



Issue 31 / November 2025

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

ILLINOIS EASTERN
COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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FORWARD >>>
>>> **TOGETHER**

ACROSS THE DISTRICT

From the Office of the Chancellor

How IECC Is Funded: A Plain-Language Walkthrough for All of Us

This message is long, but it is important. Everyone should read it.

There has been a lot of discussion recently about IECC's finances. How we are funded, what we can and cannot spend money on, and what recent reports and figures really mean. My goal in sharing this is simple: to provide context and clarity. Community college funding is not mysterious, but it is complex, and once you understand the structure, the conversations happening across our district begin to make much more sense.

If you have ever wondered where community colleges actually get their money, or why you sometimes hear leadership talking about enrollment with the intensity of SEC football fans on a Saturday afternoon, you are not alone. Most people who work in higher education never get the full picture of how the financial side of the house works. That is not because they don't care or don't want to know. It is because nobody ever takes the time to explain it in a way that connects all the dots. So let me take a run at it.

When Illinois created the community college system in 1965, the funding model was supposed to look like a three-legged stool. One leg was tuition and fees, one was local property taxes, and one was state support. And the idea, at least on paper, was that each leg would carry about one third of the load. One third from students, one third from the local tax base, one third from Springfield. It was intentionally designed to keep higher education affordable and stable. Of course, that is not how it played out in practice. Over the decades, the distribution across those three legs shifted dramatically. But that original structure still defines how our budgets work today, and it explains why things feel so tight in our operating budgets.

Here is the first big thing everyone needs to understand: two of those three legs are directly tied to enrollment. **That's a very important difference between community colleges and universities. Universities receive fixed annual appropriations from the state and do not experience sharp revenue swings when enrollment changes. Community colleges, by contrast, live and die by enrollment because our tuition and our state operating support both move with the number of credit hours we generate.**

Student tuition is fairly easy to understand. Fewer students means fewer credit hours and fewer dollars coming in to help cover our operating costs. But the state's base operating grant works the same way. The state funds community colleges based on reimbursable credit hours in categories like transfer, allied health, and CTE. So when enrollment drops, the state support tied to those credit hours eventually drops too. There is a two-year lag, but it finds its way through the system. We are also funded relative to the performance of other community colleges in the state. If their enrollment grows, or declines less than ours, they will receive a larger portion of the funds available for base operating expenses. I've shared frequently that enrollment across all community colleges in Illinois has declined since 2010, but IECC's decline has been about 7% more than the average. This is why that data point is important.

It's also important to understand *why* that is the case. IECC serves smaller, rural communities, which limits the size of our potential student population compared to more urban colleges. In addition, a significant portion of IECC's enrollment historically came from Workforce Education Division programs—especially coal mining and related industry training. Those programs once enrolled large numbers of students taking a small number of credit hours each.

(Cont. next page)

(Chancellor cont.)

As coal employment has declined statewide, so has that training demand. Some of that reduction was also intentional as we scaled back programming in sectors that no longer reflect our region's economic direction.

The third leg, local property taxes, is completely different. Local tax revenue is tied to the equalized assessed value, or EAV, of all taxable property within our district. EAV tells us the taxable value of farmland, homes, businesses, factories, utilities, and everything else that sits inside the IECC boundaries. It usually grows at a slow, predictable pace.

And here is something people often miss. Our Education Fund and our Operations and Maintenance Fund tax rates are capped by law. The Education Fund cap is 17.5 cents per 100 dollars of EAV. O&M is capped at 7.5 cents. IECC is already levying at the maximum for both. So when someone says, why don't we just raise taxes, the answer is simple. We legally cannot. We are at the ceiling. The only way our property tax revenue increases is if the overall value of property in our district grows.

