

# OLNEY CENTRAL COLLEGE KNIGHTLINE



APRIL 2026

## CALENDAR

### APRIL

17 — Art Club Exhibition Reception, Learning Commons Anderson Library Gallery, 2:30 p.m.

22 — Music Department Spring Concert, OCC Theater, 7 p.m.

24 — Last Day to Withdraw from Spring Semester Classes

### MAY

2 — Spring Musical Theater Showcase, OCC Theater, 7 p.m.

6-7 — Grad Fest, Learning Commons, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

8 — Last Day of Spring Semester Classes

11-14 — Final Exams

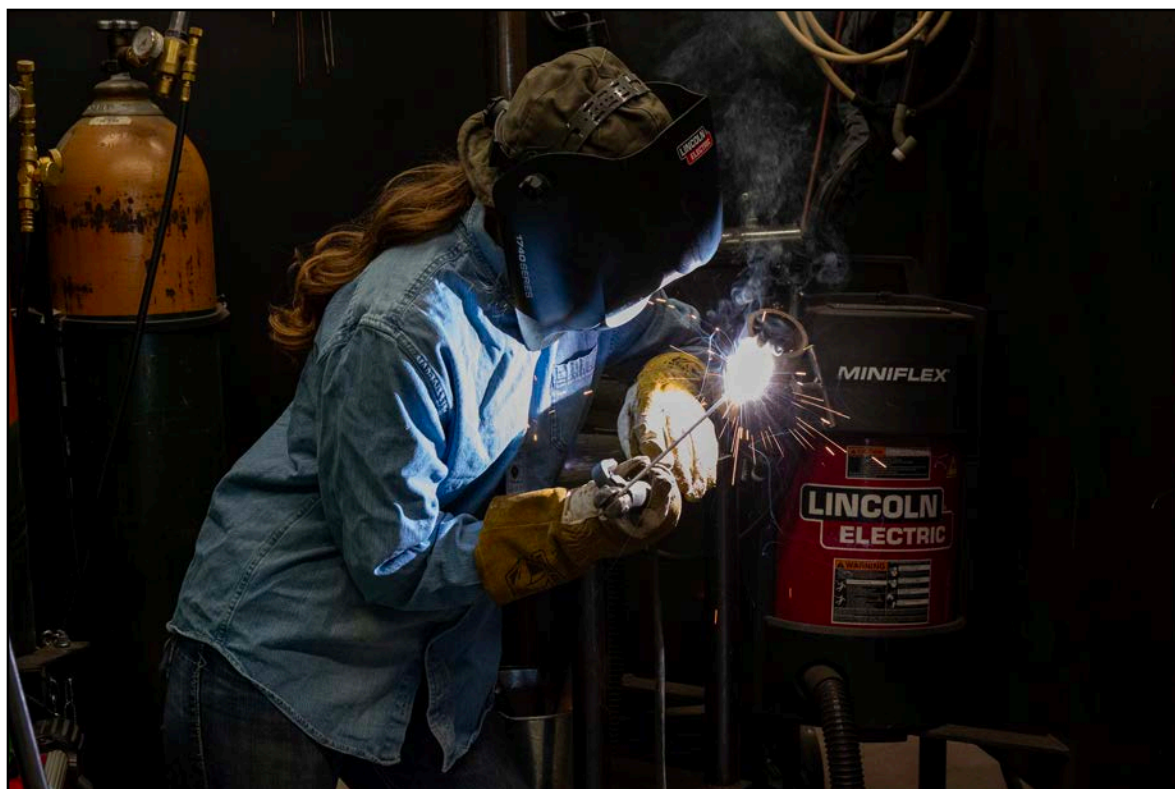
14 — OCC Graduation, Gym, 7 p.m.

### College Visits

Tables will be located in the hallway outside Student Services.

April 29 — Southern Illinois University - Edwardsville Representative Armandos Fisher, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

April 29 — University of Southern Indiana Representative Pandora Wells, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.



