

OLNEY CENTRAL COLLEGE KNIGHTLINE



JUNE 2026

CALENDAR

JUNE

19 — Campus Closed for Juneteenth

JULY

3 — Campus Closed, Independence Day Observed

6 — Midterm

6-24 — OAC/OCC Summer Children's Theater Workshop

24 — Last Day to Withdraw from Summer Semester Classes

24 — 101 Dalmatians, Kids, OCC Theater, 7 p.m.

25 — 101 Dalmatians, Kids, OCC Theater, 2 p.m.

25 — Mary Poppins Jr., OCC Theater, 7 p.m.

26 — Mary Poppins Jr., OCC Theater, 2 p.m.

31 — Last Day of Summer Semester Classes

AUGUST

3-4 — Summer Semester Final Exams

12 — IECC Faculty/Staff Workshop, Campus Closed

13 — IECC Faculty Workshop



President Chris Simpson congratulates students during Olney Central College's Commencement Ceremony on May 15.

OCC Celebrates 62nd Commencement Ceremony awarding degrees and certificates to 208 students

Olney Central College recognized the accomplishments of 208 students who were awarded degrees and certificates during OCC's 62nd Commencement Ceremony on May 15. The celebration honored students ranging in age from 18 to 61.

The ceremony reflected on both achievement and determination, as speakers encouraged graduates to carry their experiences forward into the next chapter of their lives.

OCC Dean of Instruction Amy Tarr acknowledged the perseverance students undertook to reach this milestone and the strength they developed through the challenges they faced.

"The world can be hard on beautiful things," Tarr said. "Our confidence is sometimes shaken, and our plans rarely go the way we expect. In life, there will be moments of great doubt. There will be moments when moving forward feels uncertain, unfair or painfully difficult. But, here you sit. Despite the challenges, despite the setbacks, despite the moments when quitting would have most definitely been easier, you are here. Each of you has already proven something incredibly important to yourselves. You can overcome."



Leon Stallard, a 1986 graduate of Olney Central College and this year's alumnus speaker, addresses graduates during OCC's 62nd Commencement Ceremony. Stallard reflected on the lasting impact of OCC on his family and the community. He encouraged graduates to support others and carry their resilience forward into the next chapter of their lives.

Tarr encouraged students to lean into that resilience when life becomes difficult.

"Don't let the world convince you that you were not meant to succeed," she said. "Don't let it make you forget what you are capable of. Instead, carry moments just like tonight with you. Remember what it took you to get here. That same strength is still inside you, and it will be there when you need it again."

Tarr concluded her remarks by reinforcing that message of enduring strength.

"When the world gets difficult, remember you are stronger. When the world feels unfair, remember you are capable. And when doubt tries to take hold, remember this very moment," Tarr said. "Remind yourself that you can overcome not just once, but as many times as it takes."

The ceremony also featured an alumnus address from Leon Stallard, who returned to his alma mater, reflecting on the lasting impact OCC has had on his family across generations.

"All three of my brothers and myself attended and graduated from OCC," Stallard noted. "Among the four of us, there are 16 family members counting us and our children and grandchildren. Sixteen family members have taken at least one class here. Eight of them earned associate degrees right here at Olney Central College."

Those 16 family members include two auto mechanics, a welder, a Walmart Distribution Center employee, two mechanical engineers, a massage therapist, a physical therapist, three teachers, a dietician, a speech pathologist, a soccer coach, a financial adviser, and a licensed practical nurse.

"That's the power of OCC," Stallard said. "Different paths, different careers, one strong foundation."

A native of Richland County, Stallard grew up in Noble and attended West Richland High School. In 1986, he earned his associate degree from OCC, where he was also a member of the Blue Knights Basketball Team. He later transferred to McKendree University, graduating in 1988 with a bachelor's degree in education.

Today, he serves as a financial planner with Edward Jones in Olney, working alongside his daughter, Laddy, in serving the community.

Stallard and his wife of 36 years, Kaddy, are the proud parents of five grown children and four grandchildren. Reflecting on his time at OCC, Stallard emphasized the importance of relationships and support systems in shaping student success.

“OCC gave me more than facilities. It gave me people,” he said. “We all need help along the way.”