Now, EAV in our district has grown significantly in the last four years. In fact, we have seen some of the highest increases in our history. But even those jumps do not bring in enough money to keep up with our costs. Not even close. The increases do not come close to covering the massive increases in utilities, which are among our largest expenses. They do not keep pace with health insurance, which rises faster than almost any other category in our budget. And they do not cover the cost of annual salary raises. So when EAV jumps 8 percent or 10 percent, people might assume that means we suddenly have piles of new money to spend. The reality is that the increase in revenue is far smaller than the increase in our expenses. It helps, but it does not fix the problem.

So if you are keeping score so far:

- Two legs of our funding system move with enrollment.
- One third moves slowly with property values and is capped by state law.
- Our expenses rise every year regardless of what enrollment or EAV is doing.

That is the basic model every Illinois community college lives in. And for years, it worked fairly well because community college enrollment was large and stable. IECC had 50 percent more students at one point, and that meant we had more tuition revenue and more credit hours, which meant more state support. We could afford more duplication and more inefficiency because the student volume covered it. But for the past fifteen years, enrollment has been declining statewide. IECC held steady this past year, which I count as a win in this environment, but holding steady is not the same thing as growing. The math is very different today, and we have to make decisions that reflect that reality.

There is another piece of this picture that people almost never see, and it is important. When the Illinois community college system was created, the legislature committed to funding the system at one third of the combined statewide cost. That commitment has not been met for decades. Today, the community college system is underfunded by about 670 million dollars. About 90 million of that gap is in equalization (additional state support that IECC receives because our property values are lower relative to many districts which results in less funding from property taxes), and the remaining 580 million is in base operating. **That means IECC and every other community college are operating with millions of dollars less each year than the state's formula says we should receive.**

The Illinois Community College Presidents Council continues to advocate for improved funding through both the Base Operating and Equalization formulas. IECC has a seat at that table, and I have been serving on the statewide Equity and Equalization subcommittees to help identify ways to stabilize funding and make it more predictable across districts.

(Cont. next page)

(Chancellor cont.)

The community college system has strong advocates, but we are also competing with an aggressive four-year university lobby for limited state dollars.

This brings me back to how our funds actually work. The Education Fund and the Operations and Maintenance Fund are our primary operating checkbooks. The Education Fund pays for instruction, student services, advising, academic affairs, administration, technology, and support functions. O&M keeps our buildings open and safe. These two funds carry the core cost of running the college.

It is also worth noting what these funds do *not* pay for. Dollars levied or used in the Tort Fund are legally restricted to risk management, insurance, and legal settlements. They cannot be transferred to or used within our Education or O&M Funds. Similarly, deficits or fundraising activity within Athletics do not draw from our primary operating funds. The recent bond issuance tied to the Tort Fund was permitted because that fund is not capped by the same limits as Education and O&M. In short, none of these activities impact the budgets that fund instruction, facilities, or student services.

And because the Education Fund is capped, and because two of our revenue streams depend on enrollment, we do not have a secret drawer of money to pull from when someone says we should add a program or hire more people or expand a service. What worked when we had 8,000 students does not work with 4,000 students. That is not a moral judgment or a business decision. It is basic arithmetic. The state helps through equalization, and that funding is important, but it is not designed to replace enrollment revenue or tuition. It is simply meant to level the playing field so communities with lower property wealth can still offer a comprehensive community college. It helps, but it is not a silver bullet solution. And remember – it is 90 million dollars underfunded.

The bottom line is this: we operate within a funding system where revenue cannot grow as fast as costs do. Health insurance rises. Utilities rise. Technology costs rise. Regulatory requirements rise. Salaries rise. Meanwhile, enrollment is flat or declining across the state, and EAV grows too slowly to keep up, even in the best years. So when we talk about right-sizing the college, or running programs intentionally, or eliminating duplication, it is not because we enjoy saying no. It is because we owe it to our students and our communities to keep this institution stable for the next fifty years. And that means spending carefully, growing smartly, and focusing on programs that truly serve students and lead to meaningful outcomes.

The good news is that intentionality pays off. Guided Pathways, program redesign, improved student support, marketing, targeted recruitment, and cleaner curricular structure are the very tools that help contain costs and grow enrollment. And when enrollment grows, the system stabilizes. That is exactly why we are doing this work.

