

# Illinois Business Journal

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## Flipping career. Time to work a different room?

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Have you spent years in a career that now leaves you with a sense of needing a change? A need to do “more?” A new you, part two? And maybe you’ve heard about the critical, ongoing, nationwide teacher shortage.

You might have even thought all along about how you’d like to teach, but for whatever reason, you didn’t get that teaching degree after all, so it’s not really an option now, right?

But wait! There might be hope for you to live out that dream still yet...

Madison County Career and Technical Education (CTE) System Director Kaleb Smith says that the CTE teacher pipeline needs help to sustain a viable flow, and Illinois has introduced alternative pathways to teaching to avoid an educator drought.

Alternative (non-traditional) teacher licensure is an option for those who have not completed traditional teacher preparation programs but have an interest in changing careers and becoming teachers. With at least a bachelor’s degree from a regionally accredited



Photo credit: Collinsville School District/Collinsville Area Vocational Center.

institution, or the equivalent in years of industry experience, along with a desire to pursue a teaching certification, alternative licensure may be the next right fit for that new you, part two.

“You can use your work experience and earned college credit to become a CTE teacher,” