



Bonnie Mornweg, Johnston City florist, whose idea sparked Andresen's annual Valentine's Dinner.

A Valentine Tradition Rooted in Friendship and Community

For more than 20 years, Valentine's Day in Johnston City has meant more than flowers and cards—it has meant gathering around the table, sharing a meal, and celebrating community. What began as a simple idea has grown into an anticipated annual tradition at Andresen's Restaurant and Event Center, 215 E. Broadway in Johnston City.

Andresen's Valentine's Dinner traces its roots back to the late Bonnie Mornweg, Johnston City's long-time florist and a beloved friend to many. Bonnie was

the one who first suggested trying a special Valentine's dinner. She passed away in 2009, but her idea lives on—proving she was right all along.

Andresen's owner Anthony Spiller remembers Bonnie especially this time of year. "She helped me with anything I wanted to do," he said. "I even used her sign at the four-way to advertise the café."

Their friendship began years earlier, when Beanie Babies were the big craze. Bonnie was overwhelmed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

City to recognize local service members, seeking names from community

The City of Johnston City is preparing to formally recognize members of the local community who are currently serving in the United States military, including active-duty personnel, reservists, and members of the National Guard.

The effort is being led by former City Councilman William Hatfield, who is working with city leaders to compile an accurate list of service members with ties to Johnston City. Those recognized will be presented with a certificate of appreciation during a future City Council meeting. For service members deployed or serving outside the area, certificates will be presented to family members.

"This is just a small way for our community to say thank you to our men and women in uniform," Hatfield said. "We want them to know that their service and sacrifice have not gone unnoticed back home."

To ensure accuracy, the city is asking family members and friends of service members to submit the correct spelling of names, along with current rank and branch of service. Hatfield noted that, in some



One of many service members the city hopes to honor, Hayden Byrley, in active service with the US Army and a firefighter with the JC Fire Department (JCFD photo).

cases, these certificates may also be used by service members as documentation toward promotion points or professional advancement within their military careers.

Hatfield, who also organizes Johnston City's annual Memorial Day observance, shared additional news regarding the 2026 ceremony. The keynote speaker for this year's Memorial Day service will be Kenny Hilliard, a Desert Storm veteran who retired as the highest-ranking non-commissioned officer in the United States Air Force.

Johnston City makes its pitch: Leaders launch business recruitment effort

Johnston City leaders are taking a proactive step to attract new businesses and investment, rolling out a formal outreach letter aimed at site selectors, developers, and corporate decision-makers across the region and beyond.

The letter, prepared by the Johnston City Planning and Development Committee and recently approved for distribution by the City Council, clearly signals: *Johnston City is open for business—and ready to grow.* The document outlines the city's location advantages, available commercial land, workforce strengths, and willingness to partner directly with businesses to bring projects from concept to construction.

A Strategic Location with Room to Grow

At the heart of the pitch is Johnston City's position along Interstate 57, with immediate access and visibility at Exit 59 on one of Southern Illinois' busiest transportation corridors. City leaders emphasize that Johnston City sits just north of Marion's expanding STAR Bonds district, placing it at the doorstep of the region's next wave of commercial and destination development.

The letter highlights more than 240 acres of commercial land near the interstate—both north and south of the interchange—available for development now. City officials note that they are prepared to assist with introductions, entitlements, utilities, and timelines to keep projects moving efficiently.

Incentives, Workforce, and Connectivity

Johnston City's participation in the Williamson County Enterprise Zone and its openness to Tax Increment Financing (TIF) are key selling points. According to the letter, these tools can be structured to support projects where appropriate, helping businesses manage startup and expansion costs.

The city also touts its workforce and livability. With a high rate of homeownership, a short average commute, and access to regional labor in healthcare, transportation, warehousing, and education, Johnston City positions itself as both business-friendly and family-friendly. Proximity to Southern Illinois University Carbondale and daily air service out of Veterans Airport of Southern Illinois further strengthens its regional connectivity.

A Hands-On, Pro-Development Approach

Perhaps most notable is the city's commitment to hands-on project support. The letter promises "one-stop project shepherding," offering site tours, permitting coordination, and timeline management, along with a goal of aligning approvals and infrastructure planning with a business's construction schedule.

"We want to be a partner, not a hurdle," the message conveys—an approach city leaders believe will set Johnston City apart in a competitive development landscape.

How Residents Can Help

City officials say this effort doesn't stop with one letter.