My hope is that this helps everyone see the bigger picture. Community college finance is not mysterious. It is just complicated. And once you understand the moving parts, you can see why leadership talks about enrollment the way we do, why we have to make careful choices, and why we are pushing for an institution built on intentional design rather than nostalgia for the past.

If you ever want to dig deeper on any part of this, I am always happy to talk. For now, just know that IECC is doing exactly what it needs to do to stay strong, stable, and accessible for every student who will walk through our doors in the years ahead.

Forward Together,

Ryan Gower, Ph.D.
Chancellor; Illinois Eastern Community Colleges



Spring 2026 Community Education Catalog Now Available

Illinois Eastern Community Colleges is pleased to announce the Spring 2026 Community Education Catalog, offering a diverse selection of in-person and online classes for the community of all ages and interests. This semester's offerings include courses in art, photography, woodworking, wellness & fitness, music ensembles, language, finance, game development, and more.

This is a wonderful opportunity to share with students, community members, and colleagues who would like to engage in new learning experiences. Many courses offer flexible options and are open to lifelong-learners across our region. To learn more about IECC Community Education or to inquire about teaching a class, go to www.iecc.edu/communityed

Frontier Community College (FCC)

- FCC Book Club — Learning Commons (Conference Room)
- Basketball — New Hope Grade School Gym
- FCC Fitness Classes — Bobcat Den Fitness Classroom
- What Was the Renaissance? — Mason Hall 24
- Painting Studio — Mason Hall 22
- The Golden Age of the Airwaves — Mason Hall 24
- Bobcat Den Fitness Center (Memberships) — Bobcat Den

Lincoln Trail College (LTC)

- Community Choir — Lackey Music Hall
- Jazz Band — Lackey Music Hall
- Defensive Driving (NSC-4) — Broadband Building
- Eagleton Reading Circle — Learning Commons
- Crawford County Recreation Center Programs — CCRC Facility (on LTC campus)

Olney Central College (OCC)

- Concert Band — Wattleworth 216
- Teen Driver's Education — OCC Campus
- Art Open Studio — Ceramics Studio (Automotive Building 621)
- Woodworking — West Richland Center 112
- Small Business Development Center — West Richland Center

Wabash Valley College (WVC)

- Progressive Stretch — Science Building 61
- Concealed Carry Certification/Renewal — WVC Campus
- WVC Community Choir — Brubeck Arts Center Theatre

Online

- How to Get Started in Game Development
- Spanish
- Computer Skills for the Workplace
- Conversational Japanese

Vice Chancellor Town Halls

Town Halls with the IECC Vice Chancellors - VC of Business Operations, VC of Student Affairs, VC of Academic Affairs, VC of Institutional Outreach, and VC of Business and Industry - will be coming together to each campus this fall to engage in conversations with faculty and staff and to share information, promote transparency, answer questions, create collaborative opportunities, and continue to strengthen the advancement of the IECC Strategic Engagement Plan.

- **FCC - Dec 10** - 11:00 -12:00PM and 1:00 - 2:00PM, Mason Hall

[Click here for the Spring 2026 VC Town Hall Meeting Dates](#)



IECC Winter Reading Bingo

 **IECC Winter Reading Bingo is Here!** 

Ready to make your winter cozy and fun? Join our **Reading Bingo Challenge!**

✓ **Runs Dec 1, 2025 – Mar 31, 2026**

✓ **Complete categories like Psychological Thriller, Historical Fiction, Book with 300+ pages, & more!**

✓ **Each BINGO = an entry for the Grand Prize drawing on April 1!**

 **The library with the most books read wins the Golden Book traveling trophy!**

 **Anyone, anywhere can play—students, staff, and community members!**

Bingo cards are available at each campus Learning Commons, as well as the District Office and TLBWRC. You can also [download one here](#).