**OCC alumna Maria Ward chose a career in welding for its job security, strong earning potential and the opportunity to enter the workforce quickly in a high-demand, hands-on field.**

## Community College Month highlights fast-track pathways to high-paying careers

High-paying, rewarding careers don't always require years in a university classroom. For many students, a two-year degree can be the fast track to a fulfilling and lucrative career.

During April, Olney Central College is celebrating Community College Month and shining a spotlight on the life-changing opportunities community colleges provide.

From health professions like nursing and radiography to technical fields such as automotive technology, welding, industrial maintenance, and HVAC, OCC provides pathways that equip students with the skills needed to succeed in today's workforce.

"These programs change the trajectory of a student's life by putting them on a definite pathway to a career without spending years in school and accumulating a lot of debt," said OCC President Chris Simpson. "Because our CTE programs are directly aligned with the local industry needs, students can enter a career making a very good salary right after graduation."

OCC alum Maria Ward knows the value of a community college education firsthand. The Wayne County native completed her Associate Degree in Welding and Fabrication in May and is now working as a second-year apprentice with Plumbers and Steamfitters Union Local 136 in Evansville, Indiana.

As a union welder, Ward entered the workforce earning around \$21 an hour, along with



**OCC's Radiography Program prepares students for in-demand careers in health care. Students can complete their training in two years and quickly enter the workforce as radiologic technologists serving local hospitals and medical facilities.**

benefits such as health insurance and a vacation fund, where 10 percent of her paycheck is set aside for future use, including major purchases like a home or vehicle.

"I chose a trade program because I wanted to be guaranteed a job after graduating," Ward said. "I had friends going to four-year colleges who were undecided on majors. It was taking them longer to graduate, and they weren't 100 percent guaranteed a job when they finished. I researched trade programs that led to in-demand careers with higher pay. I really love welding, but I also looked into the lineman program and nursing because those fields need workers as well."

Ward appreciates the flexibility her career provides. Since beginning her apprenticeship, she has taken on a variety of projects, including work at a power plant converting burners from coal to gas.

"It's a career that gives me a lot of options," she said. "I wanted to choose something I enjoy—something I can continue to improve and build a skill in. OCC prepared me for the work I'm doing now. The Welding Program taught me most of what I needed to know, and it gave me the skills I needed to pass all of my certifications."

With affordable tuition, flexible pathways, and career-focused training, OCC is helping students like Ward gain valuable skills and step confidently into thriving, in-demand careers after graduation.

OCC Industrial Maintenance Technology and HVAC Instructor Joe Young said area employers are looking for skilled graduates who can repair and maintain today's advanced manufacturing systems. Through OCC's IMT Degree, students can complete that training in just two years.

As industry is facing a severe labor shortage, Young said the need for IMT technicians continues to grow. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 53,000 to 159,800 openings are projected annually over

the next decade.

"Last year, I didn't have a single student who graduated without a job," he said. "A career in this field can take you anywhere."

With increased demand, also comes rising salaries. Nationwide, yearly wages for industrial maintenance technicians range from an average of \$63,800 to \$89,000.

Dr. Alani Frederick, Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Dean of Health Professions, says careers in nursing and radiography are strong options for students who want to get into the workforce relatively quickly. These careers provide clear, dependable pathways from education to employment.

"These are hands-on, licensed professions where students typically complete their education in about two years, earn a recognized credential and step directly into the workforce," she said. "If you finish the program and pass licensure or certification there's a job waiting. Students aren't investing years of tuition just to hope something pans out. They're entering stable fields, earning good wages quickly and gaining skills that are transferable anywhere."

The U.S. is facing a critical nursing shortage driven by high retirement rates and an aging population. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing, predicts more than 200,000 new registered nurse positions will be added annually through 2031 to address the shortfall.

"Many hospitals and long-term care facilities are constantly recruiting, and they value graduates who are trained locally and understand the community," Frederick said. "In many cases, students are being hired very quickly after licensure — sometimes even before graduation."

The same factors are driving the need for radiologic technologists along with the increased use of CT and MRI scans in diagnostic and treatment plans.