Why businesses should look at Johnston City:

- I-57 visibility at Exit 59
- 240+ acres of development-ready land
- Enterprise Zone & TIF opportunities
- Workforce access tied to regional growth

City leaders are actively recruiting new businesses and development.

Know a business owner or corporate decision-maker? Help spread the word about Johnston City.

Residents are encouraged to share Johnston City's strengths with friends, family members, and contacts who live or work outside the area—especially those who own businesses or influence corporate location decisions.

A conversation, a forwarded article, or a mention of Johnston City's interstate access, available land, and supportive local leadership could help open doors. Community pride and word-of-mouth advocacy remain powerful tools in shaping the city's future.

As the letter concludes, Johnston City is sending a clear message: *Growth is welcome here—and the community is ready to build it together.*

Local Realtor featured as Illinois host on national TV

Local Realtor Alysa Bunting is bringing Southern Illinois to a national audience as an Illinois host on *The American Dream TV*, a television program focused on business, community, and entrepreneurship.

Bunting, owner and designated managing broker of Indigo Realty LLC, appeared as a host in a recent episode of the series, which highlights local leaders and positive stories from communities across the country. The show emphasizes business growth, lifestyle, and regional opportunity rather than traditional news coverage.

Her debut episode aired in December, and a local premiere celebration was recently held to mark the occasion.

In addition to her work in real estate, Bunting is president of the Johnston City Rotary and serves on the Planning and Development Committee. She helped draft the City's letter inviting prospective businesses to consider Johnston City.

The American Dream TV

airs nationally through the American Dream Network and is available on cable, satellite, and streaming platforms, including Roku, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV, and Tubi, allowing viewers nationwide to watch episodes on demand.



Alysa Bunting of Indigo Realty appears on location at a Southern Illinois winery during her debut episode as an Illinois host on *The American Dream TV*. (Photo: the American Dream Network)

Provide name, rank, and service branch to: **Jade Savant, City Clerk**
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 618-983-6651 • 2011Clerk@gmail.com



February Features

Valentine Haiku by Washington School 6th Graders

SUBMITTED BY MARGIE SANDERS

Red hearts everywhere
Sweet chocolate for my friends
Love is in the air.
—Ava Szykowski

You make my heart smile.
Cupid's arrow shoots the heart.
Colorful roses
—Aiden Dudley

I feel enchanted.
My sweetheart, my valentine
I'm your beloved.
—Leia Ray

I feel enchanted
Every time I see you
And my heart flutters.
—Harper Williams

You are my sweetheart.
My heart melts when I see you.
You are my sunshine.
—Charlee Miller

My pupils grow big.
Butterflies begin to fly.
I love your bright smile.
—Juliana Adams

Passion means true love.
Love means you cherish someone.
Be my valentine.
—Aleah Taylor

Butterflies flutter.
My heart starts to melt for you.
I admire you.
—Draven Verschueren

A day about love
Chocolates and red roses
Hearts are everywhere.
—Addison Norris

When I see you
My brain completely turns off.
I can't stop looking.
—Lyric Neill

How charming you are
How my heart yearns to have you
How cupid helps me
—Miles Leitzen

My beautiful love
You enchanted my heart dear.
I grew fond of you.
—Gemma Lingafelter

My constant thinking
Her big blue eyes twinkling
I admire her so.
—Braxton Moon

Stars shine like your eyes.
Twinkling through the night sky
Like my devotion.
—Olivia Keller

My sweet valentine
Moonstruck when I saw you dear
A bliss grazed my heart.
—Rogue Cruz

Moonstruck for your heart
Love you from the moon and back
Love you like the world
—Olivia Keller

Devotion is made.
Memories are beginning.
Love is happening.
—Jaxson Miller

Butterflies flutter
In my life like the night stars
Shooting through the sky
—Dennis Leeper

Picnics in the park
Red roses everywhere
You are my sweetheart.
—Marlee Thompson

Butterflies dancing
Devotion rushing through me
You shine through the dark.
—Mason Biggs