Mental Health: A Student's Perspective

Written by Mireya Rose, IECC Student Trustee

As a college student, I've faced ongoing struggles with anxiety and depression. These challenges can be incredibly debilitating, affecting not only my academic performance but also my social life and overall well-being. One of the hardest parts was feeling like I could not talk about it openly for fear of being judged or misunderstood.

Over time, I've learned that talking about my experiences and being patient with myself are essential to managing my mental health. Reminding myself that "everything will be okay" and allowing myself grace in difficult moments has been crucial. While I don't have a single turning point in my journey as these struggles have been a constant, I've come to see how they've shaped me.

My experiences have taught me empathy and resilience. They've shown me that helping others starts with making sure people feel seen and heard, without feeling like they're drowning. My advice to other students facing similar challenges is simple: speak up when you need support, be kind to yourself, and remember that your mental health matters just as much as your grades or achievements. You are not alone, and it's okay to ask for help.



TRIO

UPWARD BOUND

IECC MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2025

• November Workshop

On Saturday, November 15th, Olney Central College hosted 59 TRIO Upward Bound students for a day packed with learning, service, and fun.

Highlights

- AI Exploration: Students learned about Artificial Intelligence from Brandon Weger.
- STEM Lab Tour: They explored the college's new STEM Lab, sparking excitement for future opportunities.
- Alumni Panel: Former Upward Bound students shared their journeys and offered valuable advice.
- Community Service: Participants painted Christmas decorations for residents at a local nursing home.
- Thanksgiving Lunch: A delicious holiday meal was prepared by Teresa Baker.
- Team Building: The day wrapped up at Britton's Bullpen, where students strengthened teamwork skills through a spirited dodgeball tournament.

• 2025 Fall Trip

TRIO Upward Bound Fall Trip 2025

This past weekend, we took 68 incredible students on an unforgettable Fall adventure!

Highlights

- First stop: The Dogwood Social House — where we enjoyed a delicious dinner and had a blast in the arcade. Students had fun while building skills that encouraged problem-solving, sharpened their memory and focus, and fostered teamwork. What felt like play was also an interactive learning experience, showing that growth can happen anywhere.
- After a fun evening, we stayed overnight at a hotel to rest up for the next day's big event!
- Day Two: SIUE Preview Day — our students explored the campus, met faculty, staff, and current students, and got a real taste of college life. Students also got to dine for lunch in the dining hall, experiencing the atmosphere of a campus dining hall.

We're so proud of our students for embracing every moment and taking steps toward their future success.

TRIO U.B. STUDENT SPOTLIGHT CHLOE SUTTER



Meet Chloe Sutter, a dedicated senior at Newton Community High School. Since her freshman year, she has been an active participant in TRIO and is involved in several clubs, including Science Club, History Club, Spanish Club, Student Council, and Scholastic Bowl. She has been accepted to Eastern Illinois University, where she plans to major in Medical Laboratory Science.

<https://iecc.edu/trioub>

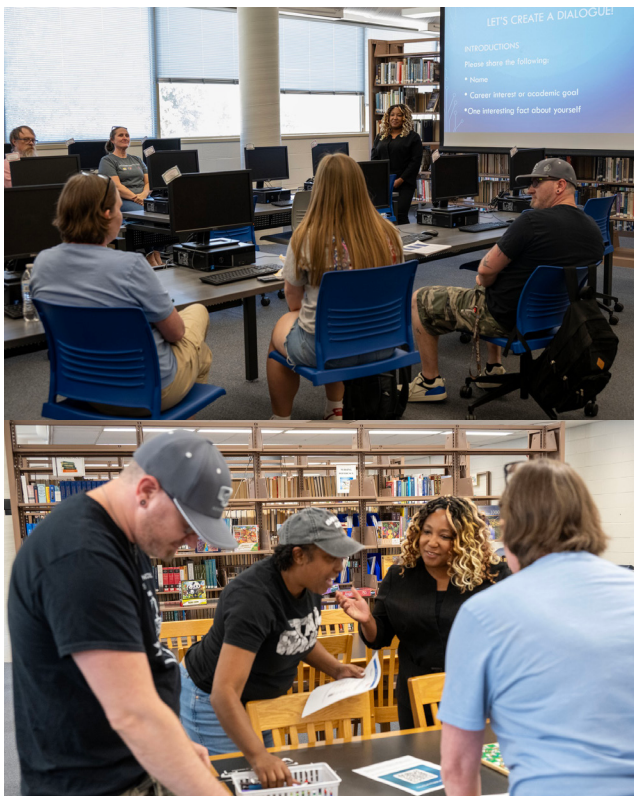
Reflections on Campus Life as a Non-Traditional Student

