And Why That's OK

DANA VOLLMER • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

Health care workers were given top priority when COVID-19 vaccines were rolled out across the country. But not all who are eligible are jumping at the opportunity.

McLean County Sets New One-Day High For COVID Cases

ERIC STOCK • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

UPDATED 5:35 P.M. | McLean County health officials reported a new one-day record of 222 coronavirus cases on Friday, while the county's rolling testing positivity rate surged to its highest level since early December.

COVID Treatment At OSF Reduces Hospitalizations

ERIC STOCK • OSF HEALTHCARE

A new COVID treatment has shown promising results for some patients in central Illinois.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Illinois Education Association President Discusses Challenges For Teachers, Students During Pandemic

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • The pandemic has reduced the number of students who want to become teachers.

B-N, Peoria COVID Testing Sites Cut To 4 Days Per Week

ERIC STOCK • REDITUS LABS

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) has announced its COVID-19 testing sites in Bloomington, Peoria and eight other locations will scale back to four days a week as demand has declined.

Fire Destroys Bloomington Apartment Building

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • CHARLIE SCHLENKER / WGLT

Fire gutted a 20-unit apartment building Sunday evening on Bloomington's west side, with the Bloomington Fire Department saying the Red Cross is helping 36 tenants find other places to live.

B-N Hospitals Stay Nearly Full Despite COVID Case Drop

ERIC STOCK • JENNY KANE / AP

Hospital bed capacity remains limited in Bloomington-Normal, even as the number of COVID-19 cases has dropped.

Federal Saliva Test Approval Too Late For Use At ISU

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

The federal government has issued emergency use authorization for a coronavirus saliva test developed by the University of Illinois for broader use around the state.

State Closes Book On 5 Long-Term Care Outbreaks

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

Five nursing homes and retirement communities in McLean County have now gone a month without a new case of COVID-19, leading the Illinois Department of Public Health to remove them from the list of active outbreaks.

McLean County Cancels Vaccine Clinic; 1B Expansion on Hold

ERIC STOCK • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

About 900 McLean County residents who were set to receive their second COVID-19 vaccine dose on Friday will have to wait, while others hoping to become eligible for a first dose soon will likely have to wait for weeks.

Needs Soar For Homeless Youth In Bloomington-Normal

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • PROJECT OZ

More young adults in Bloomington-Normal need shelter now than during the early part of the pandemic.

Project Oz Youth Service Director Cheris Larson said at the start of the pandemic, many vulnerable youth had jobs, but friends stopped letting them couch surf because they feared the virus. Larson said there are now longer term homeless young people.

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The heads of colleges and universities in Illinois are asking Gov. JB Pritzker to move higher education faculty and staff up to 1B in the vaccination queue.

McLean County Switches Vaccine Platforms After Notification Issues

ERIC STOCK • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

McLean County has shifted to a new COVID-19 vaccine signup platform after many people have reported problems getting notifications about upcoming clinics.

COVID Among Leading Causes Of Death In Central Illinois

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • REDDIT

Heart disease and cancer usually top the list of the reasons people die each year in central Illinois and throughout the state. The numbers tell a grim story: 48 weeks into the pandemic, you can add COVID-19 to the list.

COVID-19 is the third leading cause of death statewide and in most central Illinois counties, including McLean, Peoria, Woodford, and Tazewell.

New Deadliest Outbreak At McLean County Long-Term Care Facility

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • A COVID-19 outbreak at Heritage Health in Normal has become the deadliest such event at a long-term care facility in McLean County.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Student, Staff Data Exposed In Heartland College Cyberattack

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • HEARTLAND.EDU

Personal information of thousands of current and former Heartland Community College students and staff has been posted on an unsavory section of the internet, putting them at risk of identity theft.

National Guard Helps ISU Run Vaccination Clinic

DANA VOLLMER • DANA VOLLMER / WGLT

Illinois State University is getting help from the National Guard to vaccinate eligible campus community members.

ISU Academic Senate Rejects Engineering College

RYAN DENHAM • CARLEIGH GRAY / WGLT

Illinois State University's Academic Senate voted narrowly Wednesday night to reject plans for a new engineering college.

ISU Science Labs Get \$4.2M In State Renovation Money

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • WGLT

Illinois State University will get \$4.2 million to improve science lab safety. The Capital Development Board has released the money for fume hood exhaust system renovation.

Second Wave Of COVID Grads See Better Job Outlook

DANA VOLLMER • ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

A year after the start of the pandemic, a second class of "COVID graduates" is hitting the job market—and they're on better footing than last year's college seniors. The job outlook is on an upswing, and grads say they feel better equipped to navigate the virtual landscape.

Classes Are Online, But Many Reasons Keep College Students In Normal

CATRINA PETERSEN • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

The hustle of running late to class, the passion students have for a course, and the persistence of earning a degree—it's all been moved online.

ISU Leaders Eye Launching College Of Engineering

DANA VOLLMER • SCREENSHOT / ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Illinois State University administrators are hoping to open a new College of Engineering.

University Presidents Ask For Quicker Campus Vaccinations

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • WGLT

The heads of colleges and universities in Illinois are asking Gov. JB Pritzker to move higher education faculty and staff up to 1B in the vaccination queue.

New Program Brings Underrepresented Students To STEM, Business And Ag Fields

DANA VOLLMER • STAFF / WGLT

Country Financial is partnering with the Heartland Community College Foundation to help underrepresented high school students jump start their college careers.

A new scholarship opportunity, called the Country Financial Scholars Program, will cover up to 18 credit hours of dual enrollment and dual credit classes a year for a dozen Bloomington-Normal area students interested in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, business or agriculture. Country Financial also will connect students with mentors in those areas.

Black Legislative Caucus Education Bill Headed For Governor's Desk

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • CHAPIN ROSE / COURTESY

UPDATED 11:16 a.m. | An education reform bill would force schools to test children even before they enter kindergarten. The Illinois Legislative Black Caucus spearheaded the measure, which passed through both houses of the General Assembly on Monday.

Higher Education Reform Bill Unveiled In Springfield

BLUEROOMSTREAM.COM

A bill aimed at making college education and teacher preparation programs more accessible and affordable for people of color began working its way through the General Assembly on Saturday with the formal introduction of language that lawmakers have been negotiating for months.

POLICE AND COURTS

Judge Reduces 70-Year Prison Sentence For Miller Park Teen Shooter

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • A judge on Monday cut in half Byron Merriweather's 70-year sentence in the 2003 shooting death of a man at Miller Park, after a review of how Merriweather's youth may have influenced his decision to pull the trigger.

Car Dealers Sue Rivian, Secretary Of State Over EV Sales

RYAN DENHAM • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

A group of Illinois car dealers has filed a lawsuit against Rivian and Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White, alleging that plans to sell electric vehicles directly to consumers—without going through a dealer—are illegal.

State Drops Case Against Man With Seizure Disorders

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • Five criminal cases were dismissed against a Bloomington man on Friday after the state acknowledged his mental health diagnosis and clean police record since a state human rights report criticized his treatment at the McLean County jail.

Proposed Measure Eases Registry Rules For Sex Offenders

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • Proposed legislation could make it easier for former sex offenders in Illinois to find a home and remove the threat of being forced to move if a childcare facility locates near them.

Teenage Shooter Seeks New Sentence For Miller Park Murder

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • Byron Merriweather was 17 when he shot a man at Miller Park during a 2003 fight between rival Twin City gangs, a crime that netted the teen 70 years in prison.

COVID 1 Year Later: Impact On Domestic Violence Is Hard To See

RYAN DENHAM • KAMIL ZIHNIOGLU / AP

This story is part of a special episode of Sound Ideas airing March 12, marking the one-year anniversary of COVID's arrival in McLean County. Find more stories in the series.

B-N Doctor Accused Of Sexual Assault Wants Records Sealed

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • BLOOMINGTON POLICE

A former Bloomington doctor accused of sexually assaulting a patient asked a judge Tuesday to seal court records related to the testimony of other potential victims the state may try to introduce at his trial.

McLean County Board Committee Weighs Resolution Backing Police Amid Criminal Justice Reform

DANA VOLLMER • FILE PHOTO: AMY NIEBUR / WGLT

With law enforcement and civil rights groups at odds over qualified immunity protections in Illinois, the McLean County Board Justice Committee on Tuesday was set to consider a resolution to reinforce the police position.

Exodus Hebert Gets 20 Years In Prison After Guilty Plea In Bloomington Murder

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • JAIL BOOKING PHOTOS

A 20-year-old Bloomington man was sentenced to 20 years in prison on Friday after pleading guilty to murder for his role in the April 2019 death of Juan Nash at an outdoor party in Bloomington.

Partnerships A Priority For Departing U.S. Attorney John Milhiser

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • U.S. ATTORNEY FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS

When John Milhiser took over as U.S. attorney for the Central District of Illinois in 2018, he had several priorities for the office, including plans to build working relationships with 365 law enforcement agencies dotted across the sprawling 46-county federal district.

Milhiser leaves office on Feb. 28, a departure he knew was possible when he moved into his Springfield office. Milhiser and other prosecutors who were appointed during the Trump administration, or confirmed by the Senate, were asked to resign recently as part of the Biden transition.

Hammet Brown Convicted Of Murder In 2018 Bloomington Shootings

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • DAVID PROEBER / THE PANTAGRAPH (POOL)

Hammet Brown was convicted of first-degree murder on Monday in the shooting deaths of two people and wounding of two others during a June 2018 party in Bloomington.

In Closing Remarks, Prosecutors Push Back On Self-Defense Claims In Bloomington Killings
EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • BLOOMINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

“A developing, festering rivalry” led Hammet Brown to fire the bullets that killed two people and wounded two others at a June 2018 party, Brown’s lawyer said in closing remarks on Wednesday at Brown’s bench trial.

2nd Fire Reported At Site Of Derailed Train In Normal

RYAN DENHAM • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

Spilled rail cargo caught fire again Monday at the site of a weekend train derailment near Uptown Normal.

Video: Crews Fight Large Apartment Fire In Normal

RYAN DENHAM, CHARLIE SCHLENKER, ERIC STOCK, CATRINA PETERSEN •

Crews worked the scene of a large fire that destroyed or heavily damaged 12 apartment units Saturday afternoon in Normal.

Video: Fire Breaks Out At Train Derailment Site

RYAN DENHAM, DARNYSHA MITCHELL, ERIC STOCK, CATRINA PETERSEN,
CAMBERYN KELLEY

Crews braved zero-degree weather on Sunday to extinguish a fire that broke out in the debris of a major freight train derailment near Uptown Normal.

Defense Sets Up Self-Defense Claim In Bloomington Murder Trial

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • BLOOMINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

Hammet Brown acted in self-defense when he killed two people at a Bloomington party in 2018, according to opening remarks from his lawyer on Monday, the first day of his bench trial on murder charges.

Gun Seizures Increase In Bloomington-Normal

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • NORMAL POLICE DEPARTMENT

Authorities in Bloomington-Normal say the number of gun seizures rose significantly in 2020 with police seizing a total of 94 firearms. That's a third more than the 61 seized in the two communities in 2019.

Prosecutors End Bloomington Murder Case By Alleging 'Lottery By Robbery'

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • DAVID PROEBER / THE PANTAGRAPH (POOL)

UPDATED 5:40 p.m. | “A lottery by robbery” was behind a 2018 shooting that killed three men and left a 4-year old boy paralyzed, a prosecutor said in closing remarks Monday in the triple homicide trial of Sydney Mays.

1 Killed, 1 Injured In Downtown Bloomington Shooting

RYAN DENHAM • BLOOMINGTON POLICE

UPDATED 3:10 p.m. | One woman was killed and another injured in a shooting early Saturday in downtown Bloomington, police said. A suspect is in custody.

Attorney's Medical Issue Pauses Bloomington Murder Trial

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • DAVID PROEBER / THE PANTAGRAPH (POOL)

The murder trial of Sydney Mays was put on hold Friday after his defense lawyer was taken to the hospital with an apparent nose bleed.

Memory Lapses Trip Up Testimony At Bloomington Murder Trial

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • DAVID PROEBER / THE PANTAGRAPH (POOL)

In the days leading up to a June 2018 triple murder, Sydney Mays was hanging out with people known to have drugs and guns in their homes, according to witnesses at Mays' bench trial.

Murder Trial Turns To Paralyzed Boy Who Survived Shooting

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • DAVID PROEBER / THE PANTAGRAPH (POOL)

An interview with the 4-year-old survivor of a triple homicide that claimed the life of his father was played in the courtroom on Wednesday in the murder trial of Sydney Mays.

Bench Trial Opens In Triple Homicide On Riley Drive

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • DAVID PROEBER / THE PANTAGRAPH (POOL)

The McLean County judge who will determine a verdict in the June 2018 triple homicide on Bloomington's Riley Drive heard opening statements Monday in the case against Sydney Mays.

Final Coliseum Defendant Pleads Guilty To Misdemeanor, Agrees To Restitution

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • DAVID PROEBER / THE PANTAGRAPH (POOL)

The last of five former officials charged with misconduct related to their oversight of Bloomington's city-owned arena pleaded guilty to misdemeanor theft on Friday and agreed to pay \$20,500 restitution to the city.

'A Runaway Train:' Shootings Steady But Concerns About Youths With Guns

SARAH NARDI • The number of shootings in Bloomington-Normal is steady compared to previous years, but law enforcement is concerned about the increasing intensity of gun violence among young people.

B-N Organizers Celebrate End To Cash Bail; More Work Ahead

BREANNA GROW • BREANNA GROW / WGLT

As a senior case worker at Labyrinth, YWCA McLean County's transitional housing program for formerly incarcerated women, Vera Traver has witnessed the devastating effects of cash bail.

But she's also lived them as a formerly incarcerated woman herself.

Fall Trial Set For Piano Teacher On Child Porn Charges

EDITH BRADY-LUNNY • BLOOMINGTON POLICE

An October trial date was set on Monday for a former Bloomington piano teacher accused of sexually assaulting his students and recording his lewd interactions with them

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Rich Buchanan, Former Bloomington Mayor, Longtime Public Servant, Dies

ERIC STOCK • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

Former Bloomington Mayor Rich Buchanan, who spent more than four decades in public service and helped strengthen collaboration between the Twin Cities, died Tuesday. He was 81.

Election 2021: Unit 5 School Board Candidates On Issues Of Race, Equity

DANA VOLLMER • AP PHOTO / JESSICA HILL

Issues of diversity and equity are top of mind after a year of renewed calls for civil rights and social justice reform. Some of those conversations center on American schools -- what students are taught, how they're treated, and what their teachers look like.

Republican Legislators Take Measured Stances In Bloomington-Normal LGBTQ Town Hall

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • Bloomington-Normal LGBTQ residents and allies told area legislators about their wants and needs Monday night at a virtual town hall to highlight issues still facing the community. They favor certain pieces of legislation, and say they're hoping for lawmaker support.

Rep. Davis Says Reopening In Sight, As Vaccine Production Booms

DANA VOLLMER • DANA VOLLMER / WGLT

U.S. Rep. Rodney Davis sees a light at the end of the tunnel when it comes to COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

Election 2021: Normal Town Council Candidate Priorities

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • STAFF / WGLT

The job of a Normal Town Council member doesn't pay much. It comes with a lot of headaches. It takes a lot of work to listen to residents and translate that into policy. Yet nine people are running for election to three positions on April 6.

Q&A: Sen. Barickman On Republican Redistricting Concerns

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • Many Illinois Republicans are calling for an independent redistricting process. This comes amid uncertainty when data from the U.S. Census Bureau will be available.

Finding Consensus: How Bloomington City Council Candidates Would Tackle Relationship-Building

RYAN DENHAM • STAFF / WGLT

You don't have to look to Washington, D.C., to find policymakers who just don't seem to get along politically or personally.

Bill Expanding Curbside, Mail Voting Headed For Governor's Desk

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • RYAN DENHAM / WGLT

A bill that would expand voting rights is on its way to the governor after passing the Illinois Senate on Thursday. It would increase vote-by-mail options and allow curbside voting permanently.

Q&A: Bloomington City Manager On What Criminal Justice Reform Could Mean For Police Departments

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • Change is on the way for Illinois police departments.

Election 2021: Putting Normal Property Tax Claims In Context

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

Tax rates are a campaign theme in most elections no matter the level of the contest. This year's race for mayor of Normal is no exception.

ISU Science Labs Get \$4.2M In State Renovation Money

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • WGLT

Illinois State University will get \$4.2 million to improve science lab safety. The Capital Development Board has released the money for fume hood exhaust system renovation.

Q&A: Republican House Redistricting Spokesperson Discusses Priorities For Remap Process

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • Next month, the Illinois House Redistricting Committee is set to hold a series of hearings to determine the direction the map redrawing process proceeds in.

Lawmakers won't have census data until September, but are constitutionally required to complete the process by the end of June.

Black Legislative Caucus Health Care Bill Heads To Illinois Senate

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • A health care bill spearheaded by the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus has passed out of the State House on a party line vote.

New Attorney General Ruling On Town Of Normal Meetings

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • BREANNA GROW / WGLT

The Illinois attorney general has ruled the Town of Normal should not have barred citizen comment on an issue back in 2019. It's the second such ruling in a month.

Mandatory Sex Education Bill Advances In Illinois House

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • A bill requiring updated sex education standards in Illinois public schools has advanced out of the Elementary and Secondary Education Committee on School Curriculum and Policies in the Illinois House. The vote fell along party lines.

Attorney General Rules Town Of Normal Violated Open Meetings Act

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • EMILY BOLLINGER / WGLT

The Illinois attorney general has ruled the Town of Normal violated the Open Meetings Act in mid-September 2019 by denying Marc Tiritilli the right to speak to the council about public transit because the topic was not on the agenda.

Tiritilli is now running for mayor and has criticized the administration for squelching opposing points of view.

Dwight Meadery Owner Says Senate Bill Would Help Expand Business

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • A Bloomington state senator's bill would allow businesses producing mead to sell to local breweries. Mead is an alcoholic beverage made from honey.

McLean County Financial Outlook Steady, But Future Less Certain

DANA VOLLMER • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

McLean County government leaders present a confident budget outlook for 2021, but say it's uncertain how COVID-19 could impact financial health in the coming years.

Normal Town Council Races: Development Incentives

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • STAFF / WGLT

The nine candidates running for Normal Town Council split down the middle on the proper role of government in building the tax base and offering development incentives.

\$1.9 Trillion COVID-19 Relief Package Wins Final Passage; LaHood, Davis Vote 'No'

RYAN DENHAM • STAFF / WGLT

UPDATED 3:50 p.m. | Bloomington-Normal's two Republican congressmen voted against the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package that's now headed to President Biden's desk.

Bloomington Mayoral Candidates Outline Pandemic Recovery Priorities

RYAN DENHAM • RYAN DENHAM / WGLT

The three candidates for Bloomington mayor agree that the economic recovery from the pandemic will demand a lot of attention if they're elected. They have different views of what the city government's role should be in supporting that recovery.

Illinois Video Game Ban Bill Faces Uphill Legal, Scientific Battles

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • A state representative wants to ban violent video games. He says they contribute to increased carjacking in Chicago. It's far from the first time state lawmakers have taken the idea for a test drive.

Bloomington Council Candidates Talk Pandemic Recovery

RYAN DENHAM • NAM Y. HUH / AP

The candidates running for mayor and city council in Bloomington mostly praise what city government has done so far in providing relief to residents and small businesses.

Durbin, Duckworth Tout Billions For Illinois In COVID Relief Package

RYAN DENHAM • MANDEL NGAN / AP

Illinois' Democratic senators are touting billions in federal dollars that would come back to the state if the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package wins final passage.

Why Town Borrowing Is A Key Issue In Race For Normal Mayor

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • COURTESY

This story is about debt, specifically Town of Normal debt; what's healthy and what's not. It's a campaign issue in this year's mayoral and city council contests.

Pandemic Struggles Continue For Illinois Unemployment Agency

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • A year into the COVID-19 pandemic, the Illinois Department of Employment Security continues to take criticism over issues ranging from fraud to its response time for unemployment claims. State lawmakers say there needs to be a paradigm shift.

Rep. Robin Kelly Wins Tight Race For Democratic Party Chair

Illinois' Democratic State Central Committee elected U.S. Rep. Robin Kelly as its new chair Wednesday night on a razor thin margin.