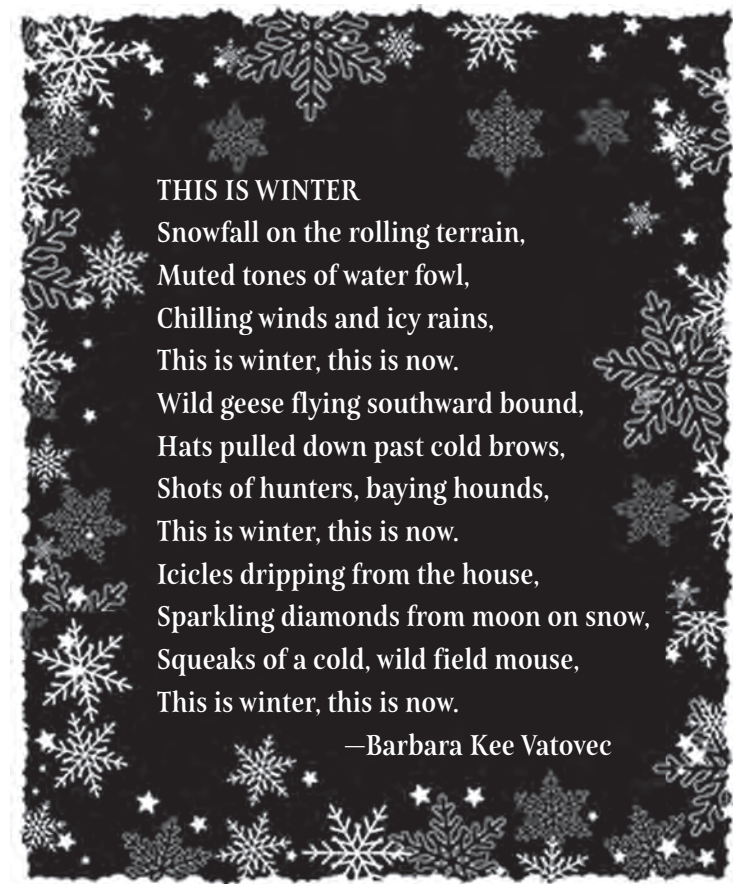
You are beautiful.
Your personality shines.
Your eyes are pretty.
—Ryder Smith

Moonstruck valentine
You're enchanted like the moon.
Your eyes twinkle bright.
—Jo Jo Thorne

Cupid struck my heart.
Adore your beloved crush.
Sweetheart, valentine
—Corvin Johnson

You enchant me like
Nerves inside me exploding
On this crazy day
—Brendan Jones

The poem below is from *Reflections of an Imperfect Woman* by Barbara Kee Vatovec, available locally at Down Home Comforts.



Valentine's Dinner

FROM PAGE 1

with shipments, and a young Anthony—just 12 or 13 at the time—offered to help her unbox them. “She reminded me a lot of my grandma Joy,” he said. “I’d sit up there and we’d just talk.”

As he got older and could drive, Anthony would help however he could—delivering flowers to funeral homes in Bonnie’s van, never expecting payment. “I didn’t want pay,” he said. “I just wanted to help my friend.”

Those memories are part of what makes the Valentine’s Dinner special. It’s not just about the food—it’s about the people who shaped Johnston City and the sense of community that we share. Anthony credits growing up surrounded by that generation of local business owners and mentors. “I was lucky to grow up with them,” he said.

At press time, this year’s Valentine’s Dinner is almost



Café owner Anthony Spiller and his mother Tina Lindsey, dressed to serve guests at a past Valentine’s Dinner (photo provided by Spiller)

sold out as usual. Spiller expressed gratitude to the many couples who return year after year. “Thanks to everyone who keeps com-

ing back,” he said. “Bonnie had a good idea—and it’s become something really special.”

Lincoln in Southern Illinois, Celebrating Feb. 12

Why the Prairie State still claims Abraham Lincoln—and why we once had the day off

By the time Abraham Lincoln became the 16th president of the United States, Illinois had already shaped him—and he had already shaped Illinois, now tagged as the Land of Lincoln. His rise from frontier lawyer to national leader happened here, in courthouses, town squares, and debate platforms across the state. For generations of Illinoisans, that shared history was reason enough to set apart his birthday, February 12, as a special day.

Lincoln’s Illinois story

Lincoln arrived in Illinois as a young man in 1830 and never truly left. He worked as a rail-splitter, clerk, surveyor, soldier, lawyer, legislator, and congressman—roles that rooted him in everyday Illinois life. He represented central and southern Illinois on the old Eighth Judicial Circuit, riding from town to town to try cases and argue law before neighbors who knew him by name.



Illinois launched Lincoln onto the national stage during the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, seven face-to-face encounters that drew massive crowds and fixed the issue of slavery’s expansion squarely in the nation’s mind. Two years later, Illinois delivered its favorite son to the presidency.

