

OLNEY CENTRAL COLLEGE KNIGHTLINE



JULY 2026

CALENDAR

JULY

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

3 — Moonlight Monday, 4-7 p.m.

6 — Dual Credit Orientation

12 — IECC Faculty/Staff Workshop, Campus Closed

13 — OCC Faculty/Staff Workshop

17 — New Student Orientation

19 — Fall Semester Classes Begin



Chris Simpson, Olney Central College President and Vice Chancellor for Business Operations, has announced he will retire from Illinois Eastern Community Colleges, effective May 17, 2027, after four years of service. He is pictured during the OCC Health Professions Center dedication in December 2025.

Chris Simpson announces May 2027 retirement, Ryan Hawkins named OCC President-Designate

Ryan Hawkins has been appointed Vice Chancellor for Financial Operations and President-Designate of Olney Central College as part of a planned leadership transition approved by the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Board of Trustees.

The appointment follows the board's approval last month of Chris Simpson's retirement notification. Simpson will continue serving as OCC President and Vice Chancellor for Business Operations through May 17, 2027.

Simpson joined IECC in 2023 and has provided leadership to both OCC and district-wide business operations. During his tenure, he helped guide the institution through the post-pandemic environment, supported implementation of the district's one-college organizational model and oversaw key operational functions, including business services, food services and

bookstore operations.

Simpson also led the construction of OCC's Health Professions Center and the ongoing renovation to the third-floor science labs in Dr. Kent L. Wattleworth Hall.

Prior to joining IECC, Simpson served as superintendent of Richland County Community Unit School District No. 1 and brought extensive educational leadership experience to the college district.

"Chris joined IECC during a period of significant change and immediately became a trusted leader," said former Chancellor Ryan Gower. "His experience, professionalism, and steady approach helped position both Olney Central College and the district for continued success. More importantly, he has been an outstanding colleague and friend, and I am grateful for his service to our students and communities."

Hawkins currently serves as Chief Financial Officer for IECC and has played a key role in the district's financial planning, budgeting, facilities development and long-range strategic initiatives.

In his new role, he will continue overseeing district financial operations while working alongside Simpson during the coming year to prepare for the transition in leadership at OCC.

The year-long transition reflects the district's commitment to leadership continuity and provides a unique opportunity for mentorship and knowledge transfer before the formal leadership change next spring.

The appointment also advances IECC's ongoing efforts to align district-wide and campus-based business functions under a unified leadership structure, strengthening coordination and operational effectiveness across the institution.

"Ryan has demonstrated exceptional leadership and a deep commitment to the mission of IECC," Gower said. "This transition allows us to build upon Chris' outstanding work while creating a thoughtful and deliberate pathway for future leadership. The opportunity for Chris and Ryan to work side-by-side over the next year is a tremendous advantage for the college, our employees, and our students."

Simpson said he is excited about the coming year and the opportunity to help prepare the next generation of leadership at OCC.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at IECC and remain excited about the work ahead of us during the coming year," Simpson said. "I look forward to welcoming Ryan more fully into the campus, sharing what I've learned, and helping ensure a smooth and successful transition next May. Olney Central College has a bright future, and I am confident it will be in excellent hands."

Hawkins said he is honored by the board's confidence and grateful for the opportunity to work alongside Simpson during the transition period.

"I am thankful for the opportunity to work with Chris to learn from his experience over the next year," Hawkins said. "I look forward to continuing to serve the district, supporting Olney Central College, and building upon the strong foundation already in place."



Ryan Hawkins has been appointed Vice Chancellor for Financial Operations and President-Designate of Olney Central College. He will work alongside President Chris Simpson during a year-long transition before assuming the presidency in May 2027.

OCC, WVC ranked top LPN programs in Illinois

The Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Nursing Program has earned statewide recognition for excellence in nursing education.

PracticalNursing.org ranked Olney Central College and Wabash Valley College No. 1 and No. 2, respectively, in its 2026 list of the Top Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) programs in Illinois.

A trusted source for nursing education information, licensure guidance and career resources, PracticalNursing.org provides data-driven rankings to help prospective students identify quality nursing programs. The annual rankings recognize programs that demonstrate excellence in preparing the next generation of nurses.

Both OCC and WVC were singled out for the honor because of their flexible exit pathways and hands-on training, which open expanded opportunities for nursing students across Southeastern Illinois.

