

KNIGHTLINE

CALENDAR

JUNE

2 - Girls Welding Camp, 8 a.m.-12 p.m., OCC Welding Building

3 - Boys Welding Camp, 8 a.m.-12 p.m., OCC Welding Building

6 - Jazz for Young Musicians, 9 a.m.-12 p.m., OCC Band Room

9 - Pathways to Healthcare, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m., OCC Theater

JULY

10 - Plush Pals Hospital, 9-11 a.m., Wattleworth Hall 117

10 - Plush Pals Hospital, 12-2 p.m., Wattleworth Hall 117

30 - Yikes Parasites! Gross Pathology and Medical Lab Science, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., Wattleworth 211

Flora High School Musicians Track Original Songs at OCC



Students from Lincoln Trail and Olney Central colleges put their skills to the test during the first Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Welding Showdown.

The brainchild of Olney Central College Welding Instructor Maverick Fisher the event brought together first-year welders at OCC, students in the LTC Certificate Program and dual-credit students. The competition tasked students with performing fabrication, root plate and structural welds, with their execution judged by industry professionals including Kevin Stewart from the Boilermakers Local 363 in Belleville, Eric Pitts and Daryl Heldenbrand from Nucor Steel in Newton and Dan Ramsey from Marathon in Robinson.

Elliot Kessler, an OCC dual credit student from Clay City High School, placed first in fabrication while OCC's Weston Miller and LTC's Dylan Casarotto earned top honors in root plate and structural welding, respectively. The winners were presented with awards, designed and created by OCC Welding Instructor Curtis Marshall.

Marshall said the showdown gave students insight into the rigorous testing they will encounter as they enter the workplace.

"The competition benefits the students by placing them in a real-world scenario as if they were taking a weld test for employment," he explained. "The welding tests they completed



are the exact ones that a welder would take for employment as a structural welder. All the judges that were at the competition work for big companies, have years of welding experience and are Certified Welding Inspectors."

OCC Dean of Instruction Amy Tarr said the event enabled students to apply the skills they've learned over the course of the year.

"Aside from good friendly competition,

the Welding Showdown was a fantastic opportunity for students to practice welds within a given time frame, much like they will when testing in for a job in the welding industry," Tarr said. "The welding industry is quite different from most other industries in that regardless of your credentials, you still have to prove your abilities by performing welds, similar to like what our students did, in order to be hired."

As a student in OCC's Welding and Fabrication Associate Degree Program, Miller enjoyed seeing how his work measured up under such scrutiny.

"The competition was set up nice," he said. "Everyone had a good attitude, and it was a great environment. It felt really good to finish in first place."

Fisher, who participated in a regional welding competition as an OCC student, first suggested organizing a multi-collegiate event in 2019. Fisher says LTC Professor Rob Jackman became the driving force this year in bringing the IECC students together. Tarr helped to organize the event along with Fisher, OCC Welding Instructor Curtis Marshall and LTC Welding Instructor Reno Bemont.

"In the true spirit of 'starting small to eventually get big,' we started with our three IECC welding schools to kick off our first event," Tarr said. "In conjunction, with that and as part of the Perkins grant, there is a requirement for co-curricular activity and this competition was a great fit."

Tarr said organizers plan to make the Welding Showdown an annual event.

"I thought it was well supported by the administration and industry and we're looking forward to doing it again next year," Fisher added.





L to R: Bob Sellers (Clay County Hospital Chief Executive Officer), Jebbee Tucker (OCC), Jonathan Paul (FCC), Whittney Gill (FCC), Kamy Vail (CCH Clinical Nurse Educator), and Alani Frederick (IECC Dean of Health Professions).

OCC Nursing Students Build Bonds and Skills at CCH

A hospital room is no longer just a place for healing—it's become a training ground for the next generation of healthcare heroes. Through an innovative partnership between Clay County Hospital (CCH) and Illinois Eastern Community Colleges (IECC), students from Olney Central College are getting a head start in the medical field thanks to a dynamic healthcare apprenticeship program.

On Thursday, May 15, CCH hosted a celebration honoring the first group of students to complete the apprenticeship program—an initiative designed to immerse students in hands-on, real-world experiences while earning academic credentials.

Dr. Alani Frederick, Dean of Health Professions at IECC, applauded the success of the collaboration.

"We started the apprenticeship and partnership with Clay County Hospital two years ago, so this is our first year of graduates," she said. "It's very exciting because these students were able to gain hands-on experience while completing their academic degrees. They also had the opportunity to work within the facility where they will be hired."

The apprenticeships allowed students to blend classroom instruction with clinical practice, preparing them to enter the workforce with confidence and competence. According to Dr. Frederick, the benefits went beyond clinical training.

"The students have developed not only in their clinical skills, but especially in their soft skills—how to communicate with patients and function as part of a healthcare team," she explained. "Thanks to this partnership, these students

are well ahead of their peers in those areas.”