Why Illinois celebrates Lincoln’s birthday

For much of the 20th century, February 12—Lincoln’s birthday—was an official Illinois school holiday, and many residents remember classrooms closed, ceremonies held, and Lincoln’s life retold in assemblies and lessons. The day honored more than a man; it celebrated values Illinoisans believed he embodied: perseverance, fairness, humility, and unity in the face of division.

While the federal government never made Lincoln’s birthday a national holiday, Illinois did—and for decades it stood alongside Washington’s Birthday as a distinct observance.

When Lincoln’s Birthday, Presidents Day merged

The change came at the national level. In 1968, Congress passed the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, which took effect in 1971. The law moved several federal holidays—including Washington’s Birthday—to Mondays

to create long weekends. Over time, Washington’s Birthday became popularly known as Presidents Day and was widely treated as a combined observance honoring multiple presidents, including Lincoln.

Illinois schools and local governments gradually aligned their calendars with the federal Monday holiday, and February 12 ceased to be a separate day off for many students, even though Lincoln’s legacy remained central to state identity.

Importantly, Illinois never abandoned Lincoln. Lincoln’s Birthday (Feb. 12) remains an official Illinois state holiday for state government—one of the few states to keep it—while Presidents Day is also observed. What changed was how schools and communities scheduled time off.



How close did Lincoln come to Johnston City?

Johnston City itself did not exist during Lincoln’s lifetime—it was founded decades later—but Lincoln came remarkably close.

The nearest documented appearance was Jonesboro, about 45 miles south of present-day Johnston City, where Lincoln debated Stephen A. Douglas on September 15, 1858. That debate—one of the most

LINCOLN IN OUR AREA

Historians confirm Abraham Lincoln practiced law in Williamson County during Eighth Judicial Circuit Court terms in 1843–44, the late 1840s, and the early 1850s. His cases often involved debt, contracts, and land disputes, common in southern Illinois.

Though rarely headline-making, this circuit work helped establish Lincoln’s reputation as a fair, careful, and persuasive lawyer, building relationships that later supported his rise to national leadership.

intense of the series—took place in deep southern Illinois, in a region sharply divided over slavery and the future of the Union.

Lincoln also traveled and practiced law in other southern Illinois communities, including Marion, Benton, Harrisburg, and Carbondale. While there’s no record of him standing on the ground that would become Johnston City, he rode, spoke, argued, and debated within a day’s journey of it, among people whose descendants still live here.

Why Lincoln still matters

Lincoln’s Illinois story is not abstract history—it’s local history. It happened on muddy roads, in small towns, and before ordinary citizens wrestling with extraordinary questions. When Illinois children once had February 12 off from school, it wasn’t merely nostalgia or tradition; it was recognition that Lincoln’s character and choices were forged here.

Even without a school holiday, February 12 remains a reminder that Illinois didn’t just produce a president—it helped produce a conscience for a nation.

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Spring training signals a new season—and old rivalries

As baseball returns, familiar teams, fresh faces, and a longtime Cubs-Cardinals rivalry take center stage.

BY JIMMY DEAN
Baseball season is just around the corner as teams make their way to Florida and Arizona for spring training.

I think in the past I have made it clear that my favorite baseball teams are, in order, the Texas Rangers, St. Louis Cardinals, and anyone playing the Chicago Cubs.

Since the Cubs have made a pretty good run over the last couple of years, I know going into this season the team in blue will be a handful for the Cardinals.

In past seasons, Cubs fans were already looking forward to next year and had a lot more losses than wins. That was before Theo Epstein. The Cubbies have built themselves the right way, from the bottom up. They have a good front office, a good manager, and a

great product on the field that looks to be strong for many more years.

I'm by no means throwing in the "Birds on the Bat" towel, but Pete Crow-Armstrong and company have made it a little harder to brag about winning the division.

Back when the Cubs featured Ernie Banks, Ron Santo, Billy Williams, and Glenn Beckert, I enjoyed watching them on WGN. Those guys represented true baseball players who loved the game and played it the right way. Even though I didn't root for the Cubs, I did root for the players.

As I write this, the Major League season is just around the corner. As you read it, spring training is under way and the regular season starts in a few weeks.



Jimmy Dean is a freelance writer and former mayor of Johnston City. He can be reached at jrdean@mchsi.com.

The Cardinals made several moves, and the Cubs did as well. As to who made the best moves—well, that remains to be determined, and we won't know for a while.

Cub fans, take your best shot at us Cardinal fans. After all these years, you have every right to bask in your baseball glory. And the Cardinals? Well, they seem to be in what every team calls "rebuilding mode," and we will wait and see.

Meanwhile, I'll be glued to the MLB channel watching my Texas Rangers.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR



February Events

- FEBRUARY 1
Free Movie Night, JCity Church, 5 pm
- FEBRUARY 3
JC Business Meet & Greet, 9 am, Andresen's
- Lions Club mtg., JCity Church, 5:30 pm
- FEBRUARY 4
Rotary Lunch, Andresen's, Noon
- FEBRUARY 10
Valentine's Stuffed Animal Sleepover, Library, 6 pm
- FEBRUARY 11
Dental Safari @ Jefferson School
- FEBRUARY 13
School Half Day, 11:30 am dismissal
- FEBRUARY 14
Valentine's Day
- FEBRUARY 16
Lunch at the Library, 11 am
No School—Presidents' Day
- FEBRUARY 17
Lions Club mtg., JCity Church, 5:30 pm
- FEBRUARY 18
Rotary, Indigo Realty, 5 pm
- FEBRUARY 28
JC Fire Dept. 21st Annual Chili Dinner, 11 am–5 pm



- MARCH 3
Lions Club mtg., JCity Church, 5:30 pm
- MARCH 4
Rotary Lunch, Andresen's, Noon
- MARCH 9–13
No School—Spring Break
- MARCH 16
Return to School
- MARCH 17
Lions Club mtg., JCity Church, 5:30 pm
- MARCH 18
Rotary, Indigo Realty, 5 pm
- MARCH 27
School Half Day, 11:30 am dismissal
- MARCH 28
Lions Club Fish Fry, 11 am–2 pm, JCHS Cafeteria

Public Meetings

- FEB. 9, MARCH 9
Library Board mtg., 6:30 pm
- FEB. 10, MARCH 10
City Council, Scout Cabin, 5 pm
- FEB. 16, MARCH 16
Planning Commission, Scout Cabin, 5 pm
- FEB. 19, MARCH 19
School Board mtg., Unit Office, 6 pm
- FEB. 24, MARCH 24
City Council, Scout Cabin, 5 pm

For calendar updates, please see Facebook or watch our video podcasts. To submit an event, email date, time, and details to jcitycenter@gmail.com or call 618-952-1272.

March Events

- MARCH 1
Free Movie Night, JCity Church, 5 pm
- MARCH 3
JC Business Meet & Greet, Andresen's, 9 am

DEVOTIONAL

Renewing Love in the Cold Months

BY THE EDITOR

February can be a hard month in Southern Illinois. The holidays are long past, winter still hangs on, and spring feels more like a promise than a reality. The cold settles in—not just outside, but sometimes in our spirits as well.

That's why Jesus' words feel especially timely this time of year: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

Love like that is a lot like a three-legged stool. When all three legs are there, it stands steady. But if one

is missing, it doesn't take much to knock it over.

Loving God and faithfully serving Him requires the engagement of heart, soul, and mind. Service without this full triad of our humanity can soon grow as cold and lifeless as the winter landscape of Southern Illinois.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus speaks to the church at Ephesus. He praises them for their hard work, endurance, and commitment to truth. They hadn't quit. They hadn't compromised. But He also tells them some-

thing sobering: "You have abandoned the love you had at first."

They were still doing the right things—but no longer motivated primarily by their love for the Lord. Without loving motives, good deeds and correct teaching can turn into joyless drudgery and heartless dogma—a spiritual temperature well below zero.

Perhaps this is a problem we sense more readily this time of year. February is full of routines: getting to work on icy roads, keeping up with responsibilities, showing up even when energy is low. We can do the same with our faith—serving God faithfully, but with gritted teeth instead of glad hearts. Jesus doesn't shame the church at Ephesus. Instead, He offers a gentle path forward: *remember, repent, and return*. Remember what love once felt like. Repent—turn around—from joyless, obligation-driven faith. And return to serving God out of love, not duty.

Loving God with our heart means allowing warmth back in—joy, gratitude, and compassion. Loving Him with our soul means engaging fully, not running on spiritual autopilot. Loving Him with our mind means letting God guide even the small, everyday choices we make.

In a season when winter feels long and patience wears thin, God invites us to something better—not a busier religion, but a renewed love.

Faith grounded in love retains its warmth, even in February.

Prayer: Lord, in this cold season, warm our hearts again. Restore the joy of our salvation and help us love You fully—heart, soul, and mind.



The churches of Johnston City working together to serve our community as the "hands and feet of Jesus."

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(618) 983-6455
Larry Stevens, pastor

***First Christian Church**
505 E. Broadway Blvd.
Johnston City, IL 62951
618-952-2591
Adam King, pastor

***First United Methodist Church**
400 W. Broadway
Johnston City, IL 62951
618-983-5150
Paul Jacob, pastor

***Heritage Fellowship**
(Church of God of Prophecy)
308 W. 12th St.
Johnston City, IL 62951
Gaylon & Dawn Stewart, pastors

***JCity Church**
(Free Will Baptist)
609 Monroe
Johnston City, IL 62951
618-983-5254
Dr. Randy Carney, pastor

*Active members of Johnston City Ministerial Alliance

Johnston City United Pentecostal Church
1101 W. 10th
Johnston City, IL 62951
618-983-5938
Brandon Abernathy, pastor

***St. Paul's Catholic Church**
1103 Washington Ave.
Johnston City, IL 62951
618-983-5073
Father Francis Tambala

***Washington Ave. Baptist Church**
9th and Washington
Johnston City, IL 62951
Barry Robertson, pastor
618-694-2995

Other Ministries

***JC Kids' Lunch Bunch**
c/o JCity Church
(see above)

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A SMART LIFE

What the Average Person Should Know About AI

BY DON MCCHESENEY

Artificial intelligence once sounded like science fiction. Today, it writes emails, helps students study, drives cars, recommends shows, and even creates art.

Whether you are a teacher, parent, student, business owner, or simply trying to keep up with technology, AI is no longer optional knowledge—it is part of everyday life. With all the hype and jargon surrounding it, what should you actually know? And what does the future look like?

AI is a set of tools that allows machines to “learn” from data and make decisions, solve problems, or generate content that mimics human thinking. However, AI does not think like people do. It does not feel or understand. Instead, it recognizes patterns and uses them to predict, generate, or recommend outcomes. You likely already use AI when you ask Alexa or Siri a question, follow Google Maps to avoid traffic, receive Netflix recommendations, or use tools like ChatGPT or Bing AI.

So what should every layperson know? First,

AI is a tool—not a magic wand. It does not know truth; it knows patterns. It does not think; it mimics thinking using data. Because of this, AI can be helpful or harmful depending on how it is trained and used. Bias is a real risk, which is why human oversight and ethical design are essential. AI also relies heavily on user data, as companies track what you click, search, say, and watch—making it important to understand privacy settings and your rights.

When used well, AI can save time and energy. It can help you write more clearly, stay organized, brainstorm ideas, and solve everyday problems—if you know how to ask the right questions.

Knowing how to use AI will become a core skill. Learning how to interact with it, evaluate its output, and use it ethically will be a lifelong skill, much like reading, writing, or using the internet.

Looking ahead, AI will play a growing role in education by supporting personalized learning, instant feedback, and accommodations for di-

verse needs. Teachers will remain essential, but AI may help them do more. Jobs will also change as AI takes over repetitive tasks while creating new opportunities. Ethics and regulation will become increasingly important as AI influences hiring, healthcare, law, and public safety.

Society will face difficult questions: Who is accountable when AI is wrong? Who owns your data? What is fair and safe? Access also matters. Students in rural or low-income communities may not have equal exposure to AI tools. If we are not careful, AI could widen gaps—but used intentionally, it could help close them.

You do not need to be a coder to understand AI. You only need curiosity, caution, and a willingness to learn. The future of AI is not just about machines—it is about people, and how we choose to use this powerful technology. You don't have to understand everything. You just have to start asking the right questions.



Follow the String
aimed at all ages

Not Just Another snowflake

Hey kids! Well, it's winter-time now. Sooner or later, it will snow, and you can make a snowman, throw snowballs, and maybe even not have to go to school. But can you tell the difference between snowflakes?

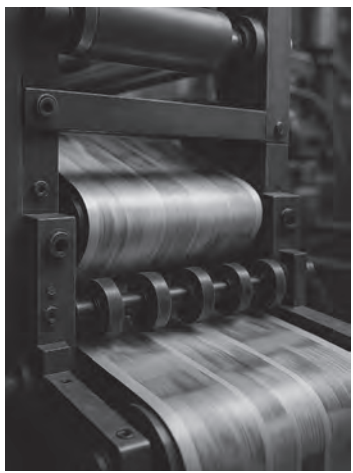
Snowflakes are beautiful—so soft and so icy cold. One snowflake is a tiny, delicate thing, easily melted by the touch of your finger. However, put a bunch of them together and they can blanket the ground in shimmering white, or even come crashing down a mountain in an avalanche that destroys everything in its path.