Among the program's defining features is its distinctive summer "exit" course, offered between the first and second years of the Associate Degree Nursing Program. This option allows students to earn LPN licensure while continuing their progress toward an associate degree and eligibility for registered nurse licensure.

"Our Practical Nursing Program is unique as a ladder program within the state of Illinois," said Dr. Alanni Frederick, IECC Dean of Health Professions. "We are able to educate our students concurrently and get them into the workforce faster. Due to the unique setup and strong preparation, our students are able to be successful both in licensure and at the bedside. Examining board scores, graduate feedback and employer evaluations allows us to ensure our program is prepared to educate at the highest level."

The rankings were based on several factors, including accreditation, program quality and academic excellence, affordability, learning flexibility and admission rates.

"IECC is committed to ensuring that local students receive a strong education to give back to our local communities," Frederick said. "With a program like nursing, our students learn how to care in our community and for our community."

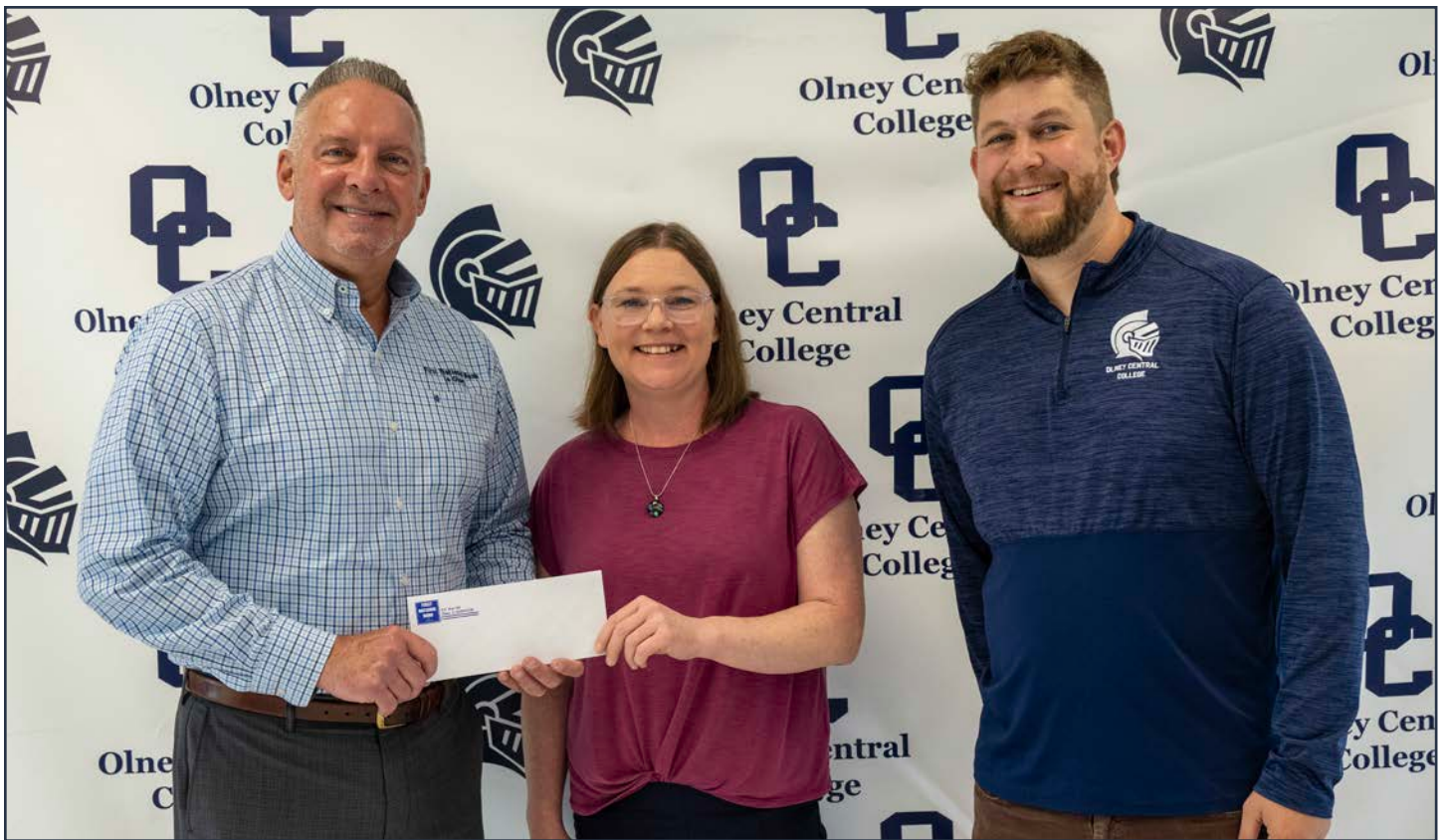
For Frederick, the top rankings underscore the impact of the IECC Nursing Program and the opportunities it provides for students to build successful healthcare careers.

