



HIGHLIGHTS



Student Senate holds food drive for LTCares Pantry.



Tip Off at the Trail brings scholastic bowl tradition back to LTC.



LTC honors first volleyball team and pioneering coach.

LTC BREAKS GROUND ON TECHNOLOGY CENTER

Illinois Capital Development Board (CDB) announced that construction is underway on the \$13.4 million Career and Technical Training Center at Lincoln Trail College, one of four colleges within Illinois Eastern Community Colleges.

Lincoln Trail College held a groundbreaking ceremony for its new Career and Technical Training Center on Tuesday, October 21. 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.

"From local high school and college students to members of Illinois' skilled workforce, Lincoln Trail College's new facility will provide vital career development opportunities for the people of southeastern Illinois," said Governor JB Pritzker. "I'm proud to see even more shovels in the ground as colleges across our state grow, offering key technical programs that help make our workforce the best in the nation. I look forward to seeing this new facility in Robinson come to life."

Construction mobilized with site preparation and groundwork



UPCOMING DECEMBER EVENTS

- 2 Health & Wellness Coach Virtual Information Session**
5:30 pm., Zoom
- Fall Instrumental Concert**
7 p.m., Zwermann Arts Center Theater
- 3 Nursing Information Session**
1 p.m., Williams Hall 110
- 5 Virtual Nursing Information Session**
12 p.m., Zoom
- Fall Vocal Concert**
7 p.m., Zwermann Arts Center Theater
- 7 Youth Recitals**
- Sunday Night Supper**
5-7 p.m., Statesmen Grill
- 12 Last Day of Fall Semester Classes**
- 14 Sunday Night Supper**
5-7 p.m., Statesmen Grill
- 15-18 Final Exams**
- 19 Last Day of Fall Semester**
- 22-1/2 COLLEGE CLOSED - Winter Break**

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 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.

The scope of work includes the construction of a single-story building encompassing approximately 30,000 square feet. The new facility will include

classroom and laboratory space to support a wide range of technical programs.

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.

"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."

The Illinois Capital Development Board (CDB) will oversee the project in accordance with the protocol for state-appropriated construction projects. H.E. Mitchell Construction is serving as the general contractor, and Graham & Hyde Architects, Inc. is the architecture and engineering firm for the project.

"We are excited to begin this project at Lincoln Trail College, which will greatly impact the regional economy," said CDB Executive Director, TJ Edwards. "Ensuring a skilled workforce is trained and ready to meet industry needs is critical to supporting Illinois' continued growth, and the new Career and Technical Training Center will be an important resource for advancing educational opportunities in the area."



Lincoln Trail College President Tona Ambrose speaks during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Technology Center

IECC AMONG ASPEN INSTITUTE'S TOP 200 U.S. COMMUNITY COLLEGES



Illinois Eastern Community Colleges (IECC) - encompassing Frontier Community College, Lincoln Trail College, Olney Central College, and Wabash Valley College — has been named among the Top 200 U.S. Community Colleges by the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program.

The recognition places IECC among the top 20 percent of nearly 1,000 community colleges eligible to compete for the \$1 million Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence — the nation's signature recognition of achievement and performance in two-year higher education. The Aspen Prize honors colleges that excel in student outcomes such as retention, completion, transfer, and workforce success, while advancing equity and continuous improvement.

"Being recognized by the Aspen Institute is an affirmation of what we already know to be true about Illinois Eastern Community Colleges — that our students receive one of the best community college educations in the nation," said Chancellor Dr. Ryan Gower.

Across the country, community colleges face unprecedented pressures, including uncertainty in state funding, shifting demographics, and growing skepticism about the value of higher education. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, national enrollment in two-year institutions has fallen nearly 40% since 2010, and persistence rates remain below 60%. IECC's inclusion in the Aspen Top 200 underscores its leadership in navigating those trends through a systemwide focus on innovation, student success, and workforce alignment. "This recognition reflects the outstanding achievements of our faculty and staff who put students first," said Dr. Cathy Robb, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs. "Our success is not only about what we've accomplished, but also our willingness to evolve — to embrace new technologies, flexible teaching strategies, and learning experiences that meet the needs of today's students."



As higher education adapts to a changing environment, including an increasingly mobile, digital, and cost-conscious generation of learners, IECC continues to expand student access while preserving accessibility and quality. From guided pathways and transfer articulation to dual credit pipelines and fully online programs, IECC is modernizing the student experience without sacrificing affordability.

"Across the country, higher education costs continue to rise, limiting access for many families," said Chris Simpson, Vice Chancellor of Business Operations. "IECC offers a different story. Students can receive an excellent education and graduate without being burdened by excessive debt."



IECC's recognition also reflects its commitment to supporting the whole student. Research consistently shows that co-curricular involvement, meaningful student support services, and a sense of belonging significantly elevate retention, completion, and transfer rates at community colleges. IECC's investments in holistic learning environments — the arts, recreation, student life to student-support services — help students find their footing and their future. "When we connect academic learning with personal growth, students not only stay enrolled — they thrive," said Dr. Matt Fowler, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs.

With deep roots across southeastern Illinois, IECC's mission is different from four-year colleges and universities. Community colleges play a vital role in strengthening local economies through workforce partnerships, apprenticeships, and career programs. "We partner with employers to build programs that provide practical, hands-on experience — preparing students for high-demand, rewarding careers that keep our communities strong," said Dr. Sharmila Kakac, Vice Chancellor of Business and Industry. And the success of IECC students after graduation is one of the more important metrics measured by the Aspen Institute.

The Aspen recognition is an important validation that IECC's student-centered approach — from affordability and access to completion and career outcomes — is among the best in the country.

"For prospective students, parents, guidance counselors, and community partners, this recognition is proof that an IECC education is trusted, high-quality, and focused on results," said Tona Ambrose, Vice Chancellor of Institutional Outreach. Enrollment for the Spring

2026 term is now open and students who are interested in attending one of the four IECC campuses can find the application online at www.iecc.edu/apply.



The 200 eligible colleges will now enter a rigorous review process that culminates in the announcement of the Aspen Prize winner in spring 2027. Colleges will be evaluated on student outcomes, equity, and institutional practices that drive exceptional performance. "This recognition belongs to our people," said Gary Carter, Chair of the IECC Board of Trustees. "Our faculty, staff, and administrators are united by one mission — to ensure every student in southeastern Illinois has access to an exceptional education that changes lives and strengthens communities."

IECC REPORTS STABLE ENROLLMENT, GROWTH IN KEY AREAS

Illinois Eastern Community Colleges (IECC) is reporting steady enrollment this fall, with strong gains among dual credit, career and technical, transfer, and adult education students. While overall full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment is down just 0.5 percent, Vice Chancellor of Institutional Outreach Tona Ambrose, who directs IECC's enrollment management efforts, says the numbers reflect stability and strength across the district's four colleges—Frontier Community College, Lincoln Trail College, Olney Central College, and Wabash Valley College.

ENROLLMENT SNAPSHOT		
	HEADCOUNT	FTE
DEGREE SEEKING	▲ 1.04%	▲ 0.30%
FIRST TIME FULL TIME	▲ 7.03%	▲ 6.93%
FIRST TIME IN COLLEGE	▲ 11.69%	▲ 9.25%
CTE	▲ 5.83%	▲ 4.27%
TRANSFER-SEEKING	▲ 2.99%	▲ 2.27%
ADULT EDUCATION	▲ 15.73%	▲ 12.13%
DUAL CREDIT	▲ 4.47%	▲ 6.30%

Ambrose said the district's core campus operations remain stable, and that enrollment declines have occurred primarily within IECC's Business and Industry division—a result of purposeful, strategic operational decisions rather than decreased student interest.

"IECC's overall FTE decline of just 0.5 percent is a strong indicator of stability and resilience in today's challenging higher education landscape," said Ambrose. "This consistency reflects the intentional and collaborative work happening across our district. It shows that our strategies are working, our programs are relevant, and our colleges are effectively supporting persistence and completion."

FTE, or full-time equivalent, represents the total number of course hours taken by all students, converted into the equivalent number of full-time students. It is a key measure used by colleges to assess overall enrollment trends.



Dual Credit and First-Time Student Growth

Dual credit enrollment continues to be one of IECC's strongest growth areas, thanks to expanded course offerings, flexible delivery options, and strong partnerships with local high schools.

"Our Directors of Dual Credit, faculty and staff, together with high school counselors, instructors, and administrators deserve recognition for helping students see the value of earning college credit early," Ambrose said. "Their collaboration has

helped more students get a head start on their college and career goals."

In addition to dual credit growth, IECC also saw an increase in first-time college students across the district—a promising sign that more students are choosing IECC to begin their higher education journey close to home.

Career and Technical Education Momentum

Enrollment in career and technical programs also rose, reflecting student interest in hands-on, high-

wage career paths and the district's close ties with regional employers. Programs in areas such as Health Professions, Broadband Telecommunications, Electrical Distribution Systems, Industrial Maintenance Technology, and Diesel Equipment Technology continue to attract students.

"That growth is fueled by our faculty who bring real-world expertise into the classroom, our academic deans who align programs with workforce needs, and employers who collaborate on equipment, internships, and curriculum," Ambrose said. "Together, they're ensuring that students gain the skills, credentials, and experience employers value most."



Strong Transfer and Adult Education Results

Transfer enrollment is also increasing, reflecting the success of students who start their academic journey with IECC before transferring to four-year universities to complete their bachelor's degrees. That growth is supported by clear academic pathways, personalized advising, and strong articulation agreements that make the transition smoother and more affordable.

"Every successful transfer represents more than just a number—it's proof that IECC's focus to prepare students

for the next step in their education and careers is working," Ambrose said.

Adult education enrollment is climbing as well, supported by targeted outreach, flexible learning options, and initiatives like ICAPS (Integrated Career and Academic Preparation System) and AMOC (Alternative Method of Credentialing). "These programs allow adult learners to earn credentials while improving foundational skills, with the added support of career coaching and other wraparound services," Ambrose explained.

Collaboration and Innovation Across the District

Ambrose credits the success to district-wide collaboration and IECC's ongoing work with Guided Pathways, which helps students identify clear academic and career goals early in their college journey. "Enrollment management and our growth take everyone at IECC," she said. "Our faculty, staff, and leaders across the district have worked tirelessly to engage students and support them every step of the way."

Looking ahead, Ambrose said the district will continue to focus on expanding access, increasing reach, and ensuring educational and career relevance. "Ultimately, IECC's greatest strength lies in our people—those who are committed to our mission and who continue to dream big and meet students where they are," she said.

STUDENT SENATE HOLDS FOOD DRIVE FOR LTCARES PANTRY

Lincoln Trail College's Student Senate is leading its annual food drive, collecting non-perishable items to support the LTCares Pantry and local families in need. Collection barrels are located outside the Zwermann Arts Center Theater, the Sports Center, the entrance of Williams Hall, and in Williams Hall Room 105. Monetary donations can be taken to the Student Services Office in Williams Hall. Donations will be accepted through December 1.

The drive is part of a districtwide initiative across all four Illinois

Eastern Community Colleges campuses. A friendly competition adds an extra incentive, with the campus collecting the most food earning a traveling trophy and bragging rights.

"This project is a great example of students taking initiative and living out our mission," said Dr. Phil Thorsen, faculty advisor of the Student Senate. "Civic engagement is a cornerstone of what we do at Lincoln Trail College, and our students understand the importance of supporting one another and our community."

Items collected through the drive will benefit the LTCares Pantry, which provides essential support for LTC students. Depending on the amount collected, the Student Senate plans to share donations with other area food pantries to help meet the growing local need.

"Many food pantries are seeing a surge in demand," Thorsen said. "We know that when students' basic needs are met, they're more likely to succeed in the classroom. This effort is one way our students are helping ensure that happens."

According to recent studies, as many as 39 percent of community college students nationally experience food insecurity, underscoring the importance of initiatives like Feed the Need, a statewide food drive organized by the Illinois Community College Board.

"Efforts like this show how community colleges can make a real difference close to home," Thorsen said. "Our students see the need firsthand, and they're stepping up to support their classmates and neighbors in meaningful ways."

Community members, faculty, staff, and students are encouraged to contribute non-perishable food items to any of the collection sites on campus through December 1.



DONATION LOCATIONS

MONETARY DONATIONS:
STUDENT SERVICES OFFICE IN WILLIAMS HALL

COLLECTION BARRELS:
ZWERMANN ARTS CENTER THEATER
SPORTS CENTER
WILLIAMS HALL ENTRANCE
WILLIAMS HALL ROOM 105

LTC, CMH INVITE FUTURE HEALTHCARE WORKERS TO APPLY FOR HEALTH & WELLNESS COACH PROGRAM



Lincoln Trail College and Crawford Memorial Hospital are now accepting applications for the 2026 Health and Wellness Coach program, a hands-on training experience for individuals interested in healthcare careers.

Open to anyone who will be 18 years old by June 2, 2026, the program equips participants with the skills and knowledge to support local patients in developing healthier lifestyles—while gaining real-world experience alongside doctors, nurses, dietitians, and other healthcare professionals.

Interested students are encouraged to attend one of three virtual information sessions on Zoom, scheduled for December 2, January 5, and February 3 from 5:30 to 6:00 p.m. These sessions offer a chance to learn more and ask questions about the program.

Training classes will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, March 17 through May 5, 2026, from 8:00 to 9:00 a.m. at Lincoln Trail College. There is no cost to participate.

Those who complete the training will attend a full-day orientation on June 2 and then be matched with a patient in Crawford County to begin their work as a Health and Wellness Coach, meeting weekly under the guidance of a CMH healthcare professional.

"This is an incredible opportunity to explore a future in healthcare while making a difference right here in the community," said Dr. Alani Frederick, program coordinator.

The application deadline is February 20, 2026. Application materials and full program details are available at iecc.edu/healthcoachCMH.

The Health and Wellness Coach program is a collaboration between Lincoln Trail College and Crawford Memorial Hospital, offering participants a pathway to meaningful, real-world experience in the health professions.

SCHOLASTIC BOWL TRADITION RETURNING TO LINCOLN TRAIL COLLEGE

Lincoln Trail College will once again buzz with the excitement of academic competition as it hosts the Tip Off at the Trail scholastic bowl tournament on November 15.

Students from twelve area high schools — Cumberland, Marshall, Newton, Robinson, Effingham, Fairfield, Edwards County, Palestine, Clay City, Lawrenceville, Flora, and Oblong — will compete in this daylong event testing their knowledge in subjects ranging from literature and science to history and current events.

The competition marks the return of a long-standing tradition at Lincoln Trail College, which for many years hosted scholastic bowl tournaments that drew talented students from across southeastern Illinois.

“Academic competition encourages teamwork, critical thinking, and a love of learning,” said LTC faculty member Austin Alexander, one of the event’s organizers. “We’re thrilled to bring this tradition back and to welcome so many outstanding students to our campus.”

In addition to the competition, visiting students will have the opportunity to explore Lincoln Trail College through campus tours and presentations about academic programs, student life, and opportunities available after high school.

“This event gives students a chance not only to showcase their academic strengths, but also to see what college life at Lincoln Trail is all about,” said Elaine Hasty, LTC faculty member and co-organizer of the event. “We hope they’ll leave feeling inspired by what they can accomplish here.”

The Tip Off at the Trail is part of Lincoln Trail College’s commitment to fostering academic excellence and community engagement by connecting area high schools with college resources and opportunities.

LTC PREPARING FOR FALL CONCERTS

The Lincoln Trail College Music Department will present two concerts to close out the fall semester, showcasing the talent of local musicians and students.

The Fall Instrumental Concert, featuring the Lincoln Trail College Jazz Band, will take place Monday, December 2 at 7 p.m. in the Zwermann Arts Center Theater.

The Fall Vocal Concert follows on Thursday, December 5 at 7 p.m., featuring performances by the Singing Seniors, Community Choir, and Children’s Choir.

“These concerts are a wonderful way to celebrate the season and the hard work of our musicians,” said LTC Director of Instrumental Music Jena Combs. “We invite everyone to join us and enjoy an evening of live music at Lincoln Trail College.”





DECEMBER ATHLETIC EVENTS

Men's Basketball

6	Brescia University JV	3:00
10	Lake Land College	7:00
13	at Vincennes University	3:00

Women's Basketball

1	Mineral Area College	5:00
3	at Moberly Area Community College	5:00
5	at Brescia University JV	6:00
9	at Lewis & Clark Community College	5:00
11	Kaskaskia College	5:00
13	at Vincennes University	1:00
15	Moberly Area Community College	5:00

LTC'S FIRST WOMEN'S COACH REMEMBERS THE START OF WOMEN'S SPORTS AT THE TRAIL



Members of LTC's first volleyball team pose with the current team. The first team was recognized for its 50th anniversary.

When Dee Abrahamson arrived at Lincoln Trail College in the mid-1970s, she didn't come to coach volleyball. Or basketball. Or softball. In fact, she hadn't coached any of those sports before. She came to manage the campus swimming pool.

What happened instead helped shape the future of women's athletics at Lincoln Trail College and, eventually, women's collegiate sports across the country.

"The whole thing really started with the students," Abrahamson recalled during her return to campus this fall, when LTC honored its first volleyball team during the program's 50th anniversary season.

"When I came here, it was about my teaching. But they said, 'We want to play.' So we sat around a table, and I said, 'What are you good at?' They said volleyball. So I said, 'Okay. I'll learn.'"

In 1975, Abrahamson became the first head coach of volleyball, women's basketball and softball at Lincoln Trail College. At a time when Title IX was still new and many colleges were only beginning to consider formal opportunities for women to compete, LTC's first teams shared one driving force: the athletes' desire to play.

