



HIGHLIGHTS



Chris Forde brings IECC to a national stage with presentation at social media conference.



Kerry Travis is working to develop dual credit program for IECC.



LTC planning to pay tribute to first volleyball team.

LTC PLANNING GROUNDBREAKING FOR TECH CENTER ON OCTOBER 21

Lincoln Trail College will hold a groundbreaking ceremony for its new Career and Technical Training Center on Tuesday, October 21, at 4:30 p.m. The state-of-the-art facility will serve as a hub for hands-on training in Welding, Process Technology, and Broadband Telecommunications, creating new pathways for students and strengthening the local workforce.

Construction crews began site preparation and groundwork in August, marking the start of a project more than 20 years in the making.

"This has been a long-term vision for Lincoln Trail College and our community," said LTC President Tona Ambrose. "We're thrilled to see it becoming a reality. This building represents opportunity—an investment in students, in Crawford County, and in the future of technical education."

The Career and Technical Training Center will provide modern, industry-aligned learning spaces where students

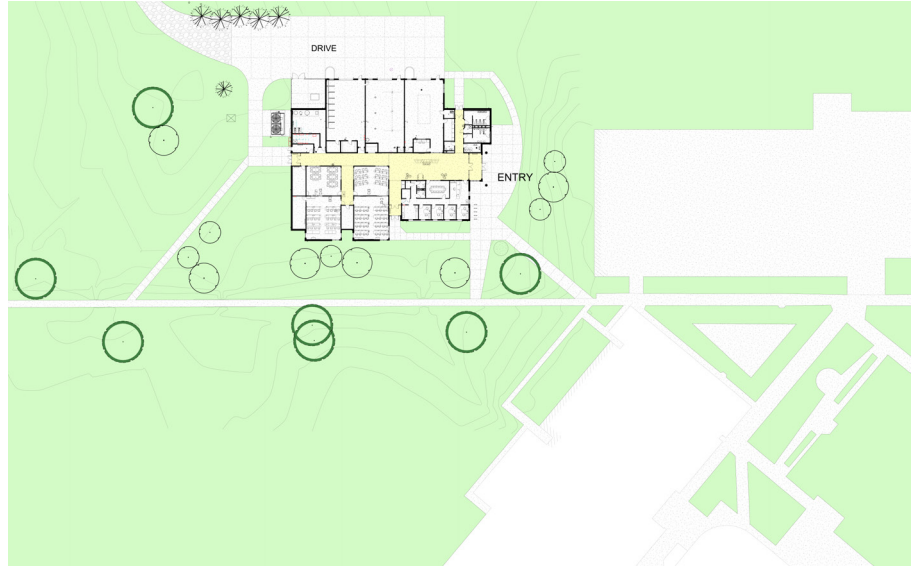


UPCOMING NOVEMBER EVENTS

- 1 **Ken Ludwig's Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery**
7 p.m., Zwermann Arts Center Theater
- 2 **Ken Ludwig's Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery**
2 p.m., Zwermann Arts Center Theater
- Sunday Night Supper**
5-7 p.m., Statesmen Grill
- 5 **Carlisle Middle School Visit**
- 7 **FAFSA Fridays**
- 9 **Sunday Night Supper**
5-7 p.m., Statesmen Grill
- 10 **EIU Visit**
10-1, Williams Hall Welcome Wall
- 11 **COLLEGE CLOSED - Veterans Day**
- 12 **USI Visit**
10-1, Williams Hall Welcome Wall
- 13 **LTC Foundation Concert Series: Endless Summer - America's Beach Boys Experience**
7 p.m., Zwermann Arts Center Theater
- 14 **FAFSA Fridays**
- 15 **LTC Scholastic Bowl**
- 16 **Sunday Night Supper**
5-7 p.m., Statesmen Grill
- 17 **McKendree College Visit**
8-11 a.m., Williams Hall Welcome Wall
- 18 **Nursing Information Session**
10 a.m., Williams Hall 110
- 20 **LTC Foundation Meeting**
12 p.m., Lincoln Room
- 23 **Sunday Night Supper**
5-7 p.m., Statesmen Grill
- 26 **Last Day to Withdraw from Fall Semester Classes**
- 27-28 **COLLEGE CLOSED - Thanksgiving Break**
- 30 **Sunday Night Supper**
5-7 p.m., Statesmen Grill

can develop the skills employers need most. The programs it houses prepare graduates for high-demand, high-wage careers in fields vital to Illinois' economy.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs in welding, process technology, and telecommunications are all projected to grow in the coming decade, with average annual salaries ranging from \$48,000 to \$70,000.