"We want our prospective students to know that a high-quality education is available in our own backyard," she added. "If you have ever thought about healthcare, now is the time."

To learn more about the IECC Nursing Program, visit www.iecc.edu/nursing. Additional information regarding the PracticalNursing.org rankings is available at: <https://www.practicalnursing.org/lpn-programs/illinois>.



Olney Central College nursing students build the knowledge, skills and confidence needed for success through hands-on learning in the Health Professions Center. That commitment to exceptional instruction and clinical preparation helped earn the Nursing Program the No. 1 ranking among Illinois LPN programs by PracticalNursing.org.



A \$1,000 grant from First National Bank in Olney will assist Olney Central College in launching a new fused glass art class this fall. The grant will help fund the purchase of a specialized kiln used in the glass-fusing process. Pictured, from left, are Herman Zuber, Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for First National Bank in Olney, fused glass art Instructor Tanara Ryden and Curtis Miller, Director of Enrollment and Community Outreach for Illinois Eastern Community Colleges.

Local artist Tanara Ryden brings fused glass art to OCC this fall

For Tanara Ryden, fused glass making started as a creative experiment. Armed with YouTube tutorials, determination and a willingness to learn through trial and error, she taught herself the craft and eventually turned a hobby into The Glassy Nut, a cottage business featuring her handcrafted glass art.

This fall, Ryden will share her passion for glass with others through a series of community education classes at Olney Central College.

"I'm excited about the opportunity to discuss fused glass making and its possibilities," she said. "There are so many things you can do. I really like the idea of being able to create art, that is not only beautiful, but functional."

Fused glass is the art of layering compatible pieces of glass and melting them together in a kiln to create colorful, one-of-a-kind designs. In these hands-on, beginner-friendly classes, students will learn the fundamentals of glass cutting, design and kiln firing while completing their own projects.



"You don't need to be a master at art to create fused glass. It is very forgiving," Ryden said. "You can start at a basic level. You don't need to know everything, and you don't need to be intimidated. If I can teach myself and others, anyone who is interested can make it happen."

Classes are tentatively scheduled to begin in September, with month-long sessions offered throughout the fall and spring semesters. All classes will meet from 6 to 8 p.m. on Thursdays.

Each month-long session is designed to build students' confidence and creativity as they explore color, texture and form under Ryden's guidance. Participants will begin with simple projects, such as mosaic suncatchers, before progressing to plates, bowls and more detailed artistic pieces. Students are encouraged to enroll in additional sessions to continue developing their skills.

"We'll explore different processes and examples that they can do, but ultimately, they can figure out what is unique to them," Ryden said. "We'll do different forms of fused glass and then they can use their creativity to branch off. I am going to show them the process, and they can use their creativity to make it their own."

While Ryden enjoys displaying and selling her work at venues such as the Olney Arts Council's Fall Festival and local art shows, her passion has always been creating — not selling. She first began offering her pieces for sale simply because she needed space to continue making new ones.

"I'm not making them for the money," she said. "I do it because I enjoy the creative outlet. If someone buys one, it means I can make something else."

Ryden's passion for creativity has been a constant throughout her life. She earned a bachelor's degree in photography with a minor in art history. Before taking up fused glass four years ago, she created stained glass for a cabinet company. While she enjoyed the work, concerns about the materials used in the process inspired her to pursue fused glass instead.

For the past two years, Ryden has shared her love of fused glass by teaching classes at Create 618 in Olney and leading hands-on fused glass experiences for children's parties and private events. After joining Olney Central College as the TRIO Student Support Services Academic Advisor, she saw an opportunity to share her knowledge through Community Education classes at OCC.

"Everyone I talked to seemed excited about the idea," she said. "All of the feedback I've received has been very positive."