"The motivation came straight from them: 'We want to play, and we'll do whatever we have to do to do it.'"

Resources were limited. Equipment was sparse. There were no film rooms or scouting reports. Schedules were handwritten and held together with more hope than experience. But what they lacked in infrastructure, they made up for in determination.

"We didn't have video to watch of the other team. Nobody did," Abrahamson said. "We had to figure out what they did best and overcome it. We didn't have any of that support. So that's different now."

The lessons learned in those early seasons went far beyond scoreboards.

"Sports mean so much — learning how to win, learning how to lose, learning how to overcome adversity, learning how to appreciate each other," she said. "There's nothing better than that."

Those ideas became foundational not only for LTC, but for Abrahamson herself. After leaving Lincoln Trail in the late 1970s, she went on to a distinguished career in collegiate athletics, most notably in softball. She spent more than two decades at Northern Illinois University, leading the team to a 416-286-5 record and an appearance in the 1988 Women's College World Series. She later became a nationally known administrator and rules interpreter, helping shape the governance and competitive structure of NCAA softball. The National Fastpitch Coaches Association honored Abrahamson with the NFCA Distinguished Service Award in 2007. She was inducted into the NIU Athletics Hall of Fame as a coach in 2002 and as an administrator in 2017. In 2019, she was inducted into the Mid-American Conference Hall of Fame and into the NFCA Hall of Fame in the Pioneer category.

But returning to LTC brought something even more meaningful than career accolades. It brought her back to the beginning.

This fall's ceremony honoring the 1975 volleyball team brought together former players, families, community members, and current student-athletes. For many, it was the first time they had seen one another in decades.

For Abrahamson, it was a moment of reflection.

"To come back and see these women, to see what's grown from those early practices in the gym...it means the world," she said.

Current LTC Head Volleyball Coach Dana Goodwin said honoring Abrahamson and the trailblazers who played for her was both emotional and necessary.

"Everything we do today rests on the foundation Dee and those early teams built," Goodwin said. "They didn't just start a program. They created a culture of strength, resilience, and possibility. Our athletes today benefit from opportunities those women never had — and that's because they pushed forward anyway."

The progress since those first seasons is clear. Today's student-athletes train year-round, compete against nationally ranked programs, and play with resources and support that reflect decades of growth in women's sports.

The game has changed. The opportunities have expanded. Yet the core remains familiar.

Abrahamson sees it every time she watches a team take the court.

"There's something special about being part of a team," she said. "What they gave to each other, they carried with them. And they've passed it on."

For Lincoln Trail College, the story of women's athletics began not with a budget directive or a strategic plan — but with a group of students who believed they deserved a chance, and a young educator who chose to say yes.

Fifty years later, that yes is still echoing.



Dee Abrahamson (left) poses with current LTC volleyball coach Dana Goodwin.

LTC IN PICTURES



The cast and crew of "Ken Ludwig's Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery" pose for a group photo.



Milker (Rachel Dollahan) and Cartwright (Anna Bales) prepare to carry out a task for Sherlock Holmes (Justin Janney) and Doctor Watson (Ryan Pinkston).



Barb Shimer and Brady Clampet with the United Way give a donation for the LTCares Pantry.



A festive fall display greets visitors at Lincoln Trail College.



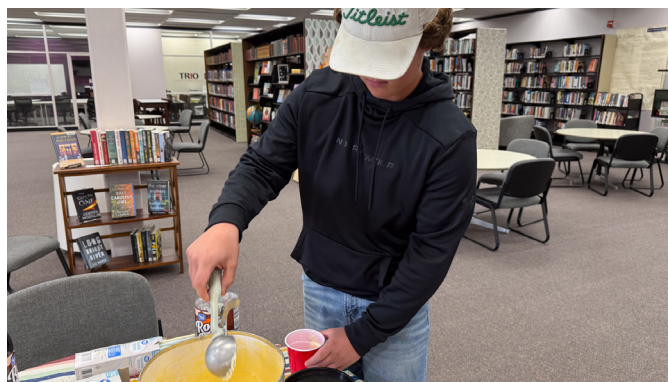
Dennis York hands out a toy to a young girl at Trick or Treat at the Trail. LTC welcomed approximately 2500 people to campus for the annual event.



A softball player gets a scare from a Trick or Treat at the Trail visitor while her teammates get a laugh.



Students show off the pumpkins they created at Student Senate's Pumpkin and a Movie Night event.



Aidan Willis helps himself to a root beer float. LTC's Active Minds chapter offered students free root beer floats for midterms.