

OCTOBER 2026



READY TO BUILD

Forrest brings vision and experience to Frontier Men's Basketball.



LESSONS THAT LAST

More than 50 years of making a difference.



EMPOWERING NURSES

Scholarships strengthen local healthcare workforce.



FRONTIER MEN'S BASKETBALL BEGINS WITH FORREST

Chris Forrest is ready to build Frontier Community College's first men's basketball program with an emphasis on academics, character and community.

The Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Board of Trustees approved Forrest's hiring on September 15, 2026. He joins Frontier from Missouri Baptist University, where he served as associate head men's basketball coach for the Spartans.

Forrest said the opportunity to establish a program and shape its future drew him to FCC.

"What attracted me most was the opportunity to build something from the ground up. Being the first men's basketball coach at Frontier gives me the opportunity to establish the culture, standards, and identity of the program from Day 1. I also really connected with Frontier's focus on developing the whole student-athlete. I want to build a program that develops young men academically, athletically, and personally, while also becoming something the college and community can be proud of."

For Frontier Athletic Director Jeremy Ellis, the addition of basketball marks an important milestone in the college's growth and its connection to southern Illinois' basketball tradition.

"The title alone says a lot about the position we are hiring: first ever! As we all know, southern Illinois is a basketball place. The idea of having basketball at Frontier is the next step in fulfilling the vision that Mr. Richard Mason had. The new gymnasium is also making it all come together."

The nationwide search attracted a strong pool of candidates. Ellis said Forrest distinguished himself through his commitment to community, emphasis on character and experience at several levels of the game.



Chris Forrest is Frontier Community College's first head men's basketball coach. Men's and women's basketball will debut at Frontier in 2027.

"The search process had many very well qualified applicants, from all over the nation. Chris stood out from the time we read his application and resume. He has a high value for community and character. He talked a lot about getting involved in the community and networking with local coaches. He also has a diverse background in coaching, from high school coaching accomplishments to working with individual players to previous experience in coaching at the college level. We are excited to announce him as our first ever Frontier Bobcats Men's Basketball Coach!"

A 2005 graduate of Willard High School, Forrest played four years of college basketball at Florissant Valley Community College, Missouri Southern State and Fontbonne University before playing in Belgium. He earned a bachelor's degree in sports management from Fontbonne and a master's degree in sports management from Missouri Baptist.

An injury during his time in Belgium redirected his career toward coaching and player development.

"My coaching journey really started after an injury brought me back from playing in Belgium and led me into coaching and skill development. Since then, I have spent the past 15 years working with athletes both on and off the court. I've had the opportunity to spend seven years as a head high school coach and six years at the collegiate level, along with extensive experience in player development. Those experiences have allowed me to work with players from 5th grade to professional. Throughout that journey, I've developed a passion for building relationships, teaching the game, and helping young men reach their potential. This opportunity at Frontier feels like a great next step in that journey."

At Frontier, Forrest's approach will center on developing what he calls "ABC players," with academics, basketball and character guiding both recruiting and daily expectations.



An aerial view of the Jerry Cox Athletic Center on October 7, 2026. Relatively dry weather has helped construction crews make steady progress, with completion expected by December 2026.

“Our core values are purpose, discipline, growth, and ownership. I want our players to understand that who they are off the court is just as important as who they are on it. We talk about developing ABC players – Academics, Basketball, and Character. If we can help our players develop in all three areas, we are preparing them for success well beyond their basketball careers.

I look at the whole person. Obviously, basketball ability is important, but I also want to know who the young man is. I look for players who are honest, passionate, hardworking, coachable, competitive, and willing to be held accountable. Academics, athletic ability, personality, character, and program fit are all important parts of our evaluation. We are not going to lower our standards in the pursuit of winning. We want

players who want to be developed and who want to be part of building something.”

That philosophy includes clear academic goals and support to help student-athletes prepare for life after basketball.

“Academics will be a major part of our program. We want to graduate our student-athletes and help them develop habits that will serve them long after basketball. Our goal is a 100% placement rate, with a team GPA of 3.2 or higher. Our coaching staff will be hands-on with academic accountability, building relationships with professors and making sure our players have the support and resources they need to be successful. We believe academics come before sport, and the habits you develop in the classroom carry over to the basketball court and into life.”

