

The VOYAGER



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FOUNDATION BREAKFAST

The FCC Foundation had its scholarship breakfast and got exciting news.



ELECTRIC MOWER

FCC received an IGEN grant for an electric riding mower.



FCC MLT FINISHES 6TH

The MLT program finished 6th in the nation in the Cell Bowl.



FCC DEDICATES NEW PAVILION

Frontier Community College hosted a dedication ceremony for the Rotary Centennial Plaza and Dreith Pavilion, honoring the legacy of Dr. Michael Dreith, former FCC president and an influential community leader. The new pavilion represents a fusion of education, history, and service, aligning with Dr. Dreith's dedication to FCC and his belief in "service above self."

FCC President Jay Edgren opened the ceremony with some history of the plaza, and then Gary Carter, chairman of the IECC Board of Trustees, acknowledged the contributions of FCC maintenance staff, led by Kent Staley, for their efforts in preparing the space. "We have come a long way from the one-room schoolhouse," Carter noted, referencing the pavilion's architectural nod to Fairfield's educational history. "This new pavilion allows us to remember the one-room schoolhouses while looking forward to the future of FCC."

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SCAN ME

The dedication also included remarks from members of the local Rotary Club, who shared the story of the original Rotary Centennial Plaza established in 2005. “Rotary’s mission of supporting education is truly reflected in this space,” said Jay Fyie from the Fairfield Rotary Club, recognizing the collaboration that made the plaza and pavilion possible.

Carol Dreith, widow of Dr. Dreith, spoke on behalf of the family, expressing her gratitude. “Mike always believed in the power of education to transform lives. FCC was not just his workplace—it was family,” she shared. She recounted Dr. Dreith’s vision for FCC as a community-centered institution, remarking on his excitement when students—both traditional and non-traditional—thrived on campus.

The new pavilion, now part of Rotary Plaza, will serve as a gathering place for students and the community, merging the historical essence of the one-room schoolhouse with a modern outdoor venue. The dedication ceremony concluded with the unveiling of a plaque in Dr. Dreith’s honor, recognizing his lasting impact on FCC.

“The day that Mike came to me and we chatted about the restoration of Rotary Plaza, I had to tell him that we discussed a possible better use of this space, which is so central to campus,” said FCC President Jay Edgren. “It’s prime real estate for the college. You see, at that time, his wife, Carol, was an FCC employee heading up our Title III grant, and she had been working on a project a little bit earlier during the Covid years of trying to investigate and build a possible outdoor venue that we could use for classroom space, and also for gatherings. Hence the inception of our pavilion, the Rotary Centennial Plaza is the perfect place on campus to preserve both the original purpose of the one-room schoolhouse with the operable bell on top and commemorating the Fairfield Rotary Club with the two plaques that were restored from the original monument and also all of the pavers that were purchased back 19 years ago.”

Frontier Community College thanks everyone involved in bringing this vision to life and invites the community to enjoy the new Rotary Plaza and Dreith Pavilion, a space for learning, reflection, and connection.

TOP RIGHT: Mike Dreith’s sons Andy and Doug are joined by their children behind the plaque dedicated to Dr. Dreith.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Dreith’s grandchildren ring the bell during the dedication ceremony.





FCC FOUNDATION HOSTS SCHOLARSHIP BREAKFAST

Frontier Community College Foundation held its annual scholarship breakfast, a heartwarming event connecting scholarship recipients with the donors who make their education possible. This year's gathering highlighted the Foundation's enduring commitment to supporting students and emphasized the power of giving back to the local community.

One of the highlights of the morning came from Jerry Cox, a prominent donor and longtime supporter of the college's nursing program and the Foundation. Cox announced his intention

to make a substantial donation of \$100,000 to the Foundation in early March, which will further enhance the resources available to support local students. "I've always supported the nurses and the Foundation," Cox shared. "This makes me happy to support the local clientele and the nursing. I've done it since 2002." Cox also encouraged others to contribute, noting, "More people should donate. I mean, every little bit helps. And there's plenty of room to add more money to the Foundation."

Dr. Ryan Gower, Chancellor of Illinois Eastern Community Colleges, acknowledged

the essential role of the Foundation in sustaining Frontier Community College in a smaller community with limited financial resources. "In a small community like this where we don't have a deep tax base or large population, we're not going to have the same access or quality of services unless there's a group of people organizing gifts for the benefit of the college," Gower remarked. He expressed his gratitude to those present, saying, "A lot of those people are right here in the room today. I just want to say thank you very much for everything you do for our students."