Written by Kristine Lisy, ISAB Member

My name is Kristine Lisy, and I am a first-year student here at Olney Central College. My area of study is Pre-Nursing. My experience as a non-traditional student at IECC has been very positive! I quickly became very involved on campus, which allowed me to realize the wonderful community here at OCC. Most of my classes have several other Pre-Nursing students. I quickly connected with others who had similar goals. This helped to build friendships as well as develop study groups to increase my studying skills. Along with my classes, I also became involved with different groups and clubs on campus. I joined Active Minds and had the opportunity to become the president. This has been a wonderful way to give back and serve other students on campus. I also applied to be a member of the student advisory board. Once I was accepted, the student advisory board gave me an opportunity to create positive changes within our campus. The other groups I am involved with are science club, student senate, and choir. I believe that my active involvement has been a large part of my enjoyment here at school.

The greatest challenge I have experienced is finding a balance to my work life, my family time, and my study time for classes. I prioritize time with my family, which includes my husband and three children. In addition to my family, I also work at Carle Richland Memorial Hospital. I spend a lot of time creating a scheduling algorithm to include sleep time, study time, and time with my family. I have tried a few different systems and found my routine. When I encounter a challenge at school, I have always been able to reach out and find a resource through our college. IECC does a lot to resource its students, and I am very happy with how supported I have been as a non-traditional student. There is an idea that I have that might also be helpful to other students. It would be wonderful to have a workshop or conference to encourage success tips and ideas. A few of the topics that I believe would be helpful are time management, self-care, study skills, and goal setting. These varying topics may offer new ideas that non-traditional students can incorporate into their routines.

My suggestion for other non-traditional students is to reach out and connect with the resources on campus. There are many different resources available through student services and the learning commons that can help you navigate some of the challenges you may have. If there is a need or resource that you cannot find a solution for, reach out and let someone know. Your voice and your experiences matter, and they are a very important part of our campus.



Spring Faculty Development Courses

CETL offers the following courses in the Spring:

Title	Description	Number	Section	Hours	CRN	Term	Instructor
BASIC PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES	EDUCATION	1600	400	1	61589	SPRING 2026	MAYHALL, AMIE (Primary)
ADVANCED PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES	EDUCATION	1605	400	1	61585	SPRING 2026	HNETKOVSKY, NIXIE (Primary)
CREATING EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS	EDUCATION	1610	400	1	61586	SPRING 2026	MCDONALD, JESSICA (Primary)
BLOOMS TAXONOMY BEST PRACTICES	EDUCATION	1613	400	1	61587	SPRING 2026	BRUCK, LAURA (Primary)
THEORIES OF LEARNING	EDUCATION	1615	400	1	61588	SPRING 2026	BARBEE, JAMIE (Primary)
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP	EDUCATION	1618	400	1	61590	SPRING 2026	SMITH, KEVIN (Primary)

To register follow this link: [CETL Micro-Certificates Registration Guide | IECC](#)