Turning the idea into reality required one key piece of equipment for the OCC ceramics studio — a specialized kiln. The purchase was made possible through community support, including a \$1,000 donation from First National Bank in Olney.

"We are extremely grateful for the generous support of individuals and organizations throughout our community," said Curtis Miller, Director of Enrollment and Community Outreach for Illinois Eastern Community Colleges. "Through their support, we can expand IECC's Community Education program and offer fun, unique classes for learners of all ages, fostering a love of lifelong learning."

Class sizes for Beginning Fused Glass Art are limited, and early registration is encouraged. For class dates and additional information, visit www.iecc.edu/communityed or call 618-395-7777.



Brandy Cochran places ninth in the nation at FBLA Collegiate Leadership Conference

Olney Central College student Brandy Cochran earned national recognition at the Future Business Leaders of America Collegiate National Leadership Conference in Las Vegas.

The Olney resident placed ninth in the nation in the Customer Service event, competing against top students from colleges and universities across the United States.

"It really is inspiring to know — especially with so much customer service background already in my life — that I have those people skills and I have that base to continue to build and grow upon," she said. "This assured me that I'm on the right path and I'm doing the right thing. Sometimes you need that extra spark and fire to keep you going and to keep pushing you through. Placing at nationals did that for me."

During the National Leadership Conference, FBLA Collegiate members participate in more than 40 competitive events that showcase their business knowledge, leadership, communication and career readiness skills. They earn the opportunity to compete in these events through state competitions.

Cochran's top 10 finish is even more remarkable because Customer Service wasn't originally part of her plans. After earning a first-place finish in the Marketing Case Study and Sales event at the state conference, she went to nationals expecting to compete only in that category.

When higher-placing competitors were unable to attend, she was given the opportunity to compete in Customer Service as well. This event challenged competitors to solve realistic customer service situations through timed role-playing exercises.

In the first round of competition, Cochran and 42 fellow FBLA members stepped into a role-playing scenario as airline employees tasked with assisting a passenger who could not locate her luggage, which contained essential medications and items needed for a business meeting.

"You had 10 minutes to prep a couple of note cards, and then they sit you in front of judges and you do a back and forth with the customer," Cochran said. "I have a background in customer service, and I completely winged it. I just tried to negotiate my way out of it."

Her skills paid off. At 5 a.m. the following day, advisor Amie Mayhall called Cochran to let her know she was one of 12 finalists advancing to the next round.

In the second role-playing scenario, Cochran assisted a disgruntled CEO experiencing issues with a global streaming service.

"We were the streaming service provider, and he was not happy with us," Cochran said. "He was much more aggressive than the first lady. He was very combative and was trying to trigger a response. Because in customer service you get a lot of angry customers, I just kept smiling and talking him through it. Every time he cut me off, I just let him finish and I would start again."

While the scenarios differed, each tested competitors' ability to think quickly and respond under pressure.

"The most challenging part was that, unlike a lot of the other events, you don't have time to prepare," Cochran said. "You never know what they're going to say. You have to think quickly and come up with the appropriate back and forth."



Olney Central College student Brandy Cochran represented OCC at the FBLA Collegiate National Leadership Conference in Las Vegas, where she earned ninth place nationally in the Customer Service competition.

While the competition challenged her professionally, the trip also provided opportunities for personal growth and new experiences.

“For me, it wasn’t just getting to experience the conference and accept this award. It was also a lot of firsts,” she said. “I’d never flown. I’d never taken a monorail. I’d never been that far out West. Getting to experience all those firsts with Amie Mayhall was really special. We walked around. We explored. If you’re like me and haven’t had the opportunity to travel very far or experience those kinds of things, FBLA is a great way to do that. I met new people and made memories that I’ll always look back on. It’s a core memory for me.”

Future Business Leaders of America is the largest business career and technical student organization in the world. Cochran participates in the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges chapter, which is based at Lincoln Trail College in Robinson.

In the future, the chapter hopes to establish clubs at each IECC campus. OCC students will have an opportunity to participate this fall under the guidance of advisor Shasta Bennett.

Cochran, who studies human resources and business management at OCC, encourages fellow business students to get involved.

“Being a part of FBLA is great,” she said. “You meet amazing people, and Amie Mayhall and Shasta Bennett are great advisors. They have a lot of experience and are amazing professors. I want to get our club up and running so we can build our membership and compete. I want us to compete at state and nationals next year and just conquer.”