Years Later, Illinois Rape Crisis Centers Still Recovering From Budget Impasse

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • Rape crisis centers are facing many hardships during the pandemic. Many are struggling to maintain services their clients rely on and balance budgets. Center leaders say it's a repeat of what they went through during the Illinois budget impasse.

New Study Shows Illinois Teacher Shortage Far From Over

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • A new study shows Illinois is still struggling with a teacher shortage as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

Q&A: Sen. Barickman Says Gov. Pritzker Not Willing To Work With Republicans On Budget

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • JASON BARICKMAN / COURTESY

Illinois Republicans continue to criticize what they say is an unbalanced budget proposal from Gov. JB Pritzker. The Senate Republican floor leader is no exception.

How Bloomington's Mayoral Candidates Would Balance Core Services, Economic Growth and Social Justice

RYAN DENHAM • Bloomington voters this spring will choose their first new mayor in eight years. The choice is between a low-key veteran city council member and two political newcomers with very different backgrounds. One of them will replace Tari Renner, who is not seeking a third term.

Signing Of Criminal Justice Bill Raises Implementation Concerns

JOE DEACONCHRISTINE HATFIELD • JOE DEACON / WCBU

Gov. JB Pritzker has signed a criminal justice reform bill spearheaded by the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus. But questions linger among activists, lawmakers and law enforcement officials over the effects of the bill.

How McLean County Shaped Rep. Adam Kinzinger

ERIC STOCK • KEVIN DEITSCH / POOL VIA AP

Illinois Republican Rep. Adam Kinzinger's support for impeachment of former President Donald Trump helped make Kinzinger a national political figure. He's also taking heat from many within his own party and even his own family.

State Republicans Attack Pritzker For 'Reckless' Budget Proposal

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • STAFF / WGLT

Gov. J.B. Pritzker has released his proposal for the next Illinois budget as part of his State of the State address. But Republican lawmakers in the Peoria and Bloomington-Normal areas say it doesn't provide solutions to some of the state's biggest challenges.

B-N Mayors Pan Pritzker's Income Tax Grab

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • STAFF / WGLT

City and county leaders in McLean County said Wednesday one of Gov. JB Pritzker's budget proposals is a bad idea.

The governor has proposed taking 10% of the income tax money it currently shares with cities, towns, and counties through the Local Government Distributive Fund.

IWU Psychologist On How 'First Dogs' De-Stress The White House

DANA VOLLMER • TWITTER / THE FIRST DOGS OF THE UNITED STATES

The White House has two new four-legged occupants: Champ and Major Biden. The German shepherds are good for more than just a feel good story or photo op. They'll offer special benefits to workers on the Hill.

Needs Soar For Homeless Youth In Bloomington-Normal

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • PROJECT OZ

More young adults in Bloomington-Normal need shelter now than during the early part of the pandemic.

Project Oz Youth Service Director Cheris Larson said at the start of the pandemic, many vulnerable youth had jobs, but friends stopped letting them couch surf because they feared the virus. Larson said there are now longer term homeless young people.

In Illinois, The Fight For LGBTQ+ Rights Continues

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • In his first weeks in office, President Joe Biden has rolled back multiple federal policies that negatively affected LGBTQ+ people under former president Donald Trump. But in Illinois, policy advocates say there's still more battles to be fought.

Former State Senator, Republican AG Candidate Paul Schimpf To Run For Governor
BLUEROOMSTREAM.COM

Former state Sen. Paul Schimpf, who spent four years representing the 58th District and was the Republican Party's candidate for attorney general in 2014, announced Monday he will run for governor in 2022.

Q&A: Rep. Brady Criticizes 'Culturally Responsive' Teaching Standards
CHRISTINE HATFIELD • DAN BRADY / COURTESY

Republican lawmakers have been speaking out against new standards for teacher education being proposed by the Illinois State Board of Education.

Bloomington Fines 6 Bars For Tax And COVID Violations
CHARLIE SCHLENKER • CHARLIE SCHLENKER / WGLT

The Bloomington Liquor Commission fined two more establishments Tuesday for violating COVID-19 mitigation rules in January, and four others for tax violations.

Kinzinger Pushes For Trump Conviction Amid GOP Backlash
ERIC STOCK • HOUSE TELEVISION / AP

As former President Donald Trump's second impeachment trial gets underway, Illinois Republican Congressman Adam Kinzinger is leading a lonely crusade within his own party to seek a conviction.

Lawmakers, Advocates Aim To Address Racial Disparities Among Older Illinoisans
BLUEROOMSTREAM.COM

The senior advocacy group AARP is backing forthcoming legislation aimed at addressing racial disparities in health care, economic security and digital connectivity for Illinoisans over 50.

Central Illinois Republican Legislators Still Plan To Wait Their Turn For COVID Vaccine
CHRISTINE HATFIELD • CHAPIN ROSE / COURTESY

Bloomington-Normal and Peoria Republicans are blasting Gov. JB Pritzker's decision to include state lawmakers in phase 1B of Illinois' COVID vaccination efforts.

As GOP Pitches Constitutional Changes, Political Scientist Sees Potential 'Unintended Consequences'

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • KENT REDFIELD / COURTESY

Illinois Republicans have introduced state constitutional amendments that would give voters more control over state laws and officials, along with the constitution itself. A political scientist with University of Illinois Springfield said the bill may give voters too much control.