The site plan of the Career and Technical Center shows the location of the new building in relation to Williams Hall and the Sports Center.

"This facility is going to open doors for students, for employers, and for the region," said IECC Chancellor Dr. Ryan Gower. "It will give people the tools to build better careers and better lives—without ever leaving southeastern Illinois."

In addition to serving traditional college students, the facility will support dual credit and workforce partnerships. High school students will have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience and earn college credit, while area employers will benefit from customized training and upskilling opportunities through IECC's Business and Industry division.

"This is about creating a strong, connected talent pipeline," Ambrose said. "From high

school students to adults returning to learn new skills, this center will empower people to achieve their goals and drive our local economy forward."

FORDE REPRESENTS IECC ON NATIONAL STAGE AT SOCIAL MEDIA CONFERENCE



When the 2025 Social Media Strategies Summit for Higher Education convenes this month, Illinois Eastern Community Colleges will once again have a voice on the national stage. Chris Forde, IECC's Program Director of Marketing and Communications, has been invited for the second consecutive year to serve as a conference speaker, joining communications professionals from some of the nation's most respected universities.

Forde will be part of a panel discussion titled "The Building Blocks of a Social Media Campaign: From Planning to Results." The session explores the art and strategy behind building effective social media campaigns that align with institutional priorities and deliver measurable impact.

Joining Forde on the panel are Kristen Pope, Associate Director of Social Media at Harvard University's Division of Continuing Education, and Kayla Ooms, Digital and Social Media Specialist at Purdue University Northwest. The discussion will be moderated by Jason

Boucher, Director of Social Marketing at Cookson Communications.

"It's a real honor to share the stage with colleagues from institutions like Harvard and Purdue," Forde said. "But even more meaningful is the opportunity to represent a community college system like IECC on a national platform. It reinforces that some of the most innovative and strategic marketing work in higher education is happening right here in rural Illinois."

Sharing Strategy and Collaboration

The panel delves into how marketing teams can connect creative campaigns to institutional goals and foster collaboration across departments.

During the session, Forde and his co-panelists will explore how content pillars can guide campaign planning, how to communicate strategies to campus partners, and how to gain buy-in from leadership, faculty, and students. They'll also discuss managing deadlines, creating campaign briefs, evaluating results, and learning from campaigns that don't go as planned.

"For us, everything begins with our mission," Forde said. "When we plan a campaign—whether it's promoting one of our programs, sharing alumni success stories, or encouraging students to register for classes—it's not just about engagement metrics. It's about helping more people see how accessible and life-changing community college education can be."

He said collaboration is a key ingredient. "The best campaigns are the ones where everyone has a voice—faculty, staff, students, and leadership," he said. "We've worked hard to build relationships across departments so our messaging feels unified and authentic."

National Recognition for Local Innovation

The Social Media Strategies Summit, hosted annually by Global Strategic Management Institute, draws marketing and communications professionals from colleges and universities across the country to exchange ideas, case studies, and best practices.

Forde's participation, he said, highlights the growing recognition of IECC's marketing approach,

which focuses on storytelling, data-driven strategy, and creative campaigns that resonate with students and communities alike.

"IECC has shown that you don't need a massive budget or a huge team to create impact," he said. "You need clarity, creativity, and consistency. The fact that we're part of this conversation two years in a row shows that the work being done here matters nationally."

Under Forde's leadership, IECC's marketing team has launched several large-scale initiatives, including the Best Decision Ever campaign, a long-term storytelling effort featuring students and alumni whose college experiences transformed their lives. The campaign, which runs through 2026, has helped humanize the college's message and strengthen enrollment outreach across the district's four campuses.

"Social media gives us the ability to connect our stories directly to the people we serve," Forde said. "When students see someone like them succeeding at IECC, it builds trust and inspires action. That's the heart of every great campaign."

A Platform for Continued Learning

Beyond representing IECC, Forde said participating in the summit is also a chance to learn from others and bring new insights back to the college system.

"Being part of this event is a reminder that higher education marketing is constantly evolving," he said. "Listening to peers from across the country helps us see where the field is headed—what's working, what's changing, and how we can keep improving."

Representing the Community College Mission

Ultimately, Forde said, the invitation is about more than professional recognition; it's about showcasing the value and creativity that community colleges bring to higher education.

"When IECC is part of a national conversation like this, it helps elevate the perception of community colleges everywhere," he said. "We're proving that innovation doesn't just happen at the biggest universities. It happens in communities like ours, where the work we do every day directly changes lives."



The banner features a central graphic of a globe composed of various social media icons, topped with a graduation cap. To the right, the text reads: "I'M SPEAKING AT", "SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES SUMMIT", "HIGHER EDUCATION", "October 20-22, 2025", and "VIRTUAL CONFERENCE". Below this, a circular portrait of Chris Forde is shown. To the right of the portrait, his name "Chris Forde" is displayed in bold, followed by "Illinois Eastern Community Colleges & Lincoln Trail College". At the bottom left, a yellow button says "Join me!". At the bottom right, the website "socialmediastrategiessummit.com" is listed.

FINANCIAL AID USING FALL FRIDAYS TO HELP STUDENTS WITH THE FAFSA

Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is one of the most important steps students can take to make college affordable, and Illinois Eastern Community Colleges is helping make the process easier through its FAFSA Fridays events.

Beginning October 17 and continuing through November 14, FAFSA Fridays will take place each Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at all four IECC campuses — Frontier Community College, Lincoln Trail College, Olney Central College, and Wabash Valley College. The walk-in events give students and their families one-on-one support from IECC's financial aid professionals as they complete their 2026–2027 FAFSA.



"These events are designed to make the FAFSA process less intimidating," said Krystle Riggle, Program Director of Financial Aid for IECC. "Our goal is to help students feel confident and supported as they take this important step toward funding their education."

The FAFSA is a key component of college financial planning. By completing the form, students can determine their eligibility for federal and state grants, work-study programs, and certain scholarships. Some aid programs are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, which makes submitting the FAFSA early especially important.

"Filling out your FAFSA early ensures you're in the best position to receive the maximum amount of aid available," said Riggle. "We want students to know that help is available every step of the way. Whether you're a new applicant, a returning student, or a parent navigating the process for the first time, our team is here to guide you."

FAFSA Fridays are open to all current and prospective students, and no appointment is required.

In addition to the Friday walk-in sessions, IECC's financial aid offices are available throughout the week for students who are unable to attend on Fridays. Appointments can be scheduled directly with any campus financial aid office.

Riggle said that IECC's financial aid professionals are trained to help students address a variety of FAFSA-related questions, including how to create an FSA ID, what information is needed to complete the application, and how to review the status of a FAFSA form.

"Our financial aid experts truly care about helping students succeed," Riggle said. "We understand that the FAFSA can feel overwhelming, but students don't have to figure it out alone. FAFSA Fridays are about removing barriers and giving students the personalized support they deserve." For many students, completing the FAFSA is the first step in turning college aspirations into reality. Riggle emphasized that understanding financial aid options early helps students and families plan with confidence.

"College is an investment in your future," she said. "Taking the time to complete your FAFSA is one of the smartest things you can do to make that future possible."

For more information about FAFSA Fridays or to schedule an appointment with a financial aid office, visit iecc.edu or contact your nearest IECC campus.

TRAVIS HELPING CULTIVATE AGRICULTURE AT LTC AND IECC



After 35 years of teaching agriculture at Oblong High School, Kerry Travis thought he was ready to retire. Then Lincoln Trail College came calling.

"They kind of came and said, 'Hey, we'd like to start an ag program at LTC. Would you help us spearhead that and get it started?' " Travis recalled with a laugh. "So the rest is history — except it's not too much history yet."

That call brought Travis back into a familiar role: building something from the ground up. When he first arrived at Oblong more than three decades ago, its agriculture program was struggling. By the time he retired, it had become one of the region's strongest FFA chapters. Now, Travis hopes to repeat that success at the college level.

"I feel like I'm doing the same thing here, which is kind of exciting," he said. "It almost gets me excited to start all over again — seeing all the different jobs out there and the possibilities for young people to really get involved."

Building From the Ground Up

Lincoln Trail College plans to launch its agriculture program in fall 2026, beginning with dual-credit classes for local high-school students. The goal is to give area students an opportunity to explore agricultural careers close to home while earning college credit.

"For a lot of these kids, it's a chance to get their feet wet," Travis said. "They might think they know what they want to go into, but once they get into a class, it might open up a whole new area they never realized existed."

Travis has already started laying the groundwork — meeting with local schools, identifying course options, and talking with businesses that might partner with the college. He sees enormous potential in connecting students with the wide range of careers that fall under the agriculture umbrella.

More Than Farming

When many people think of agriculture, they think of traditional farming. But Travis said the industry today stretches far beyond the family farm.

"There's everything — production, seed and chemical sales, animal science, drones, agribusiness," he said. "There are so many opportunities, and a lot of them are right here in our area."

Those opportunities range from working with regional cooperatives like FS and Effingham Equity to careers in precision agriculture, logistics, and technology. Some require a four-year degree, but many employers are eager to hire graduates with two-year degrees and practical skills.

Even if you just take a few classes — learning how to mix chemicals, studying ag math — you never know where that might take you," Travis said. "It might open doors you didn't expect, even in fields that aren't strictly ag-related."

Meeting Local Demand

For years, Crawford County students interested in pursuing college-level agriculture courses have had to travel outside of the county.

"That's really nice for those who can do it, but it's a lot to ask some families to drive that far," Travis said. "This just gives kids an opportunity to do it here — to get a two-year degree locally or start here and then transfer on."

He's quick to emphasize that the goal isn't to compete with nearby colleges, but to expand access.

"We're not trying to steal kids from other programs," he said. "It just opens more doors. You can start here in Robinson, stay close to home, and still have a path to a four-year university."

Travis hopes those pathways will keep more young people rooted in the community — and supply local employers with a steady pipeline of skilled, motivated graduates.

"There's a big demand for ag jobs around here," he said. "If we can train students here, we can help local businesses fill those positions and help our area grow."

A Familiar Mission

For Travis, the project feels like a continuation of his life's work: helping students discover their passion for agriculture.

"High school FFA has been so strong in this area," he said. "Now those students can continue right into LTC. I think that's really important."

He's also eager to see how the college's resources — from facilities to partnerships — can support students in new ways.

"It's going to be exciting to see how it all comes together," Travis said. "There are so many different directions this could go, and I think people are going to be surprised by how much agriculture touches everything."

Looking Ahead

The timeline for the program's rollout is ambitious but achievable. Planning and curriculum development are underway, and if all goes well, the first classes could begin in fall 2026.

"We all have a goal that kids will be able to take classes next fall," Travis said. "That's what we're working toward."

Until then, he's focused on cultivating interest — among students, parents, and local industry leaders — in what he hopes will become a cornerstone program for the college.

"It's about getting people involved — businesses involved, kids involved," he said. "That's how you grow something that lasts."

As someone who's spent a career nurturing growth — both in crops and in students — Travis sees this new chapter as a chance to plant the seeds of opportunity once again.

"I've always believed in what agriculture can do for young people," he said. "And now, to help build that right here at LTC — that's pretty special."



TRICK OR TREAT AT THE TRAIL RETURNS TO LTC



Lincoln Trail College's beloved Trick or Treat at the Trail returns on Thursday, October 23, from 4–6 p.m. The annual event offers families a fun and safe environment to celebrate Halloween and has become one of the community's favorite fall traditions.

This year's event will once again take place inside the Crawford County Recreation Center, the Sports Center, Williams Hall, the Student Union, and the Zwermann Arts Center, giving children a chance to collect candy in a festive, weather-proof setting. The indoor layout allows for creative decorations, themed booths, and plenty of opportunities for photos.

Trick or Treat at the Trail typically draws more than 2,000 guests each year. Children and their families can visit dozens of stations hosted by LTC student clubs, organizations, and athletic teams, along with several local businesses and community partners. Many groups spend weeks preparing their displays and costumes to help make the event special for visitors.