"Imaging is used more than ever, both in hospitals and outpatient settings, but staffing hasn't kept pace," Frederick said. "Facilities are actively looking for radiologic technologists, particularly those willing to work locally rather than travel."

That creates real opportunity for graduates who want to stay close to home and build a career without relocating.

"Our region needs these professionals, and community colleges are doing exactly what they're supposed to do — preparing people who can step in, contribute immediately and stay," Frederick added.

OCC Welding Instructor Maverick Fisher said, like Ward, students in both the certificate and associate degree programs are finding jobs before they graduate.

Those with the associate degree typically join the pipefitters or boilermakers unions, while others pursue opportunities with BWXT in Mt. Vernon, Indiana — a critical manufacturing facility for BWX Technologies, Inc., which designs and produces heavy nuclear components for U.S. Navy submarines and aircraft carriers.

The need for trained welders remains high, especially as late Baby Boomers reach retirement age. Nationally, more than 45,000 openings exist each year.

With a few years of experience, welders can easily see their earning potential increase from \$30 to \$50 an hour, Fisher said. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, top-earning welders are bringing home more than \$75,000 annually. Rates can be even higher for traveling welders, who often receive bonuses and additional incentives.

A graduate of OCC's Welding Program, Fisher said its expansion to include an associate degree five years ago means students are leaving with enhanced skills that can lead to higher-paying jobs.

"When I jumped from the fabrication world into the pipe world, it took a lot of extra practice, a lot of YouTube, and a lot of help from experienced pipe welders to get started," he said. "Luckily, with the pipe-focused second year, OCC students today will skip most of these growing pains."

The additional training is making a significant difference for graduates.

"I'm so proud to see how far our program has come since I was in school," Fisher added. "When I was in welding school, I may have welded on two or three pipes the whole year, and plate tests were few and far between. Now students see hundreds of pipes by the time they leave the program, and probably close to the same number of plates. To top it off we machine bevel most of the plates and pipes for them so they can spend their time welding and not beveling. Students will still do enough hand beveling to know how. Also having the machine bevels versus the hand bevels lets you learn on an easier level before jumping into the harder fit-ups."

# OCC student earns first-place in prestigious welding competition

Olney Central College student Jacob Kimbro, of Flora, captured first place in the Southern Indiana Career and Technical Center Welding Competition in Evansville — becoming the first OCC student to earn top honors in the Nix Industrial-sponsored event.

“Being in the competition was a really good experience,” Kimbro said. “I feel great about winning — it was definitely a surprise. I didn’t think I was going to take first place, but it felt good. I was proud to represent OCC, the Welding Program and Instructor Maverick Fisher.”

During the competition, participants were challenged to complete plate tests and stick welds within a 45-minute time limit. Their work was evaluated by Certified Welding Inspectors, with Kimbro competing against approximately 30 to 40 other welders.

What makes his win even more impressive is that the OCC freshman was required to use a 6013 rod, which he’d never worked with before.

“I am so proud of Jacob, and all the boys that went down there to give it a go,” Fisher said. “From my understanding, the contest used 6013 rods. My guys have never even seen a 6013 rod. To me that speaks to the resourcefulness and critical thinking skills Jacob has picked up in his time here at OCC.”

Kimbro added, “It was a fun experience, and I don’t think it would have been possible without Maverick. He really helped us learn, and I’m very thankful for that.”

Fisher said the experience gives students an opportunity to test their skills.

“The biggest benefit of these competitions, in my opinion, is being put in a high-pressure situation, in a strange place, with a strange welding machine,” he said. “This is exactly how most of your hire-in tests go once the students are in the field.”

Kimbro discovered his passion for welding in high school.

“I’ve always liked working with my hands,” he said. “I took a welding class and then construction, and I just liked welding a lot more. Since starting here, I’ve really gotten into it.”

After graduation, Kimbro plans to join the boilermakers union and continue advancing in the field.