As he begins assembling the Bobcats’ first roster, Forrest is also focused on establishing relationships across campus and throughout the region.

“My immediate priorities are building relationships, recruiting the right student-athletes to Frontier that will ultimately be the foundation of our culture. I want to get to know our community, connect with local high school and AAU coaches, build relationships across campus, and establish a strong recruiting network. At the same time, we need to create clear expectations for our players and build the foundation for how we want to operate every day. This is about building the program the right way from the beginning.

I want our basketball program to be an active part of the college and the community, not just something that happens inside the gym. Our players will have opportunities to serve, volunteer, work with youth, visit schools, and be involved in community events. I also want to build strong relationships with local coaches, businesses, alumni, and community leaders. If we’re going to ask the community to support our program, we need to make sure our program is giving back to the community as well.”

Ellis said that commitment to communication and relationship-building reinforced Forrest's selection to lead the program.

"Chris brings a wealth of knowledge for the game of basketball. He has talked about getting here and learning about Frontier, how it all works and making it a part of his program. We have talked about the importance of communication in all directions, with the faculty and staff on campus, to the area coaches, to incoming recruits, and maybe most importantly to the community. He has talked a lot about his philosophies as a coach and what he values in future players, and that was a strong point we liked about Chris."

Frontier plans to launch men's and women's basketball in 2027, with Jerry Cox Court inside the new Jerry Cox Athletic Center serving as their home. As construction moves toward completion, Forrest sees the facility as a gathering place for the campus and community.

"I'm really excited about what that facility can mean for Frontier and the surrounding community. Obviously, having a new home for our program is exciting, but I think the bigger opportunity is what happens inside that building. I want Jerry Cox Court to become a place where our players compete, students come together, families come to watch, and the community feels connected to Frontier basketball. We're building a program from the ground up, and having a facility like this gives us an incredible opportunity to create experiences and memories for our players and our community."

Ellis shares that excitement as Frontier prepares for its first basketball season.

"I'm excited to see Frontier to continue to grow, not only athletically but as a campus. Having Chris join our staff is super exciting, and I can't wait to see him coach that first ever basketball game in our new gym!"

Forrest began his duties on September 21 and has relocated to the area with his wife, Claire, and their son, William. As he settles into his new role, he understands the significance of shaping the program's first chapter.

"I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity Frontier has given me. Being the first men's basketball coach is something I don't take lightly, and I understand the responsibility that comes with building this program. My goal is to create a program that develops young men, represents Frontier the right way, and becomes something our players, college, alumni, and community can be proud of. I'm excited to get to work."



An early look at the future of Jerry Cox Court, photographed on September 18, 2026.



GOOD, BETTER, BEST: LINDA MONGE'S LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO TEACHING

What was America like in 1972?

It was a year of political turmoil, cultural milestones and technological change. The Watergate break-in set a historic political scandal in motion as the United States continued reducing its military presence in Vietnam.

In entertainment, Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* became a sensation in theaters. *All in the Family* dominated television ratings, and Don McLean's *American Pie* topped the music charts. Atari introduced *Pong*, while the Magnavox Odyssey brought video games into American homes.

Gasoline cost about 36 cents per gallon, a first-class postage stamp was 8 cents, and everyday communication depended on landline telephones and handwritten letters.

While those events and innovations helped define an era, a young educator was beginning a journey here at home that would span generations.

NOVEMBER 2026

- 3 Election Day - Campuses Closed
- 8 FCC Foundation Carnaby Square Fashion Show at First Christian Church in Fairfield 2:00
- 11 Veterans Day - Campuses Closed
- 17 IECC Board of Trustees Meeting @ WVC 6:15
- 25 Last Day to Withdraw from Fall Courses
- 26 & 27 Thanksgiving - Campuses Closed

DECEMBER 2026

- 8 IECC Board of Trustees Meeting @ FCC 6:15
- 11 Last Day of Classes
- 14 - 17 Final Exams - Fall Classes
- 18 Last Day of Fall Semester
- 21 - Jan 1 Winter Break - Campuses Closed

JANUARY 2027

- 4 Campuses Open
- 6 Faculty Workshop
- 7 & 8 Spring Registration, Testing
- 11 First Day of Spring Classes
- 18 Martin Luther King Jr. - Campuses Closed



Linda Monge teaches math in Mason Hall, continuing a career in education that spans more than 50 years and has touched the lives of countless students.

