

## Local food truck brings solar-powered smoothies to Edwardsville, Alton

By BRANDON WELLS

Accomplishing goals is always satisfying, and Taylor Tobin of Glen Carbon did just that when she opened her food truck, Solar Smoothies.

The truck itself is unlike many of its kind in that it runs purely on solar energy via the solar panels on the roof.

Tobin, the sole owner and operator of the truck said owning a food truck is something she's been wanting to do for a while.

"I always have wanted one. I just wanted to do something different with my life," Tobin said. "I kind of like the idea of working for myself and it's just something different. I like the freedom and being able to travel and make my own schedule."

When going to other events, Tobin said she'd notice a lack in products like hers and that this was what motivated her to choose smoothies.

"A lot of times I would go to food truck events and there was never anything refreshing [and] not a lot of healthy options. That's what led me to doing smoothies, and I also



"Solar Smoothies" comes from the fact that Taylor Tobin's truck is run by solar energy. (submitted photo)

just love smoothies," Tobin said.

Tobin said the name, Solar Smoothies, comes from the fact that her truck is run by solar energy.

The process of owning a food truck itself is lengthy and starts off

with coming up with an idea for the truck before getting licensed.

"Once it's all built out you have to go through the licensing process, which is a lot. You have to get your health inspections [and] here in Illinois you

have to get licensed in each county, but also in each city as well. That process can take quite a long time," Tobin said.

In building the truck, Tobin said she got a lot of help from her parents to help her idea come to life.

Contrary to many other trucks, Tobin said hers relies solely on blenders, refrigerators and freezers rather than fryers or grills. This means she doesn't have to have an extensive fire suppression system.

While she's still unsure of how long she's going to keep her truck, Tobin said her current plan is to keep at it for about five years and assess where she's at afterward.

Tobin said she does a lot of events, but usually has her truck at the Flock food truck park in Alton and at Trace in Edwardsville. One of the events she has coming up is at Plan Shop Live in Maryville where she will be accompanied by Rudy's Flower Truck, a St. Louis florist.

More info on where her truck is located every week can be found on the truck's Facebook page, @solarsmoothietruck. Solar Smoothies can also be found on Instagram.

## Caritas Family Solutions celebrates 75th anniversary, expansion at St. John Bosco Children's Center

Caritas Family Solutions is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year and kicked off the year-long celebrations with a ribbon-cutting at St. John Bosco Children's Center (SJBCC).

The ribbon-cutting was in celebration of its new playground expansion which will provide additional play areas and a home-like environment for the foster children living at SJBCC. SJBCC provides a loving and structured home for up to 36 boys and girls ages 8-18, who are not currently able to be placed in a traditional foster care setting because of the extreme trauma they have endured.

"This playground expansion is a perfect example of the work we do on a daily basis to provide a loving, home-like environment for the youth in our care," said Caritas Family Solutions CEO Gary Huelsmann. "These are children who need support to heal from the trauma they've endured and playing is an important part of that healing process. We're so grateful to all of our community partners who came out to celebrate the beginning of our 75th anniversary with us and made this project possible."

Caritas has continuously grown over the last 75 years. The nonprofit currently cares for roughly 10% of all foster kids in Illinois, which equals around 1,700 children per month. Huelsmann added that while the largest percentage of their work is still in foster care, Caritas also provides a variety of other human services needs including pregnancy care for women who are homeless, independent living for adults with



Caritas Family Solutions kicks off its 75th anniversary with playground expansion (submitted photo).

developmental disabilities and employment assistance for seniors among others.

"Caritas has been around for 75 years and over that time our mission has grown and expanded to include a wide array of services spanning all walks of life," said Huelsmann. "The meaning of 'Caritas' is love or to hold others in high esteem. This anniversary is really about acknowledging our 'Legacy of Love' and celebrating all of the lives we've been able to positively impact over that time."

As part of the nonprofit's 75th-anniversary celebration, Caritas also buried a time capsule which will be opened on July 31, 2047, when Caritas celebrates its 100th

anniversary.

RASI, Gonzalez Companies, Archford Capital, Walmart and William H. & Mary E. Baker Charitable Trust all provided grants and resources for the playground expansion project. Ameren Illinois also presented a \$20,000 check to Caritas at the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Founded in 1947, Caritas Family Solutions is a nonprofit social service agency whose mission is to strengthen the social and emotional well-being of individuals and families in order to create healthy relationships, loving homes, and strong communities. Services include adoption, pregnancy

care for women who are homeless, foster care, counseling, residential treatment for children healing from abuse and/or neglect, independent living for adults with developmental disabilities (CILA), and assisted living and employment assistance for low-income seniors.

Caritas serves more than 6,000 individuals annually across Southern Illinois from offices located in Belleville, Carterville, Mount Vernon, Olney, Glen Carbon, Alton and Effingham as well as satellite locations in Highland and Sparta. For additional information, visit [www.caritasfamilysolutions.org](http://www.caritasfamilysolutions.org).

## \$37.7M Taxiway Lima and Bridge project underway at MidAmerica

Work to add nearly 3,100 linear feet of new Taxiway Lima pavement and a new Taxiway Bridge over Crooked Creek is underway at MidAmerica St. Louis Airport (BLV). The \$37.7 million project will provide airfield access to a future aviation business park on the south side of MidAmerica St. Louis Airport, where the new Boeing Production Facility already under construction will be the first tenant. The project will also include drainage improvements, a new perimeter security fence, the extension of the existing perimeter road and improvements to the electrical and access control.

Begun in April 2022, the project is funded through grants issued by the Illinois

Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO). The work is set to finish by mid-2023 and will ultimately serve to connect the airport to the Boeing Production Facility and other new developments surrounding it.

The new Boeing facility is set to be completed in 2024 and will consist of multiple buildings within a 34-acre campus where Boeing's new unmanned aircraft, the MQ-25, will be assembled. The MQ-25 will use the taxiway to access the MidAmerica St. Louis Airport runway for flight testing and ultimate delivery to the US Navy.

"We expect the new Boeing facility will

attract additional aerospace industry companies to this new campus, including those in the airlines, engineering, and technology sectors, and the Taxiway Lima and Taxiway Bridge project will serve them all," said St. Clair County Chairman Mark Kern. "The investments underway will provide hundreds of high-paying jobs to St. Clair County and the other surrounding communities."

The Taxiway Lima project is being completed by Plocher Construction Company of Highland, Ill. Springfield, Ill.-based Crawford, Murphy & Tilly handled the design work and will be providing construction inspection services.

"The new Lima Taxiway and bridge

paves the way for continued expansion here at MidAmerica St. Louis Airport, and this project will help to ensure that Boeing and any other new developments south of the airport have the runway access they need," said Bryan Johnson, director of MidAmerica St. Louis Airport. "When paired with the increases we've been seeing in passenger travel and the investment we are making in our new terminal, it is clear we're proactively preparing for future growth."

To learn more about MidAmerica St. Louis Airport (BLV), visit [www.flymidamerica.com](http://www.flymidamerica.com) or follow on social media, [www.twitter.com/@BLVairport](http://www.twitter.com/@BLVairport) and [www.facebook.com/midamericalv](http://www.facebook.com/midamericalv).