A snowflake forms high up in the clouds when a tiny water droplet freezes into an ice crystal. Water vapor in the cloud sticks to the frozen crystal and helps shape the snowflake into amazingly creative designs. Most snowflakes have six sides, but each one becomes its own unique cre-

ation. It's hard to tell them apart when they are all jumbled together in a big pile or packed into a snowman. Even though they may look alike, no two snowflakes are exactly the same.

The same can be said for each one of us, because we are all unique and different. No one else on the planet is like you—not now, and not ever. Just look at your fingerprints. Even identical twins do not have the same ones. And that's not all that is unique about you. Scientists can also use the retina of your eyes, the shape of your ears, and even your tongue print to identify you, because no one else has a tongue, ears, or retina exactly like yours.

Do you ever feel like there is nothing special about you? If you have ever had that thought—you are wrong! *You are special. You are unique. No one else is like you. You were created to be special.*



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Preschool screening scheduled in Johnston City

Families with young children are encouraged to take advantage of an upcoming preschool screening opportunity coming to Johnston City next month.

Pre-K screening will be held Tuesday, March 24, from 8:00 to 10:30 a.m. at JCity Church, 609 Monroe Avenue, for families interested in preschool enrollment for the 2026-27 school year. The screenings are designed to help determine developmental readiness and connect families with early learning resources.

The screenings are open to all families with children from birth to age five, regardless of income. Children must be three years old to attend Pre-K. Organizers emphasize that early screenings help ensure children receive the support and educational opportunities they need before entering school.

Additional screening dates will be offered in surrounding communities (Herrin, Crab Orchard, Marion, and Carterville) in the same time frame.

Parents may schedule appointments in any community where the screenings are offered. Johnston

City families are encouraged to register early, as appointment times are limited.

Preschool Screening APPOINTMENTS ARE REQUIRED. Please call 618-993-2138 or 618-733-3355 to schedule or cancel an appointment.

Dental Safari to visit Jefferson, Feb. 11

Dental Safari will provide on-site dental checkups for students at Jefferson Elementary School on Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2026.

Parents or guardians who would like their child to participate must complete a consent form. Forms are available online at www.dentalsafariforms.com, or a paper copy may be picked up from the school office and returned as soon as possible.

Families are reminded that all kindergarten and second-grade students are required to have a dental exam on file in the school nurse's office. Participation in the Dental Safari visit will satisfy this requirement.

Johnston City Fire Department Chili Supper returns for 21st year

The Johnston City Fire Department will host its 21st Annual Chili Supper Fundraiser on Saturday, February 28, 2026, inviting the community to come out for good food, good company, and a good cause.

The event will be held from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the fire department, located at 500 Washington Street in Johnston City. The chili supper is the department's largest fundraiser of the year, with proceeds supporting equipment, training, and ongoing operations for the city's volunteer firefighters.

For \$10, guests will receive a meal that includes chili, one hot dog, dessert, and a drink. Additional hot dogs will be available for \$2 each.

In addition to the popular chili supper, the fire department is expanding the event this year with several added attractions. Attendees can browse a silent



The JC Fire Department crew is stirring up something new for this year's annual chili supper, but the chili will be as delicious as always (Tim Hastings photo).

auction, take part in a gun raffle, and check out something brand new for 2026—an indoor yard sale hosted in the volunteers' building.

Fire department members say the annual chili supper is more than just a fundraiser—it's a chance for the community to gather, support local volunteers, and spend time together during the winter months.

For more information about the event, residents may contact JCFD at 618-983-8311 or Fire Chief Tom Burton at 618-889-3308.

The members of the Johnston City Volunteer Fire Department extend their thanks to the community for its continued support.

Easy Red Velvet Cake

INGREDIENTS

2½ cups self-rising flour	1 tsp white vinegar	¼ cup (2 oz.) red food coloring
1 cup buttermilk	1½ cups sugar	1 tsp baking soda
1½ cups vegetable oil	1 tsp vanilla	2 eggs
1 tsp cocoa		

DIRECTIONS

Heat oven to 350°. Beat all ingredients together with an electric mixer until smooth. Spray and flour three 8- or 9-inch round pans. Divide batter evenly and bake 35 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Remove from pans and cool on racks.