In 1972, Linda Monge stepped into the classroom to teach for the first time. More than five decades later, she is still teaching, building a legacy measured in lessons shared, equations solved and students encouraged to believe in themselves.

If the dictionary had an entry for “longtime educator,” Monge’s name would fit comfortably beside it.

Monge addressed alumni from several generations during the Fairfield Community High School Alumni Banquet on Saturday, October 3, at the Fairfield Elks Lodge. The gathering took place during Homecoming Week as FCHS celebrated its 100th anniversary.

For Monge, the occasion offered an opportunity to reflect on the school’s place in her life and invite others to do the same.

“I thought the high school has made an impact on a lot of people, and I was honored they asked me to speak,” Monge said. “I wanted everyone to reflect on their memories as I talked.”

She recalled a time when the high school was the center of students’ social lives as well as their education.

“When we were students, we weren’t traveling to Mt. Vernon or Evansville or going to concerts. Everything we did revolved around the high school,” she said. “It was the place to hang out, study, and be with friends.”

Monge’s family ties to FCHS stretch back nearly nine decades. Her mother, Eunice Musgrave Williams, graduated in 1938, when the school was only about 12 years old. Her brother, David, graduated in 1966, followed by Monge and her husband, Dee, in 1968. Their children continued that tradition: Maria graduated in 1995, Whitney in 1997 and Joe in 2002.

Her local teaching career began at New Hope School, four miles south of Fairfield, where she taught eighth graders every subject except science. In 1980, she joined FCHS and spent the next 30 years there. She is now in her 17th year teaching at Frontier Community College.

Throughout her career, Monge has watched the tools of education evolve. What has remained constant, she told alumni, is the need to keep learning.

"I have been in the classroom more than 50 years. And I can tell you that a lot has changed since I started teaching in 1972," Monge said. "I have seen the classroom go from the handheld calculator to the personal computer, to smartphones, and now to artificial intelligence. The world is constantly changing. And I think that makes a good education even more important today than ever. We have to keep learning, because the world certainly is not going to stop changing for us."



Linda Monge assists a student with math homework after class in Mason Hall.

Artificial intelligence even figured into her preparations for the banquet, she admitted with humor. But as she considered the memories she wanted to share, she realized the stories needed to come from the person who had lived them.

"As I was trying to prepare this talk tonight, I have to admit that I almost let ChatGPT write my speech. But then I started thinking about all those years at FCHS, and I thought – how could A.I. possibly tell you what those years meant to me?" she said.

"A.I. was not there and did not know the students. It did not ride in the school vans, and it did not decorate the gym at midnight before Homecoming. And it certainly never had to do cartwheels on the University of Illinois Quad because a group of teenagers called its bluff. So I decided I had better tell these stories myself!"

Those stories included memories of coaching FCHS Scholastic Bowl and math teams during her three decades at the school. Alongside the laughter and recollections, Monge shared the belief that has guided her work: every student deserves to feel welcome, capable and supported.

"After more than 50 years of teaching, I can honestly say that I have never met a student I did not like," she said. "Some were what I called my 'project students.' Some were high school wizards. Some needed an extra push, and some simply needed attention and encouragement. But I can say that every one of them wanted to be successful!"

Helping students find that success, she explained, begins with helping them feel they belong.

"And over the years, I came to believe that one of the most important jobs we have as teachers is to make a student feel that they belong in the classroom," Monge said. "To help a student believe they can learn, motivate them to want to learn, and then to let them know that someone cares whether they succeed."

That responsibility extends beyond the classroom.

"Teachers do not do that work alone, schools do not do it alone. Parents, coaches, bus drivers, secretaries, custodians, administrators, and neighbors are all a part of this equation."