Two of the program’s students, Jebee Tucker and Victoria Sturm, both from Olney Central College, shared how the apprenticeship helped shape their career paths.

“This really meant a big deal to me,” Tucker said. “I needed that support and financial aid to go to school. Clay County Hospital felt like a family. They supported me throughout the program, and it makes me want to stay with the hospital because it’s been a part of my life.”

Tucker reflected on the valuable lessons she gained—both personally and professionally. “Time management was big—balancing school, twelve-hour shifts, and clinicals. I learned how to give medications, and I hope to learn IVs this summer. But more than that, it made me want to help people, just like my family of nurses.”

For Sturm, the apprenticeship provided the support and real-life exposure she needed to grow.

“When we first started, we were just PCTs, and it was cool to learn about the hospital before becoming a nurse,” said Sturm. “The program has helped me study and transition into nursing. Honestly, it felt like a family was rooting me on the whole time.”

Both Tucker and Sturm praised the inclusive and encouraging environment at Clay County Hospital.

“Nurses wear several hats,” Sturm explained. “We’re the ones building rapport with patients. We’re not just caregivers—we’re friends, educators, advocates. And through this program, I saw that nursing is so much more than bedside care. There are so many paths—from behavioral health to surgical support.”

Sturm was particularly inspired by the nurse practitioners she worked with, prompting her to set future goals.

“I want to continue with my BSN and become a nurse practitioner. Watching them here at CCH really inspired me.”

The impact of the program is already fueling its expansion. Dr. Frederick announced that Clay County Hospital plans to double the number of apprenticeships next year, with four new positions already open.

“This shows they see the value in investing in our students,” she said. “We’re hopeful this will grow into other specialties. We are incredibly thankful for the support of Clay County Hospital. They’re helping our students become workforce-ready in a truly meaningful way.”

As Tucker summarized, the value of apprenticeship goes beyond skills training.

“I highly encourage others to participate. It’s more than paid tuition—it’s the experience, friendships, the confidence. You’re not just learning, you’re becoming a part of something bigger.”

And for students like Sturm and Tucker, that “something bigger” is the beginning of a lifelong calling—to care, to serve, and to heal, right in the heart of their community.



Flora High School Musicians Track Original Songs at OCC

Twenty musicians from Flora High School swapped first-hour band for a crash course in commercial recording when they spent a day inside Olney Central College's state-of-the-art Recording Studio, tracking original material, tightening their timing to a metronome and learning how a professional session really runs.

The visiting roster — three student rock bands plus classmates from a music and audio-recording technology course — cycled through three hour-long blocks in the live room while OCC alumni engineers manned the control desk. Between takes, the teenagers peppered the crew with questions about microphone placement, signal flow and digital audio workstations, then broke for lunch together in the campus Knight Café, a trip underwritten by a gift from Muddy Creek & Co.

"I brought 20 students which made up 3 different rock bands as well as students from my Music/Audio Recording Technology Class," said Ethan Steber, Flora director of bands and an OCC graduate. "All of these rock bands meet during the school day, which allows them to practice completely during school hours, without trying to practice after school around work, sports and other activities."

The idea, Steber added, was born of a hallway chat with Wade Baker, OCC Instrumental Assistant Professor. "It came about with Ethan and me just brainstorming cool ideas for his kids," Baker said.

Baker mapped out a real-world production schedule — 9 a.m. to noon in the studio, followed by a Modern Musician Methods clinic — so students felt the same "high-pressure recording situation away from the comfort of their band room," he said. The payoff, Baker noted, was letting young performers "run the mic cables, set up the mic placements, use in-ear monitors, record to a metronome, be quick and efficient both behind the instrument and behind the computer."

For Steber's class, the session connected months of theory to practice. "This experience was super beneficial for

my students because it allowed them to see a real-world application of what they have been learning all year," he said. "Overall, all of my students had a great experience putting their skills to use, and are super excited to do it again soon!"

The day doubled as professional development for Baker's team. "This was not only a great opportunity but also for my faculty/staff," he said. "It also affords me the opportunity to get 3 of my former students experience in the recording and production field while benefiting our community ... It makes me extraordinarily proud of my students and the legacy they've left behind in our program."

That legacy now loops back into recruitment. Three OCC alumni — Josh Moats, James Whitfield and Trevor Parrent — served as session engineers alongside technician Jonathon Garrison, a living illustration, Baker said, of "the impact of community college" on regional arts education.

Looking ahead, Baker is turning the momentum into new offerings. "We will be organizing a commercial music festival next spring and we are working on organizing a week-long summer camp in Audio Recording and Production & Commercial Music," he said, inviting interested students to contact him at bakerw@iecc.edu.

Walk-In Wednesdays Return in July

Illinois Eastern Community Colleges will once again open its doors for Walk-In Wednesdays this July, offering prospective and current students a convenient way to get ready for the fall semester without the need for an appointment.