Advisor Amie Mayhall congratulates OCC student Brandy Cochran following the awards ceremony at the FBLA Collegiate National Leadership Conference in Las Vegas.



OLNEY CENTRAL COLLEGE

2025-26 ATHLETICS REPORT CARD

SOFTBALL	3.55
WOMEN’S BASKETBALL	3.29
BASEBALL	3.16
MEN’S BASKETBALL	3.11

OCC ATHLETICS OVERALL 3.25

Ignite Curiosity Summer Camps inspire learning

From creating culinary masterpieces and designing robots to exploring cosmetology, students are discovering new interests and building confidence through Olney Central College's Ignite Curiosity Summer Camps.

"Our Ignite Curiosity Summer Camps gave students the opportunity to explore new interests, build practical skills and discover just how much fun learning can be," said Director of Enrollment and Community Outreach Curtis Miller. "During the summer, our campers embraced every opportunity to learn and grow."

Young chefs put their skills to the test during Culinary Conquest, hosted in partnership with the University of Illinois Extension.

Through this hands-on camp, students learned about food safety, nutrition, kitchen safety and food preparation while working together in a team-based environment. From mixing ingredients to creating delicious dishes, campers gained confidence in the kitchen and ended the week with an exciting team food challenge.

During the LEGO Battle Bots Camp, students stepped into the role of designers and engineers as they built and programmed LEGO robots from the ground up.

Campers explored how sensors, movement and coding work together to bring their creations to life while using creativity and teamwork to test their designs.

Creativity, color and a little sparkle filled the Getting Styled Summer Camp as students received a hands-on introduction to the world of cosmetology.

Working with OCC Cosmetology Instructor Nancy Stremme and her students, campers practiced skills such as braiding, curling hair, adding hair tinsel and painting nails.

"One of the best parts of these camps is seeing students gain confidence while trying something new," Miller added. "We hope these experiences inspire them to keep asking questions, developing their talents and imagining what's possible for their future."



Campers add the final ingredients to their omelet during the Culinary Conquest Camp.



A camper fine tunes his LEGO Battle Bot to ensure the coding programs are working correctly.



An OCC Cosmetology student shows a camper curling techniques during the Getting Styled Summer Camp.

Anna Taylor explores career opportunities through TRIO Upward Bound

Job shadowing experiences give students the opportunity to explore potential career paths while developing new skills and gaining real-world experience.

As part of the TRIO Upward Bound summer program, Fairfield High School student Anna Taylor spent time job shadowing with the Marketing and Communications team at Olney Central College and Frontier Community College, where she explored writing and photography.

A budding journalist, Anna put those skills into practice by writing the following article about her experience.

My name is Anna Taylor, and I am a student in TRIO, job shadowing in the Marketing Office at OCC.

Working in the Marketing Department is something I have wanted to do for a while now. I love sharing information and writing!

Being part of an IECC school like this has been the "Best Decision Ever!" Because I am an Upward Bound student, I have gained tons of experience and knowledge.

TRIO helps with life outside of schooling, soft skills, and college readiness. The IECC staff have been supportive, helpful, and excellent to learn from. Every student should apply to join TRIO, as it is available for college students as well. It can waive some fees — like application fees for college — and it provides tons of support, study groups, and tutors.

TRIO offers these free college classes and trips during the summer program. The summer program runs from about 9 a.m. to 3:20 p.m., Monday through Friday.

In this program, students take a college class Monday through Thursday. On Fridays, they either visit a local business, tour a college, or job shadow in their future career.

At the end of the year, TRIO takes a large educational trip that is usually two to four days long. Two years ago, I got to go to Chicago, last year I went to Cincinnati, and this year we are going to Gatlinburg.

I have been in TRIO for three years, and I have never once regretted joining the program. There is nothing else like this program, and slots are limited, so sign up ASAP.

TRIO Upward Bound is 100% federally funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Illinois Eastern Community Colleges TRIO Upward Bound serves 209 students from 12 target high schools throughout the IECC District. Upward Bound is a college preparation program that provides the support, motivation, and academic preparation necessary to individuals interested in pursuing a post-secondary degree.



Fairfield High School student Anna Taylor shares highlights from her TRIO Upward Bound summer experience during the program's Walk-Thru Showcase. During the event, seniors presented what they learned through internships, college coursework and volunteer experiences, highlighting the skills, knowledge and confidence they gained.