The evening also brought an unexpected reminder of the lasting connections formed at FCHS. Monge reunited with three former students she said she had not seen since their high school days: Keven Cates, a physician in psychiatry at New York University School of Medicine who resides in Brooklyn, New York; Commander Holden Smith, who serves as chief deputy of Future Submarine Warfare and lives on the U.S. Naval Base in Norfolk, Virginia; and Ryan Musgrave of Evansville, Indiana, who retired after a career in computer software engineering.

Their return meant a great deal to her.

"They start here, go anywhere. It's true," Monge said. "For them to come back that made me think that FCHS meant a lot to them. That was awesome."

Their lives have taken them far beyond the classrooms where Monge once taught them. Yet their return reflects the enduring connection between a school, its teachers and the students who carry those experiences with them.

More than 50 years after her first day of teaching, Monge continues helping students take their next steps. The words she shared at both the beginning and end of her speech offered a fitting expression of that lifelong commitment:

"Good, better, best. Never let it rest...till your good is better, and your better's best. Life is good."



JERRY COX CONTINUES LEGACY OF SUPPORT WITH 114TH NURSING SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

The Clemence Elizabeth Cox Nursing Scholarship, established by Jerry Cox in honor of his mother, recently reached a remarkable milestone with the presentation of its 114th scholarship award. Through his continued generosity, Mr. Cox is investing in the future of nursing students at Illinois Eastern Community Colleges, Olney Central College, and Frontier Community College.

His support has helped open doors for countless students pursuing careers in nursing while also strengthening the future of healthcare throughout the region. Three of this semester's scholarship recipients have already secured employment with Fairfield Memorial Hospital, demonstrating the direct impact these scholarships have on developing and retaining a skilled local healthcare workforce.

Mr. Cox's longstanding connection to Fairfield Memorial Hospital and Frontier Community College underscores the importance of supporting students who choose to serve their local communities. During scholarship presentations, he takes time to speak with recipients about their career goals, future employment opportunities, and the value of continuing their education. He often encourages students to consider advanced degrees and future teaching opportunities, recognizing the ongoing need for nursing educators who will prepare the next generation of healthcare professionals.

Mr. Cox remains deeply committed to improving both the college and the community. His dedication to giving back reflects his belief that investing in students today is essential to ensuring a strong future for Fairfield and the surrounding area. Frontier Community College sincerely appreciates his continued support, commitment to student success, and the meaningful way he honors his mother's legacy through these scholarships.

Recipients of the Clemence Elizabeth Cox Nursing Scholarship are Allaryn Brach, Megan Blazier, Kadence Smith, Talisa Church, and Morgan Chapman.

Recipients of the Debra Jean Withrow Nursing Scholarship are Talisa Church and Cindy Jolley.

Photo Caption: Front row, from left: Allaryn Brach, Megan Blazier, Jerry Cox, and Kadence Smith. Middle row: Julie Bullard, Allied Health Program Advisor; Talisa Church; Morgan Chapman; and Brianna Trowbridge, Nursing Faculty Instructor. Back row: Dr. Sharmila Kakac, FCC President; Nathan Gentz, Fairfield Memorial Hospital Foundation Director; David Savage, FCC Foundation; and Brittany Rose, Nursing Faculty Instructor. Not pictured: Cindy Jolley.



A DAY OF LEARNING, WELLNESS AND CONNECTION FOR AREA SENIORS

Senior Citizens Day returned to Frontier Community College on Friday, Sept. 25, bringing area residents together for a morning of learning, connection, and wellness. Held in West Hall Rooms 103–105, the event had been offered several years ago and was revived this year. Attendees began the morning by registering and enjoying breakfast provided by Fairfield Memorial Hospital.

FCC President Dr. Sharmila Kakac welcomed guests with opening remarks, highlighting the college's 50th anniversary celebration and its commitment to serving community members of all ages. Lori Noe, Director of Learning Commons, also shared information about the resources and services available through the Learning Commons in Cox Hall.