PREVIOUS PAGE: Jerry Cox (center), poses for a photo with nursing students Tiffany Hughes, Rebecca Young, Jackie Flechs, and Angel Dinwiddie.

TOP RIGHT: Jodi Poole, Madalyn Griswold, Jill Carter.

CENTER: Gael Salinas, Jodi Poole, Madalyn Griswold, Jill Carter, Laela Kohzadi

BOTTOM: FCC Foundation Past President Sarah Rush, Jerry Cox, FCC Foundation President Luke Harl and Frontier Community College President Jay Edgren.



Luke Harl, FCC Foundation President, spoke from personal experience as a former scholarship recipient. Reflecting on the meaningful connection between donors and students, he shared, “As helpful as the monetary commitment was to me to be able to attend school, even more beneficial was knowing the donor and knowing the story behind the donor.” He encouraged students and donors to connect and learn from one another, adding, “Today, I would encourage you to take the time to meet your donors. Invest in your story and in them—it can be extremely beneficial.”



The breakfast was a powerful reminder of how the Foundation’s supporters make a real difference in students’ lives and in our community. Contributions to the Frontier Community College Foundation help open doors for more students, creating opportunities for them to pursue their educational goals and build brighter futures.





FCC USES IGEN GRANT FOR ELECTRIC MOWER

Frontier Community College recently received a grant from the Illinois Green Economy Network (IGEN) to fund the purchase of a new Stihl electric mower. The addition is part of FCC's ongoing commitment to environmental sustainability and energy efficiency on campus, helping reduce fossil fuel consumption while promoting green technology to students and community partners.

"Protecting the environment, embracing renewable energy initiatives, and finding energy-efficient solutions are core priorities at Frontier Community College," said Dr. Paul Bruinsma, Illinois Eastern Community Colleges' Chief Academic Officer. "This funding opportunity is another step forward as FCC strives to be a leader in green technology and sustainability efforts."

FCC has made significant strides in recent years toward renewable energy and sustainability. Recent IGEN-funded projects include a 45kW

solar array, solar-powered bollards lighting walkways, and a solar charging picnic table on campus. These initiatives have generated more than \$16,000 in power to date and have allowed FCC to reduce its reliance on traditional energy sources. These changes also create valuable educational opportunities for FCC students and partnerships with local organizations.

The grant will support the purchase of a smaller, battery-powered electric riding mower with a 60-inch deck and an electric push lawnmower with a 30-inch deck. These mowers will help the college maintain the grounds efficiently while navigating around its renewable energy installations, like the solar array and bollards, which have proven challenging for FCC's current fleet of large gas-powered mowers.

"We hope to reduce our fossil fuel consumption by 40% and cut CO2 emissions by roughly 320 pounds per mowing cycle," Bruinsma noted.

“Adding electric mowers not only reduces environmental impact but complements FCC’s other renewable energy initiatives.”

In addition to maintaining FCC’s 50-acre campus, the electric mowers will provide hands-on learning experiences for students in FCC’s Automotive Technology Program, who already have access to training with electric vehicles. With the popularity of electric-powered equipment on the rise, FCC is exploring the development of new courses to help students learn to diagnose, repair, and maintain electric systems.

As part of its commitment to local outreach, FCC will offer demonstrations of the electric mowers to community partners, including Fairfield Memorial Hospital, Wayne White Electric Cooperative, and the City of Fairfield. These events aim to encourage local businesses and organizations to consider energy-efficient technology options.

“FCC is committed to being a beacon of sustainability and green energy in Wayne County,” Bruinsma said. “Through this grant and

our ongoing projects, we are showing our community the importance and benefits of renewable energy and energy reduction initiatives.”



ALUMNA HELPS PHELBOTOMY CLASS

Katie Fisher graduated from FCC’s Phlebotomy program in May and recently visited the class. Fisher came to the class to help with their first venipuncture. Instructor Jodi Peach said it was good to have Fisher back, “It was a great experience to have Katie supporting the picture.

Fisher, in the grey sweatshirt second to the left, is joined by Shawni King, Corinne Walker, Eliyah Taylor, Heather Dunlap, and Shelby Wyland.