Bloomington Agencies Expand Services With Cannabis Tax Grants
CHARLIE SCHLENKER • PROJECT OZ

Two Twin City nonprofit agencies will expand services in areas of high need after being awarded state grants funded by marijuana tax money.

State Task Force Advocates For Greater Support For Children Of Jailed Parents

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • One out of every 20 children in Illinois has had a parent in jail or prison, according to a new report released Wednesday from a task force that members hope will ease challenges those children face.

Q&A: Sally Turner Replaces Bill Brady As 44th District State Senator

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • LOGAN COUNTY CLERK / COURTESY

Bill Brady's former Illinois Senate seat now belongs to a former Logan County clerk.

Proposed Normal Budget Reviewed Amid Uncertainties

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • TOWN OF NORMAL

The proposed budget for the Town of Normal is \$138 million next year and an estimated \$711 million over a five-year period.

State Senate Republican Floor Leader Barickman Looks Ahead To Budget Planning, Redistricting

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • JASON BARICKMAN / COURTESY

The Republican floor leader says the state Senate has "got to get back to work" after Senate leaders announced Thursday the session the following week would not take place as scheduled.

Jehan Gordon-Booth Named New House Speaker Pro Tempore

TIM SHELLEY • JOE DEACON / WCBU

State Rep. Jehan Gordon-Booth is the new Speaker Pro Tempore of the Illinois House.

Bloomington Headed For Welcoming Cities Vote - Again

BREANNA GROW • BREANNA GROW / WGLT

The Bloomington City Council will again consider a proposal for a Welcoming Cities ordinance, nearly three years after a group of council members halted a vote on a similar proposal.

McLean County GOP Divided Over Trump, Election Fraud Claims

ERIC STOCK • GERALD HERBERT / AP

President Donald Trump has long been a divisive figure in national politics. Now, he has become one within the Republican Party.

McLean County Democrats Pick Former Communications Chair To Head Party

BREANNA GROW • COURTESY

The former communications chair of the McLean County Democrats will now serve as party chair, filling the position vacated by Nikita Richards in November.

McLean County GOP Chair Slams Trump Impeachment

ERIC STOCK • JULIO CORTEZ / AP

The head of the McLean County Republican Party says Democrats should have focused more on unifying the country in President Donald Trump's final days in office, rather than pursuing a second impeachment.

State Farm Employee PAC Suspends Campaign Contributions After Capitol Riot

RYAN DENHAM • KEVIN DIETSCH / AP

Many large U.S. companies have suspended donations to members of Congress in the wake of last week's riot on Capitol Hill. State Farm's employee political action committee is joining them.

5 Republican Party County Chairs To Pick Bill Brady's Replacement This Month

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • BILL BRADY / COURTESY

The 44th State Senate District will have a new senator by the end of the month, after Bill Brady's resignation at the end of last year triggered an appointment process involving Republican chairs from the five counties that make up the district.

Governor Weighs In On Criminal Justice Reform Bill

• CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS BY JERRY NOWICKI

Gov. JB Pritzker took questions on a massive criminal justice omnibus bill backed by the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus on Monday, noting he was generally "in favor of the process and the work that the Black Caucus has done overall."

When pressed on specific provisions in the bill that have been seen as controversial, especially as it relates to changes in how policing is done in the state, Pritzker said he would wait until the final version of the bill is presented to him.

Law Enforcement Objects To Manner, Content Of Legal Reform Bill

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

Law enforcement officials and prosecutors said they feel blindsided by a massive criminal justice reform bill introduced by the Black Democratic Caucus in the Illinois House, with police saying they are shocked and surprised at the timing and sweeping scope of the measure.

GOP: Madigan's Suspended Campaign 'Historic,' Unsure If His Reign Is Over

ERIC STOCK • SETH PERLMAN / AP

In what could become one of the biggest shifts of political power in Illinois in decades, Mike Madigan announced Monday he's suspending his campaign for Illinois House Speaker.

Black Legislative Caucus Education Bill Headed For Governor's Desk

CHRISTINE HATFIELD • CHAPIN ROSE / COURTESY

UPDATED 11:16 a.m. | An education reform bill would force schools to test children even before they enter kindergarten. The Illinois Legislative Black Caucus spearheaded the measure, which passed through both houses of the General Assembly on Monday.

Commerce Bank's Employee PAC Stops Campaign Contributions After Capitol Riot

RYAN DENHAM • GOOGLE MAPS

Commerce Bank says its employee-funded political action committee (PAC) will no longer give money to members of Congress who have "impeded the peaceful transfer of power."

'You Holler Like Hell': B-N Leaders Speak Out Against Riot At Capitol

SARAH NARDI • WGLT

As Willie Halbert watched scenes of chaos unfold at the U.S. Capitol, she said she was neither shocked nor surprised.

Darin LaHood Votes To Certify Biden's Electoral College Win

RYAN DENHAM • STAFF / WGLT

U.S. Rep. Darin LaHood voted late Wednesday to certify President-elect Joe Biden's victory, though he says he still has "concerns about irregularities in the presidential election."