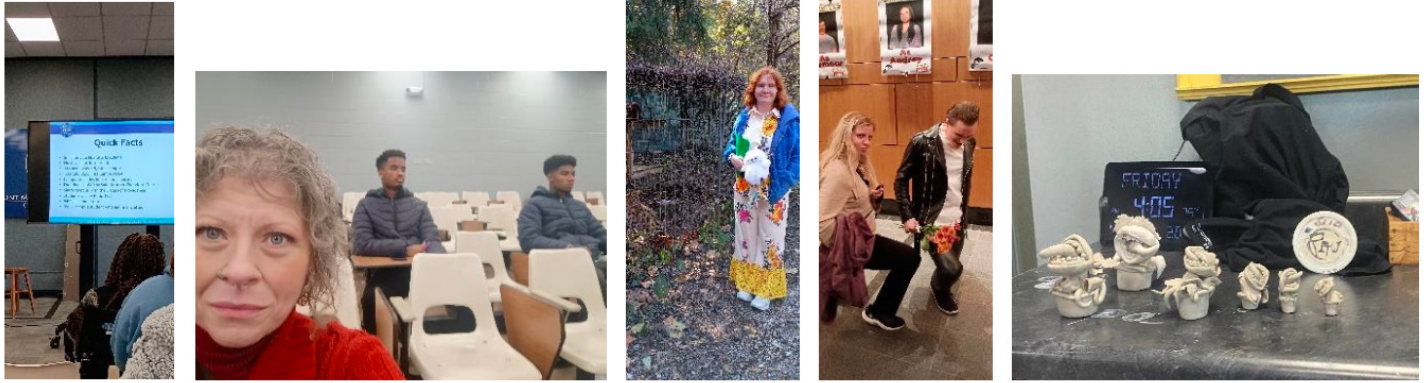
IECC's "Best Decision Ever" Campaign Continues to Grow

IECC's **Best Decision Ever** campaign continues to grow across the district, driven by compelling storytelling and a bold new digital presence. The centerpiece of the campaign is iecc.edu/best, a custom-built site designed by Cameron Ireland. Created specifically for this initiative, the page features a striking, modern layout that showcases student and alumni stories while guiding prospective students to explore programs and apply. Its design allows visitors to immediately connect with the people behind the IECC experience—those whose best decisions began right here. Visibility on campus and throughout the community has also expanded. In addition to distributing hundreds of Best Decision Ever yard signs to employees, alumni, and business partners, IECC has provided faculty and staff at each campus with campaign T-shirts. Whether it's a T-shirt worn in a classroom or a sign posted along a busy road, these visuals serve as everyday reminders of the pride our communities place in IECC and the life-changing opportunities our colleges offer. The Office of Marketing and Communications encourages any faculty or staff member who is an IECC alumnus to reach out and share their story so it can be featured as part of this growing campaign. "This campaign resonates with so many people because it's built on authenticity," said Chris Forde, IECC Program Director of Marketing & Communications. "When our own faculty and staff talk about starting as IECC students and choosing to build their careers here, those stories ring true. They remind people that IECC changes lives and that their own best decision could start with us."