**OCC student Jacob Kimbro, of Flora, earned first place in the Southern Indiana Career and Technical Center Welding Competition in Evansville.**



**OCC student Kimberly Williams stands with her watercolor artwork featured in her solo exhibit *Finding Home* in the OCC Anderson Library Gallery.**

## Student artwork on display in Anderson Library Gallery

The Olney Central College Learning Commons is proud to present *Finding Home*, a solo exhibit by Kimberly Williams, a student in the Intermediate Painting class.

Through a series of heartfelt watercolor paintings, Williams captures buildings around Olney that hold deep personal meaning — including her very first home here. Each piece reflects the places that have helped shape her sense of belonging.

“They are all things that make me feel at home since moving here,” she added.

Originally from Chesapeake, Va., Williams relocated to Olney 11 years ago. She has been interested in art since childhood and has spent the past decade honing her watercolor skills.

The OCC Anderson Library Gallery is open weekdays from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The public is invited to stop in and experience William’s work.

In addition, the OCC Art Club will present an exhibition titled *Lumière et Ombre* in the Library Gallery beginning April 17.

An opening reception will be held that day at 2:30 p.m. giving patrons a chance to meet the artists while viewing their work.

## Sports Schedule

### Softball

April 16 — at Spoon River, 2 & 4 p.m.

April 18 — vs. Southwestern Illinois, noon & 2 p.m. at home

April 21 — at Shawnee, 2 & 4 p.m.

April 23 — vs. Frontier, 2 & 4 p.m. at home

April 25 — vs. Lake Land, noon & 2 p.m. at home

April 28 — at John A. Logan, 2 & 4 p.m.

### Baseball

April 15 — at Parkland, 3 p.m.

April 16 — vs. Lake Land, 3 p.m. at home

April 18 — at Lake Land, noon & 3 p.m.

April 21 — at Kaskaskia, 3 p.m.

April 23 — at Wabash Valley, 3 p.m.

April 25 — vs. Wabash Valley, noon & 3 p.m. at home

April 30 — at Shawnee, 1 & 3 p.m.

May 1 — vs. Shawnee, 3 p.m. at home

## OCC Grad Fest will be May 6-7

Olney Central College 2026 graduates, join us for Grad Fest from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on May 6–7 in the Learning Commons.

Pick up your caps and gowns for Commencement, plus enjoy giveaways, free food and a photo booth. This is also your opportunity to complete your graduation survey.

Grad Fest is open to all graduates, regardless of whether you’ll be walking at Commencement.

# Music Department Spring Concert April 22

The Olney Central College Music Department will present its Spring Concert at 7 p.m. on April 22 in the Dr. John D. Stull Performing Arts Center.

The evening will feature performances by the OCC Community Concert Band and Jazz Combo, under the direction of OCC Interim Director of Bands Jena Combs. Joining them as a special guest will be the Flora High School Band, directed by OCC alumnus Ethan Steber.

Combs is excited to include the high school students in the event, an idea that grew out of a conversation with Steber.

"We were talking about ways to get the community more involved, and the idea came up to invite high school bands to perform with us and feature them in a concert," she said. "Ethan immediately volunteered his band to be the first. We thought it was a cool way to get people here and a great way to help with recruitment."

Combs previously served as FHS band director before accepting a position at Lincoln Trail College in 2024 and assisting with OCC's instrumental program this year. Steber completed his student teaching under Combs and later succeeded her as Flora band director.

The FHS band will present *The Great Rubber Chicken Galop* by Randall Standridge, *American Riversongs* by Pierre LaPlante and *The Pines of Rome* by Ottorino Respighi and arranged by James Curnow.

The high school students will then have an opportunity to perform with the OCC Community Concert Band and the OCC Jazz Combo as the three ensembles come together for the selection *Shine on Me* by Seattle-based composer and conductor Erin Keeton-Howard.

The OCC Community Concert Band, which brings together OCC students and area musicians, will perform *Prestissimo* by march-music composer Karl L. King with the arrangement by James Swearingen, *Secret Valley* by Michael Sweeney and *Amazing Grace* by Frank Ticheli, whose many works have become standards in concert band repertoire. Other pieces will include *Nevermore* and *Reverberations* by contemporary American composer, conductor and music educator Brian Balmages and *Insurrection* by composer Gary P. Gilroy.

Selections by the OCC Jazz Combo will include *C Jam Blues* by legendary jazz performer Duke Ellington and *Someone to Watch Over Me* by groundbreaking American composer and pianist George Gershwin. Other pieces include *Sonnymoon for Two* by jazz saxophonist Sonny Rollins, *Brasilian Skies* by Masayoshi Takanaka and the Latin-rock hit *Oye Como Va* by Santana.

Combs invites the community to come out and enjoy this final instrumental performance of the semester. Admission is a free-will offering.



## Registration underway for Ignite Curiosity Summer Camps

Registration is now underway for the 2026 Ignite Curiosity Summer Camps, offering elementary through high school students the opportunity to explore new interests, discover potential career paths and engage in hands-on learning in a fun and supportive environment.

Led by Illinois Eastern Community Colleges faculty and community experts, the camps are designed to spark creativity, build problem-solving skills and boost confidence while introducing students to in-demand fields such as STEM, health sciences, technology and the arts.

OCC camps will include: Culinary Conquest on July 8–12, Lego Battle Bots on June 15, Getting Styled on June 17 and STEM Builders on July 20. To register, call 618-395-7777.

For additional details about the camps, as well as, a complete list of camps offered throughout IECC, visit [www.iecc.edu/communityed](http://www.iecc.edu/communityed).

# OCC IN PICTURES



## Spring Fling

Students enjoyed a day of fun, food and prizes during OCC's annual Spring Fling on April 8. Student Senate sponsored the event.

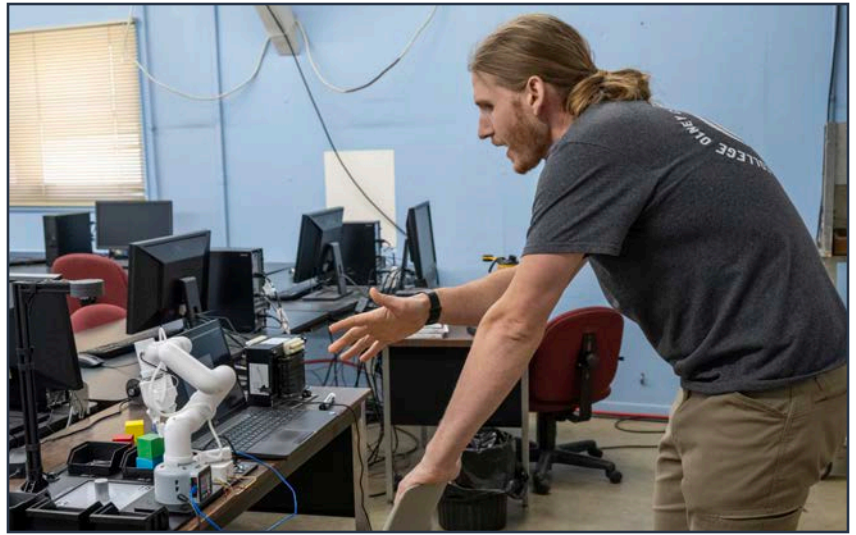


## Sowing Party

Active Minds and the OCC Science Club partnered for a plant sowing party in the OCC Greenhouse, where students planted seeds and took part in hands-on learning. Students will continue to care for and monitor their seedlings in preparation for an upcoming Spring Plant Sale.

## CTE Showcase

Area high school students visited campus on March 25 for OCC's annual CTE Showcase, where they explored Automotive, Industrial Maintenance, HVAC, and Welding programs and connected with faculty to learn about in-demand career pathways. Students also toured the SkillForge Manufacturing Skills Lab at the Terry L. Bruce West Richland Center in Noble.



## Easter Egg Hunt

The OCC Student Nurses Association hosted an Easter Egg Hunt for children at Buckeroo Early Education Center on April 1.



OCC Theater Presents  
*Joseph and the Amazing  
Technicolor Dreamcoat*

**Olney Central College Theatre**  
delivered an outstanding performance in its recent production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, delighting audiences with a memorable show.