Durbin Decries 'Thugs' Who Desecrated Capitol Building

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin said he blames President Trump for the violence that desecrated the temple to democracy that is the U.S. Capitol.

During Wednesday's debate over objections to the electoral college vote, the Illinois Democrat said Trump wanted the mob to disrupt the constitutional process.

Trump Supporter, Normal Council Candidate Hosts Bus Trip To DC Ahead Of Riot

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • FACEBOOK

A candidate for Normal Town Council participated in the events that became an insurrection and riot at the nation's capital on Wednesday.

Illinois Lawmakers Condemn Pro-Trump Extremists Storming U.S. Capitol

TIM SHELLEY • JOSE LUIS MAGANA / AP

Illinois lawmakers of both parties are condemning insurrection after pro-Trump extremists stormed the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday.

Pritzker Calls for President Trump's Immediate Impeachment

TIM SHELLEY • Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker said Congress should immediately impeach and remove President Donald Trump from office.

Senior Housing Proposed For Fairview Building In Normal

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • TOWN OF NORMAL

A union-backed development group is moving forward with a \$9 million affordable senior housing project that would use the old TB Sanatorium in Normal.

Democrats Win 1 Of 2 Georgia Races, With Senate Control In Sight

DEIRDRE WALSH • Updated at 2:06 a.m. ET Wednesday

Democrats are hopeful about possibly taking total control of Washington after the Associated Press projected that the party had picked up one of two Georgia Senate seats early Wednesday morning.

The Senate runoff elections in Georgia on Tuesday were set to decide which party will hold the majority in the upper chamber, with Democrats already winning the presidency and holding a slim House majority.

State GOP Leaders Support Remote General Assembly Work Ahead Of Lamé Duck Session CHRISTINE HATFIELD • STAFF / WGLT

The Illinois House Republican leader said Monday his caucus is open to the idea of doing government work remotely as the General Assembly convenes for a lame duck session Friday.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

ISU Professor Makes Ribbiting Breakthroughs In Frog Research CATRINA PETERSEN • MATTHEW DUGAS

A thumb-sized frog lays very tiny eggs, but that didn't stop an Illinois State University professor at taking a closer look.

Professor Matthew Dugas studies poison dart frogs he keeps in a fish tank in a walk-in cooler in his laboratory. Dugas specifically studies parental care. He spent a lot of time focusing on the begging behavior tadpoles exhibit, similar to that of birds.

ISU Science Labs Get \$4.2M In State Renovation Money CHARLIE SCHLENKER • WGLT

Illinois State University will get \$4.2 million to improve science lab safety. The Capital Development Board has rel

TRANSPORTATION

Transit Board OKs 2-Month Extension Of Free B-N Bus Rides CHARLIE SCHLENKER • CONNECT TRANSIT

Bloomington Normal's public bus system will let people ride free through the end of May.

The Connect Transit board renewed the fare suspension to ease the impact of the pandemic. And for the first time since the coronavirus became prevalent, Connect Transit has specifically indicated a likely date to resume collecting fares -- June 1. That would include fixed-route buses and Connect Mobility paratransit service.

Connect Transit Chooses Former Pantagraph Site For Bus Center CHARLIE SCHLENKER • GOOGLE MAPS

The Connect Transit board has approved the former Pantagraph building in downtown Bloomington as the preferred location for a new \$18-20 million bus transfer center.

Connect Transit Studies 3 Transfer Center Sites In Downtown Bloomington ERIC STOCK • RALPH WEISHEIT / WGLT

Engineers outlined the pros and cons of three proposed sites for a bus transfer center in downtown Bloomington on Wednesday.

Connect Transit Names 3 Finalists For Location Of Downtown Transfer Center DANA VOLLMER • DANA VOLLMER / WGLT

Connect Transit has unveiled three potential locations for the new downtown Bloomington transfer center.

Normal Council OKs Senior Apartments at Fairview

MICHELE STEINBACHER • A project that will create an affordable senior housing development in a renovated building near Fairview Park moved forward Monday, with the Normal Town Council's support.

During the virtual meeting, the council unanimously approved the amended site plan for 901-905 N. Main St., at what's known as the old Fairview building.

Bloomington Council OKs Joining Welcoming America Program

MICHELE STEINBACHER • The Bloomington City Council on Monday overwhelmingly voted to join the Welcoming Network, a nonprofit group that prides itself on creating inclusive environments for immigrants through community engagement, job training and other initiatives.

Connect Transit Surveys Public On GM Search

ERIC STOCK • CONNECT TRANSIT

Bloomington-Normal's public transit agency is seeking public input on its search for a new general manager.

CIRA Sees Rays of Hope in Steady Leisure Travel

SARAH NARDI • Typically, December is a slow month for business travel at Central Illinois Regional Airport, but this year it was practically non-existent with airport director Carl Olson saying there was "no detectable business travel activity" the final month of 2020.

Normal Council Candidates Debate Finance, Infrastructure

MICHELE STEINBACHER • Candidates competing for three open seats on the Normal Town Council sparred Thursday over how best to handle town finances and infrastructure, future development, and whether divisive politics is tainting town governance.

Pantagraph Media hosted the forum, moderated by Central Illinois Editor Chris Coates. He asked candidates what they viewed as Normal's recent successes, what policy ideas they'd bring to the table if elected, and how they'd prioritize infrastructure funding, among other questions.