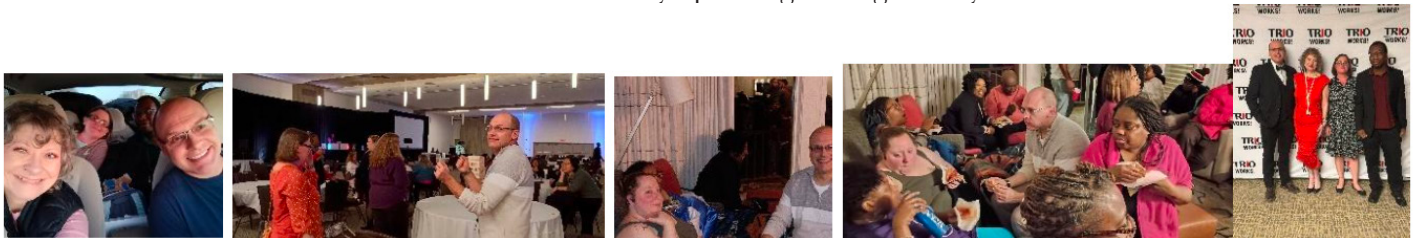
TRIO SSS Update

TRIO Student Support Services has been busy! We visited St. Mary of the Woods Liberal Arts College, The Exotic Feline Rescue Center, Oy Vey restaurant for dinner, and Rose Hulman Technical Institute to see a stage production of *The Little Shop of Horrors* for our Fall trip in October. We had an incredible time learning about the admissions process and programs available at St. Mary of the Woods. The Exotic Feline Rescue Center is filled with big cats that have been rescued or surrendered by private citizens who realize that a cute little furry cub doesn't stay that way for long or they are way more expensive to feed than they can afford.



Jaeda Thomason hosted a Live Art for Opportunity Event at FCC and showed us how to make Audrey II from *The Little Shop of Horrors*! She has currently made over 20 of them in assorted sizes. To say I'm obsessed with them is not strong enough!

Your IECC TRIO SSS Advisors just returned from Lake Geneva, WI. TRIO Director, Wain Davis, and SSS Advisors, Cindy Smith (WVC), Caleb Kamplain (LTC), and Tanara Ryden (OCC) attended the 51st Annual EOA TRIO Conference with many other TRIO professionals who were primed and ready for Elevating Minds, Empowering Futures: A Journey Through Wellness & Mindfulness. The theme this year was very focused on making sure that we as your TRIO Advisors not only keep the wellness and mindfulness of our students at the front of everything we do but also stay aware of our own wellness and mindfulness. That's a difficult thing to do sometimes when we provide the support services that we offer. This conference offered speakers who focused on fostering personal growth, resilience, and empowerment; how we can help our students attain academic success, the history, purpose, mission, and vision of the EOA Foundation; and how burn-out is a stress-cycle process and that there is neuroscience behind exhaustion and why "pushing through" only makes it worse.



There were many breakout sessions to choose from including several that allowed us to practice our own self-care and/or gather as groups to strengthen relationships between professionals and institutions. We learned so much about ourselves and what to do to keep our cups full so that our students receive the very best of us as they need us.

- Cindy R. Smith
Academic Advisor, TRIO SSS

NEWS AT THE COLLEGES

Click each newsletter to view

The Voyager

Network LT

Knightline

View from the Valley



The image is a dark blue invitation card with a decorative border. At the top center is the Olney Central College (OCC) logo, which is a circular seal with 'OLNEY CENTRAL COLLEGE' around the top, 'OCC' in the center, and 'founded 1861' at the bottom. Below the logo, the text 'OPEN HOUSE & DEDICATION CEREMONY' is written in a serif font, followed by a horizontal line. Below the line, 'HEALTH PROFESSIONS CENTER' is written in a larger serif font, followed by another horizontal line. Below that, the date 'December 11, 2025' is displayed in a large serif font. Further down, the event times are listed: 'Open House 3:00-7:00 PM' and 'Dedication Ceremony 4:00 PM'. Below the times, the location is given: 'DR. KENT L. WATTLEWORTH HALL', 'Olney Central College', and '305 N. West St., Olney, IL 62450'. At the bottom, a paragraph of text reads: 'Olney Central College President Chris Simpson and the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Board of Trustees invite you to join us in celebrating the opening of the Health Professions Center, which will house our state-of-the-art nursing and radiography classrooms and labs.'


OLNEY CENTRAL COLLEGE
OCC
founded 1861

OPEN HOUSE
& DEDICATION CEREMONY

HEALTH PROFESSIONS
CENTER

December 11, 2025

Open House 3:00-7:00 PM
Dedication Ceremony 4:00 PM

DR. KENT L. WATTLEWORTH HALL
Olney Central College
305 N. West St., Olney, IL 62450

Olney Central College President Chris Simpson and the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Board of Trustees invite you to join us in celebrating the opening of the Health Professions Center, which will house our state-of-the-art nursing and radiography classrooms and labs.

To submit information for upcoming IECC newsletters, please email newsletter@iecc.edu.