ICING

1 stick butter	1 lb powdered sugar	8 oz cream cheese, softened
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Beat until smooth. Frost cooled layers. Garnish with red-tinted coconut, if desired.

Makes a great dessert for Valentine's Day.

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Arrowhead Classic ends early as winter storm forces cancellation

The 2026 Arrowhead Classic at Johnston City delivered milestone moments, narrow close finishes, and a strong showing by DuQuoin before winter weather brought the tournament to an early close.

Tournament play opened Monday, Jan. 19, with Anna-Jonesboro defeating Johnston City 62-30, a win that marked the 1,500th boys basketball victory in Anna-Jonesboro program history. Earlier that evening, Eldorado earned a 67-55 win over Christopher.

Action continued Tuesday as DuQuoin topped Anna-Jonesboro 71-55, while

Johnston City thrilled the home crowd with a narrow 43-42 victory over Eldorado on a late basket.

Thursday night saw Christopher edge Anna-Jonesboro 51-49, and DuQuoin remain unbeaten with a decisive 59-24 win over Johnston City. On Friday, Anna-Jonesboro bounced back with a 62-48 win over Eldorado, while DuQuoin closed its schedule with a hard-fought 57-51 victory over Christopher.

Saturday's final round was cancelled due to incoming Winter Storm Fern. Based on results through Friday play, DuQuoin was



SOUTHERN ILLINOIS OFFICIALS ASSOCIATION PRESENTS DONATION TO JCHS Prior to the final night of the Arrowhead Classic at JCHS, the Southern Illinois Officials Association presented a check to support the school. The donation came from proceeds raised during the association's golf tournament held this past summer. Funds from the event were directed to schools that participated in the tournament. Accepting the check on behalf of JCHS was Principal Christy Schell. Presenting the donation were Southern Illinois Officials Association members Jimmy Dean, Barry Vaughan, Landon Vaughan (photo provided by Jimmy Dean).

declared the Arrowhead Classic champion.

The tournament was once again sponsored by Banterra Bank, continuing its support of high school athletics and the Arrowhead Classic tradition.

Arrowhead Classic — Scoreboard

Mon., Jan. 19 Anna-Jonesboro 62, Johnston City 30 (AJ win No. 1,500) Eldorado 67, Christopher 55	Fri., Jan. 23 Anna-Jonesboro 62, Eldorado 48 DuQuoin 57, Christopher 51
Tue., Jan. 20 DuQuoin 71, Anna-Jonesboro 55 Johnston City 43, Eldorado 42	Sat., Jan. 24 Cancelled due to winter storm
Thu., Jan. 22 Christopher 51, Anna-Jonesboro 49 DuQuoin 59, Johnston City 24	Tournament Champion: DuQuoin

Chaney's team-first approach paying off at WMS

The Washington Middle School boys basketball team is nearing the end of regular season play, and Head Coach Brian Chaney says consistency, unselfish play, and fundamentals have paid off as the squad completes its schedule in January.

In a January 22 interview on Tee Pee Talk, Chaney reflected on his team's progress and the role leadership has played this season. After earlier games that helped establish the group's rhythm, he challenged his players with a simple goal: "I told them at the beginning of the year, you want to be playing your best basketball in January."

Chaney has been impressed with the team's chemistry, noting players have put team goals ahead

of individual statistics. "Nobody is pushing for points. Nobody is selfish in the sense—they're almost too unselfish sometimes," he said, praising the squad's collective mindset.

A focus on fundamentals has been a season-long priority, with Chaney encouraging drills that blend skill development with enjoyment. "If you put the fun in fundamental, you're getting the fun out of it," he said, a philosophy that has helped players stay engaged through practices and games alike.

Coach Chaney also emphasized that each player's contribution goes beyond scoring. "Your value to this team is way more than your shooting," he told his roster, highlighting the importance of defense, hustle

plays, and supportive leadership.

Reflecting on his first season at Washington Middle School, Chaney said, "I couldn't ask for a better group for my first year somewhere—they've just been incredible."

The team's record currently stands at 16-7, and they have won the last nine straight games.



Dustin Hill of Tee Pee Talk interviews WMS Boys Basketball Coach Brian Chaney (on left) (Photo courtesy of Tee Pee Talk)

8TH GRADE NIGHT WIN: A Washington Middle School player goes up for a layup during the Jan. 22 game against Christopher. The Indians picked up another win on Eighth-Grade Night. (Photo courtesy of Tee Pee Talk)



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