Election 2021: Normal Town Council Candidate Priorities

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • STAFF / WGLT

The job of a Normal Town Council member doesn't pay much. It comes with a lot of headaches. It takes a lot of work to listen to residents and translate that into policy. Yet nine people are running for election to three positions on April 6.

Car Dealers Sue Rivian, Secretary Of State Over EV Sales

RYAN DENHAM • ERIC STOCK / WGLT

A group of Illinois car dealers has filed a lawsuit against Rivian and Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White, alleging that plans to sell electric vehicles directly to consumers—without going through a dealer—are illegal.

Rivian To Add 1,800 Jobs In Next 9 Months At Normal Plant

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • RIVIAN

Rivian continues to ramp up hiring as the start of production approaches in June. The electric vehicle maker will begin manufacturing vans, trucks, and SUVs over the summer and early autumn.

Rivian Files For Plant Expansion

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • RIVIAN FILING WITH THE TOWN OF NORMAL

The electric automaker Rivian is preparing for the possibility of adding up to 10.6 million square feet of new space at its plant in Normal.

Why Rivian Would Want To Go Public

RYAN DENHAM • MARK LENNIHAN / AP

The electric automaker Rivian already has raised billions of dollars from the likes of Amazon and Ford. Why would it want to go public?

Amazon-Rivian Vans Now Being Road Tested

RYAN DENHAM • BUSINESS WIRE

Amazon's first Rivian-made electric delivery vans are now being tested in Los Angeles.

Rivian Lands \$2.65 Billion In New Investment Round

RYAN DENHAM • MEGAN MCGOWAN / WGLT

The electric automaker Rivian has brought in another \$2.65 billion in a new investment round as it prepares to begin production in Normal.

Report Points To 'Standoff' Between Insurers, Automakers On Self-Driving Data

RYAN DENHAM • GENE J. PUSKAR / AP

Auto insurers and carmakers must overcome corporate secrecy concerns and find a way to collaborate on data-sharing to facilitate the shift to higher levels of autonomous driving.

Why Utilities Need A Seat At The EV Table

RYAN DENHAM • MEGAN MCGOWAN / WGLT

An Illinois Commerce Commission member says regulators are ready and willing to work with utilities to smooth out the road toward vehicle electrification.

State Farm Plans To Cut Greenhouse Gas Emissions In Half By 2030

RYAN DENHAM • STAFF / WGLT

State Farm said Tuesday it will cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030, with plans to lean more on renewable energy, cut down on paper and fleet vehicles, and incentivize good behavior among its customers.

State Farm Nets \$3.7 Billion In 2020

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • STAFF / WGLT

Even with pandemic-driven refunds and rate decreases, State Farm made a lot of money in 2020. The Bloomington-based company's annual financial report showed net income of \$3.7 billion. That's well into positive territory, but down by more than a third from 2019. State Farm's net worth rose by 8.5%—thanks to stock market gains—to \$126.1 billion.

Lawsuits Filed Against Auto Insurers Over Rates In Pandemic

RYAN DENHAM • JOHN LOCHER / AP

Class action lawsuits were filed in Nevada against 10 major auto insurance companies on Tuesday, including State Farm, contending that the companies charged excessive insurance premiums during the pandemic by failing to account for a drop in driving and crashes.

State Farm Hiking Auto Insurance Rates

CHARLIE SCHLENKER • STAFF / WGLT

Bloomington-based State Farm is raising Illinois auto insurance rates by an average of 4.2%. That's less than the nearly 14% drop last year because of reduced driving due to the pandemic. The rate hike goes into effect March 29, according to a company statement.

State Farm Debuts 1st Super Bowl Ad With NFL Stars

DANA VOLLMER • SCREENSHOT / STATE FARM

State Farm will air its first Super Bowl ad on Sunday, featuring Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes and Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers, alongside Jake from State Farm.

State Farm Looks To Expand Blockchain Use For Speedier Auto Claims

RYAN DENHAM • STAFF / WGLT

State Farm says it plans to expand the use of a digital bookkeeping technology to speed up and streamline the auto claims process, after a successful trial run with USAA.

Report Points To 'Standoff' Between Insurers, Automakers On Self-Driving Data

RYAN DENHAM • GENE J. PUSKAR / AP

Auto insurers and carmakers must overcome corporate secrecy concerns and find a way to collaborate on data-sharing to facilitate the shift to higher levels of autonomous driving.

State Farm Employee PAC Suspends Campaign Contributions After Capitol Riot

RYAN DENHAM • KEVIN DIETSCH / AP

Many large U.S. companies have suspended donations to members of Congress in the wake of last week's riot on Capitol Hill. State Farm's employee political action committee is joining them.

Consumer Group Wants Another Round Of Refunds From Auto Insurers

RYAN DENHAM • JEFF CHIU / AP

A consumer advocacy group wants auto insurers like State Farm to give back even more money to their customers who are driving less because of the pandemic.

B-N Nonprofits Receive Passenger Vans From State Farm

CATRINA PETERSEN • BRODIE HURTADO

The pandemic has caused substantial need throughout the community, so State Farm decided to not sell five passenger vans and instead give them to Bloomington-Normal nonprofits.