Luke Harl, Financial Advisor with FNB Financial in Fairfield, opened the presentations with a discussion of estate planning and wealth preservation. He explained how individuals can estimate estate taxes and emphasized the importance of having a comprehensive estate plan. Harl described a will as the cornerstone of that plan and discussed other essential documents, including those that outline healthcare decisions and help ensure personal wishes are honored.

Following a short break, Dana Taylor, Chief Operating Officer at Fairfield Memorial Hospital, presented "Resiliency Through Life Challenges." She emphasized that resilience involves learning to navigate adversity and drawing on the strength developed through life's experiences.



Sharis Wilson describes the services Adult Education provides at Frontier and throughout the IECC District.

"Resilience isn't about avoiding the storm," Taylor said. "It's about having the deep roots needed to get through the storm. As older adults, you aren't just learning about resilience. You are already masters of it."

Taylor highlighted adaptability, connection, purpose, and humor as important elements of resilience. She encouraged attendees to maintain meaningful relationships and cultivate a small circle of trusted individuals she called "marble jar friends."

The concept, introduced by author and researcher Dr. Brené Brown in *Daring Greatly*, describes people who earn trust over time by consistently treating personal stories, vulnerabilities, and emotions with care. Taylor

noted that three to four close "marble jar friends" can provide a valuable source of support through life's challenges.

She also introduced the "3-to-1 gratitude habit," encouraging attendees to end each day by identifying three things they were thankful for and one obstacle they faced. The practice offers an opportunity to recognize positive moments while reflecting on challenges and personal growth.

Taylor then reviewed specialized services available at Fairfield Memorial Hospital, including behavioral and mental health services, diagnostic imaging, and bone density testing. She also highlighted physical, occupational, and speech therapy, along with cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation programs that support recovery and improved health.

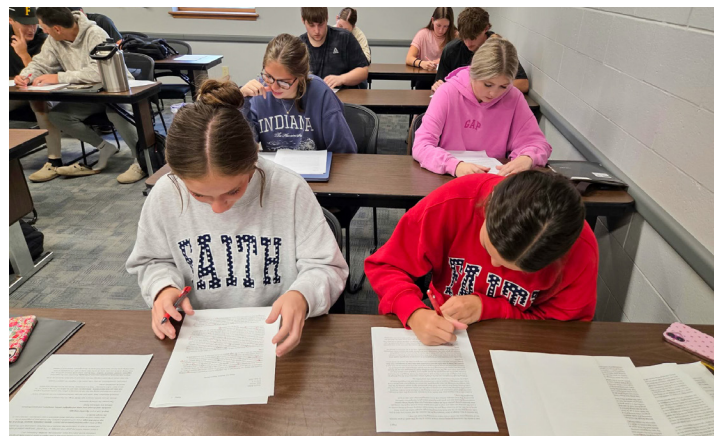
Whitney Buckles, MS, RD, LDN, of Fairfield Memorial Hospital followed with "Healthy Snacks – Healthy Meals." She discussed the importance of proper nutrition, highlighting ways to incorporate protein, produce, healthy fats, and probiotics into daily diets. Buckles demonstrated how to prepare a high-protein pasta salad and Greek yogurt overnight oats, giving attendees practical meal ideas and an opportunity to sample both recipes.

Sharis Wilson, Director of Literacy and Adult Education Operations, provided an overview of Adult Education services available at Frontier and throughout the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges District. She distributed informational materials for attendees interested in exploring the program's offerings.

The morning concluded with door prizes and wrapped up shortly before noon. Surveys were distributed following the event, with early feedback indicating a very positive response from participants.

The next Senior Citizens Day and Health Fair is scheduled for March 19 at the Workforce Development Center. Additional details will be announced at a later date.

FCC IN PICTURES



1 Dr. Sharmila Kakac addresses attendees during Frontier Community College's Senior Citizen Event Day.

3 FCC student Kenzie Turner waves to the crowd during the Fairfield Community High School Homecoming Parade.

5 Riley Roark serves the ball during a Bobcats volleyball match.

2 A student from New Hope School shares a hug with the Bobcat mascot during High-Five Friday.

4 EDS students take advantage of the pleasant weather as they gain hands-on experience working on utility poles..

6 Students in Kim Wellen's English class review and proofread their papers during class.