Walk-In Wednesdays will take place from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on July 2, 9, 16 and 23 at all four IECC campuses: Frontier Community College in Fairfield, Lincoln Trail College in Robinson, Olney Central College in Olney, and Wabash Valley College in Mount Carmel.

The events are designed to streamline the enrollment process by providing one-stop access to key student services, including advising, class registration, financial aid assistance, and placement testing. Staff will be on hand to answer questions and help students through each step.

"This is one of the easiest ways for students to take care of everything they need to get started," said Chris Forde, Director of Marketing and Communications for Illinois Eastern Community Colleges. "Whether you're a first-time student, returning to college, or still finalizing plans for the fall, we're here to help—and you don't need to schedule anything in advance."

In addition to personalized support, each campus will offer free snacks and small giveaways to attendees.

To make the most of their visit, students are encouraged to bring their high school or college transcripts, a driver's license or state ID, their Social Security number or card, and a completed FAFSA. If applicable, students may also bring an IEP or 504 plan to help with academic accommodations.

More information is available by contacting any IECC college or visiting iecc.edu.

WALK-IN WEDNESDAYS *get ready FOR FALL '25*

ADVISING - CLASS REGISTRATION - FINANCIAL AID - TESTING

FREE SNACKS & GIFTS FOR ATTENDING

JULY 2 9-3 **JULY 9 9-3** **JULY 16 9-3** **JULY 23 9-3**

Event held in Student Services Office at Wattleworth Hall at Olney Central College
305 North West Street
Olney, IL 62450
Please bring: Transcripts, Driver's License or State ID, Social Security Number or Card, Completed FAFSA, IEP or 504 Plan (optional)

Science, Sparks, and Stuffed Animals: Ignite Your Curiosity at OCC

Whether it's strumming a jazz riff, diagnosing a plush patient, or striking a welding arc, students across southeastern Illinois are spending their summer discovering something new through Olney Central College's Ignite Curiosity Summer Camps.

OCC launched its summer camp series in June with hands-on opportunities for boys and girls to learn the basics of welding, a jazz band camp, and a healthcare-themed camp that introduced students to careers in nursing and medicine. And the fun isn't over yet—more exciting sessions are coming in July and August.

"We want students to see that learning doesn't stop when the school year ends—and that exploring your curiosity can lead to exciting career paths," said Curtis Miller, Director of Enrollment and Community Outreach for Illinois Eastern Community Colleges. "These camps give kids a chance to try something new in a hands-on, memorable way."



Plush Pals Hospital

July 10 | 9–11 a.m. or 12–2 p.m. | \$35

For students who have completed Grades 1–5

Future healthcare heroes will jump into action as they treat stuffed animal patients diagnosed with "Fluff Deficiency Syndrome." Led by Dr. Alani Frederick, students will take vital signs, conduct mock lab tests, assist in pretend X-rays and surgery, and even try physical therapy—all while exploring careers in nursing, radiology, and lab science. Each camper will go home with their own cuddly, cured patient.



Yikes, Parasites! Gross Pathology and Medical Lab Science

July 30 | 9 a.m.–2 p.m. | \$25

For students who have completed Grades 9–12

This camp gets real—and a little gross—as high school students investigate 10 patient cases using real lab techniques. With instructors Dr. Sarah Bergbower and Chris Matthews, campers will dive into blood typing, urinalysis, microbiology, gross pathology, and mock autopsies. Gloves on—lunch is included!



Welding Camp

August 7 | 8 a.m.–12 p.m. | \$45

For students who have completed Grades 7–12

Spark creativity (and a few metal joints) at this MIG welding camp at OCC's Terry L. Bruce West Richland Center in Noble. Instructor Maverick Fisher will guide students through safety basics and welding techniques as they build a take-home project. Students should wear jeans, closed-toed shoes, and long sleeves—and check in at the WRC, not the OCC main campus.

How to Register

To register, students must submit the registration form, emergency contact information, and a liability waiver to the OCC Student Services Office in Wattleworth Hall. Camps are filled on a first-come, first-served basis, and submitting materials by mail does not guarantee a spot.

For more information and registration forms, visit iecc.edu/summercamps.

OCC in Pictures



Graduates from Olney Central College's Class of 2025 stand to be recognized during the Commencement Ceremony.



With smiles and selfies, Radiography grads get ready to mark a major milestone.



A round of applause greets graduates as they exit the ceremony and head into their next chapter.



A heartfelt hug marks a proud milestone during OCC's Nursing Pinning Ceremony.



OCC students Emma Gill and Courtney Crawford are recognized at the Phi Theta Kappa Illinois Academic Team Banquet for their outstanding academic achievements.



Students in OCC's Administration of Justice Program got a firsthand look at K9 operations this week as Instructor Trenton Gonzales and K9 Riggs led a live demonstration for the Police Organization & Operations class.