FCC FINISHES 6TH IN CELL BOWL

Frontier Community College's Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT) program recently demonstrated its expertise by placing sixth in the nation in the prestigious Cell Bowl, a dynamic competition that brings together Medical Laboratory Science (MLS) and MLT programs from across the country. FCC's team narrowly missed advancing to the semifinals by a mere one second, showcasing their competitive spirit and extensive knowledge in blood cell morphology.

The Cell Bowl, organized by the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) and hosted by Medical Lab Lady Gill, provides an engaging platform for students to strengthen their understanding of blood cell

identification and morphology. Through a series of weekly competitions, students use the CellaVision CellAtlas app to test their scientific knowledge and compete for a chance to advance to the Super Cell Bowl. Each week, teams work diligently to improve their CellQuiz scores and refine their skills, preparing for the ASCP Board of Certification exams.

MLT instructor Julie DeHart expressed her pride in the students' achievements and dedication throughout the competition. "I couldn't be prouder of our students," said DeHart. "The Cell Bowl is a fantastic opportunity for them to sharpen their skills and prepare for their board certification exams in an exciting and

challenging way. Their hard work and commitment to excellence have truly shone through in this competition."

The Cell Bowl is designed to help students not only master the academic rigor required in the field but also connect with peers and professionals nationwide.

Frontier Community College's strong finish highlights the program's commitment to producing well-prepared, certified laboratory professionals who can contribute meaningfully to the field.

SOFTBALL TEAM HELPS COAT DRIVE



The Frontier Community College Bobcats Softball team supported the First Wesleyan Church of Fairfield with the 14th Annual Community Coat Drive – Coat & Shoe Give-Away, leading up to the event on Saturday, October 19. Earlier that week, the team helped sort and organize 450 coats and 200 pairs of shoes.

The giveaway took place earlier than usual due to Pastor Philip Trent and his family moving back to Indiana at the end of October. Trent had served as Pastor at The Wesleyan Church for 22 years. Trent says the Bobcats Softball team's assistance has saved his staff time in sorting and organizing items.

FCC Athletic Director and Head Softball Coach, Jeremy

Ellis, says participating in the giveaway has strengthened the team's sense of community and teamwork.

"We want to promote community and service in our athletes. It's important for them to understand community outreach. The more we do as a team, the stronger we'll be in the long run."

Ellis noted that community service enhances the overall experience of being on a sports team: "I believe they get a feel for the support this community has for our campus. It shows them the amount of time and effort it takes to have a successful program. At the end of the day, the athletes feel special and feel like they have helped someone out."

With his move back to Indiana, Ellis reflects on the positive impact of Trent's support over the years. "We've had the privilege of this for a few years now. It is a great outreach program. He and his congregation have helped a lot of kids and adults. His family also lived close to our field and attended some practices and games. They also provided our sophomores with a picture as a graduation gift. The relationship between our program and he and his church has grown every year. It is always awesome to just see how our community and our campus can make great things happen in this small town."

IECC RANKS IN TOP 50 FOR ONLINE

Illinois Eastern Community Colleges (IECC) have earned national recognition from Intelligent.com, ranking 41st in the nation in the 2025 Best Online Community Colleges and Trade Schools. IECC was one of only two community colleges in Illinois to make the top 50, underscoring its dedication to providing high-quality, affordable, and accessible online education.

Intelligent.com, a trusted source for higher education rankings and research, conducted an in-depth, data-driven evaluation of institutions across the country. Unlike conventional rankings, Intelligent's assessment uses a proprietary scale of 0 to 100, analyzing four primary factors: academic quality, graduation rates, cost and return on investment (ROI), and student resources. This approach emphasizes schools that combine rigorous academics, affordability, and robust student support, helping prospective students make well-informed decisions about their education.

IECC received an Intelligent Score of 76.67.

Jay Edgren, IECC Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, spoke on the significance of the ranking,

stating, "Rankings like these validate our commitment to providing students with an affordable, high-quality education that they can access from anywhere. Being named one of the best online colleges in the nation is a reflection of our dedication to student success and academic excellence."

The Intelligent.com ranking relies on data from respected sources, including U.S. News & World Report, the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Cross-checking these sources with internal reviews, Intelligent.com ensures accurate and up-to-date evaluations, helping prospective students find institutions with strong academics and high value.

IECC's strong ranking highlights its commitment to accessible education through diverse online programs that serve a variety of student needs, from career training to university transfer pathways. For more information about IECC's online programs, visit iecc.edu.