"Trick or Treat at the Trail is one of our favorite events of the year," said Lincoln Trail College President Tona Ambrose. "It's a wonderful example of how our students, staff, and community come together to create something magical for families. We couldn't do it without the generosity of our local sponsors and the hard work of everyone involved."

Visitors are encouraged to arrive early and keep safety in mind while parking and walking on campus.

"There are always a lot of excited kids moving between buildings," said Ambrose. "We remind everyone to drive slowly, stay alert, and please avoid parking on the grass."



TICKETS ON SALE FOR BASKERVILLE: A SHERLOCK HOLMES MYSTERY

Tickets are now available for Lincoln Trail College Theatre's fall production of *Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery*, opening October 30 in the Zwermann Arts Center Theater. Performances run October 30, 31, and November 1 at 7 p.m., with a matinee on November 2 at 2 p.m.

Directed by Taylor Dahlberg, Ken Ludwig's fast-paced comedy brings a fresh and hilarious twist to the classic Sherlock Holmes story. When a family curse threatens the Baskerville heir, Holmes and Dr. Watson must solve the case before it's too late. With five actors portraying more than 40 characters, audiences can expect disguises, accents, and nonstop laughs as the detective duo untangles a web of mystery and mischief.

The cast includes Justin Janney as Sherlock Holmes, Ryan Pinkston as Dr. Watson, Rachel Dollahan as Actor 1, Al Crosley as Actor 2, and Anna Bales as Actress 1. The run crew features Anna Osborn, Ashtyn Reid, Anna Paul, Rebecca Trivett, and Grayson Pinkston.

Tickets are \$15 and available now at cur8.com.

For more information, call the Performing Arts Office at 618-544-8657 ext. 1433 or visit iecc.edu/ltc.



LTC LAUNCHING CHILDREN'S CHOIR

Lincoln Trail College is inviting young singers to take the stage this fall with the launch of a new Children's Choir.

Open to kids ages 5–11, the choir will meet from 6:30–7:30 p.m. on November 6, 13, 20, and December 4 in DeMent Auditorium. Under the direction of Rebecca Geffs, participants will learn songs, explore basic vocal techniques, and develop performance skills in a fun and supportive environment.

The choir will make its debut performance on December 5 at 7 p.m. as part of Lincoln Trail College's Fall Choral Concert.

"We're excited to give children in our community the opportunity to experience the joy of singing and performing on stage," said Geffs. "It's a wonderful way for them to build confidence and creativity."

Participation in the Children's Choir is limited to 20 students, and the cost to register is \$25 per child. Parents interested in enrolling their child can call 618-546-2300 or email rawlingsk@iecc.edu for more information.



LTC REMEMBERS FIRST VOLLEYBALL TEAM

Lincoln Trail College will celebrate a milestone in school history when it honors the first Lady Statesmen volleyball team during its home match against Rend Lake College on Oct. 20 at 6:30 p.m.

This season marks the 50th anniversary of women's athletics at LTC. The 1975 volleyball team was the first women's program in school history, paving the way for generations of female student-athletes. Volleyball was joined later that academic year by women's basketball, which began play in January 1976, and softball, which launched that spring.



LTC's first volleyball team (front row) Zelpha Clatfelter, Greta Hudson, Laronda Brush, P.K. Mehler, Barb Wesner, and Beth Lowe; (back row) Vicki Gullett, Rose Napier, Dana Wells, Cheri Brimberry, and Kathy Hoke.

"This is such a special year for Lincoln Trail College and for everyone who's been part of our women's athletics programs," said head volleyball coach Dana Goodwin.

"We stand on the shoulders of the women who helped start it all. Honoring that first team reminds us where we came from and how far we've come."

In their inaugural 1975 season, the Lady Statesmen posted a combined varsity and B-team record of 8-3 under coach Dee Abrahamson. Team captains Vicki Gullett, Kathy Hoke, and P.K. Mehler led a group of athletes who were learning competitive volleyball for the first time. Players such as Dana Wells, Zelpha Clatfelter, Greta Hudson, Laronda Brush, Barb Wesner, Beth Lowe, Rose Napier, and Cheri Brimberry helped lay the foundation for decades of LTC volleyball success.

"They were trailblazers," said Goodwin. "At that time, women's sports were just beginning to take hold across the country, and these players jumped in with incredible spirit and determination. Their courage to compete opened the door for thousands of women who have come through our programs since."

Goodwin said recognizing the 1975 team is not only about celebrating a record but also about honoring the broader impact of women's athletics at Lincoln Trail College.

"Every time our athletes step onto the court, the field, or the diamond, they represent 50 years of growth, opportunity, and empowerment," she said. "That legacy continues today, and it's important for our current players to see the women who made it possible."

The celebration on Oct. 20 will include special recognition of the 1975 team members and a look back at the early years of volleyball at LTC.



NOVEMBER ATHLETIC EVENTS

Men's Basketball

1	Volunteer State CC (at Vincennes)	2:00
4	at Jefferson College	7:00
8	Olive Harvey College (at Mattoon)	3:00
9	Richard J. Daley College (at Mattoon)	11:00
10	Millikin JV	7:00
15	Danville Area Community College	3:00
19	Greenville JV	7:00
22	Oakland City JV	3:00
25	at Indian Hills Community College	7:00
28	at Southeastern Community College	7:00
29	John Wood CC (at Southeastern IA)	TBA

Women's Basketball

1	Mineral Area College	2:00
3	St. Louis Community College	5:30
4	at Jefferson College	5:00
7	at Dan Hull Memorial Classic	TBA
8	at Dan Hull Memorial Classic	TBA
10	at Brescia University JV	5:00
12	at Three Rivers Community College	5:00
15	Mott Community College	12:00
19	at Kaskaskia College	5:00
22	Danville Area Community College	1:00

NEW SOFTBALL CHANGES



Lincoln Trail College welcomed two new faces to lead its softball program. Veteran coach Larry Hilderbrand has been named Interim Head Softball Coach, while recent Weber State standout Eva Richardson joins as Assistant Coach.

Lincoln Trail College has begun a search for a permanent head softball coach. Hilderbrand will serve in the interim role during the fall season, guiding the program and student-athletes while the search is underway.

Hilderbrand brings more than three decades of coaching experience to LTC. His career began at the youth level, coaching his daughter, and grew to include travel teams and more than 12 years of high school coaching. Most recently, he has served as an assistant coach at Robinson High School. "It's

been a little hectic, but exciting," Hilderbrand said of his transition to the college level. "The players have responded really well, and we're making a lot of progress."

Richardson, a graduate of Casey-Westfield High School, adds a fresh perspective to the Statesmen program. A catcher by trade, she was a two-time NJCAA All-American at Lake Land Community College before transferring to Weber State University in Utah. At Weber State, she helped the Wildcats win the Big Sky Conference championship and advance to the NCAA Regional in Oregon. Richardson earned her bachelor's degree in Sport Management and is grateful for the chance to begin her coaching career close to home. "The junior college experience changed my life," she said. "I want to help other student-athletes experience the same opportunities I had."

"We're excited to have Coach Hilderbrand and Coach Richardson leading our softball program," said LTC Athletic Director Jennifer Saad. "Larry's years of experience and Eva's recent success as a student-athlete bring an excellent balance to our coaching staff. I'm confident they'll make a positive impact on our players and the program."

LTC IN PICTURES



Golden hour light warms the Lincoln Trail College sculpture, framed by autumn blooms and pumpkins—a perfect snapshot of fall on campus.



Justin Janney (left) and Ryan Pinkston (right) rehearse for *Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery* while run crew members pose as portraits in the background.



The Lincoln Trail College volleyball team celebrates a point.



Conner York, Erin Volk, Carrie Brown, Heather Watts, and Cyndi Boyce pose with the Statesmen at LTC's Trivia Night.



A student asks local officials about voter registration. Students were able to register during Constitution Day.



A group of students sings karaoke during LTC's Pancake and Karaoke Night.



Students from Lawrenceville High School interested in becoming educators learned about their options at LTC during a campus visit.



Members of the Institutional Outreach team pose for a photo during the Fall Workshop at Lincoln Trail College.