Stallard shared how his academic path shifted early in his time at OCC. Following in his older brother Dave’s footsteps, he initially enrolled in the Automotive Program, but after one semester realized it was not the right fit for him. Encouraged by his high school basketball Coach Butch Lockley, Stallard made a change toward education.

He credits former OCC advisor Jervaise McGlone with helping him navigate that transition and stay on track academically.

“After I changed from auto mechanics to education after one semester, you can imagine I was behind. She helped me put my schedule together and told me exactly which classes I needed to take. I trusted her completely,” Stallard said. “And, once again, I was reminded of something important. We all need help along the way. Those two individuals truly changed my life, and I remain deeply grateful to them.”

Stallard offered graduates four guiding principles: live below your means, invest in personal growth, be kind, and help others succeed.

“Everyone wants to be successful, but there’s no greater reward than helping someone else achieve their goals,” he emphasized. “Pull people up with you. Bring others along. No matter what profession you choose, success is better when it’s shared.”

Stallard encouraged OCC’s newest alumni to go out and build upon their experiences at Olney Central College.

“You didn’t get here by accident. You showed up. You worked hard. You took a few hits along the way, and you kept going,” he said. “Olney Central College gave you the foundation. What you build on it is up to you.”



OCC students face-off in welding competition

Sparks flew, skills were tested and winners were crowned on May 7 during the second-annual Olney Central College Welding Program Showdown.

The competition served as a capstone event for the academic year, providing students an opportunity to demonstrate the welding skills and techniques they have developed throughout the program.

"In this competition, students were expected to demonstrate different welding types as well as techniques," said OCC Welding Instructor Will Bookhout. "The students welded open root TIG tests, open root stick 6010 tests, as well as restricted MIG pipe to plate tests."

Taking top honors this year are Gavin Williams, TIG open root; Brayden Hale, stick 6010 open root; and Owen Ochs, restricted pipe to plate/fabrication.

Beyond showcasing technical abilities, the event gave students a chance to challenge themselves in a competitive setting.

"This event benefits students because it gives them an opportunity to not only showcase their skills, but also to get a little competitive with each other and have some fun using what they've learned," Bookhout said.

The competition also mirrors the expectations students face as they enter the workforce. The timed welding tests closely resemble those administered by employers during the hiring process, helping students gain valuable real-world experience.

"These timed tests serve as a real-life example of what will be expected from graduates of our program when they apply for welding jobs," said OCC Dean of Instruction Amy Tarr.

Adding to the authenticity, OCC invited industry professionals to evaluate the students' work.

"For this competition, we brought in employees from Nix in Poseyville, Indiana, as well as employees from Nucor in Newton, Illinois to judge, critique and scout upcoming talent," Bookhout said.

Tarr said the event reflects the strength of the welding programs offered throughout Illinois Eastern Community Colleges.

"Our current welding programs at IECC are literally second to none," she said. "I would run the capabilities of our graduates against anyone in the nation. This has been accomplished through the guidance of excellent instructors and students who are committed to obtaining excellence."

Tarr was equally impressed by the focus and determination displayed by the competitors throughout the event.

"As soon as the timer started these students shifted into work mode immediately and stayed in that frame of mind until they completed their project," she said.



Winners of the OCC Welding Showdown, from left, are Gavin Williams Brayden Hale and Owen Ochs.

OCC IN PICTURES



Nurse Pinning Ceremony

Olney Central College Associate Degree Nursing graduates were honored during the 2026 Nursing Pinning Ceremony. Above, Olivia Schaefer gives the student address. At left, Anna Weidner receives her pin.

Theme Thursdays

Olney Central College kicked off its annual Theme Thursdays with Camo Day on June 5. During the summer students, faculty and staff are invited to join the fun and dress up on these special days.

Upcoming June Theme Days include:

- June 11 — Tacky Tourist Day
- June 18 — College Spirit Day
- June 25 — Anything But a Cup Day

Day



Grad Fest Winner

Lauren Stover is the winner of the 2026 Grad Fest Prize Basket. This year the OCC Learning Commons hosted the event, which provides students the opportunity to snap some photos while picking up their caps and gowns and completing the annual graduation survey.