Paul Bruinsma, IECC Chief Academic Officer, echoed these sentiments, adding, "This recognition underscores the hard work of our faculty and staff and signals to students that IECC is a trusted choice for online education. We are proud to offer programs that not only prepare students for successful careers but also equip them with skills for lifelong learning."



GUIDED BY MIKE: A TRIBUTE TO A MENTOR AND FRIEND

BY DEREK DUNN

At the Dr. Mike Dreith Pavilion Dedication Ceremony last October, memories of Mike came flooding back. He was once the President of Frontier Community College, but I got to know him years later in a different chapter of his life. Mike was my boss for two and half years at WFIW/WOKZ Radio in Fairfield, but more than that, he became a mentor and a good friend.

A true mentor is someone who sees more in you than you see in yourself, helping to unlock your potential. I've been fortunate to have had several mentors throughout my broadcasting career. Mike, however, came into my

life at a point where I thought I had learned all I could – and he proved me wrong. You are never too old to improve upon your craft, and Mike pushed me to become a better broadcaster and a better person.

I first met Mike briefly in April 2007, but our real connection came in 2018 when he became general manager at WFIW/WOKZ. The first time he called to introduce himself, I let it go to voicemail – his 925 area code looked like a telemarketer number to me. But when I listened to the message and realized it was Mike, we connected just a few minutes later.

From the beginning, Mike emphasized the importance of localism in everything we did, from news to sports to weather and social media. I had the pleasure of teaching him how to use audio production software for his "Talk Isn't Always Cheap" commentaries. He struggled at first, but with practice and persistence, he learned and didn't need my help. Mike also launched "Morning Coffee" on the radio and YouTube, where he and Mark Turner brought in local guests for engaging conversations. He also launched 'Auction Time', a show where local auctioneers discussed

upcoming auctions and he brought back the popular Fairfield Mystery Voice contest.

One of my favorite memories was announcing a New Hope School boys basketball game with Mike at Rend Lake. Mike was a hoops fanatic, a lifelong Kansas Jayhawks fan, and a former player in his younger years back in Bethalto, Illinois. His knowledge and passion for the game shone through on-air, and his commentary was masterclass in how much he loved basketball.

On air, off air, and everywhere in between, Mike was a force of nature. He was wise, witty, full of character, and always a joy to be around. He had a unique blend of personalities. Mike was like a blend of my father, Ferris Bueller, and Arthur "Big Guy" Carlson of "WKRP in Cincinnati". He was a constant presence, with his booming voice, his ever-present mug of coffee, and his unshakeable love for the community.

When Mike decided to run for Mayor of Fairfield, he announced his decision to leave the station to focus on his campaign. After he stepped away from the station to focus on his new journey, we stayed in touch. Even as Mayor, he remained a constant support, teaching speech classes at Frontier as an adjunct instructor. I remember a parent telling me later how much their child enjoyed his class.

I'll never forget the day I learned of Mike's

passing. I had just returned home from engineering audio at a wedding he had recommended I help with. The news hit me like a ton of bricks, and I found myself crying in my living room. It was only three days earlier that I had seen him at Bold Goat Coffee Company, and just weeks before that, I had taken a photo of him at Frontier Community College's 2022 graduation. On the day of his funeral, I wore one of his ties as a tribute to him.

Since starting my job at Frontier in January 2022, I have felt Mike's presence on campus. Every day, I strive to be the kind of positive influence he was to me – for the faculty, staff and students. I am grateful for Mike and his wife, Carol, for the role they played in my life. Without their guidance and friendship, I wouldn't be where I am today. Mike's words still echo in my mind when I speak with students about their futures: "When in career doubt, always pursue your passions. You'll never truly have to punch in a time clock, because your work will be your passion."

Thank you, Mike. I love and miss you, "Big Guy."



FCC IN PICTURES



1 Students pose ahead of the Fran Carter Memorial Scholarship Carnaby Square Fashion Show.

3 Students serve tacos at a fundraiser for the Cultural Diversity class' trip to Chicago.

5 Student-athletes play a spirited game of Wiffle Ball at the Monster Mash at FNB Field.

2 FCC Softball players past and present pose together to celebrate 10 years of the program.

4 Baseball players meet with local kids during Bobcat Baseball Fun Fest which raised money for Feeding Kids of Wayne County.

6 Volleyball players enjoyed some fall seasonal fun and team bonding while decorating pumpkins together.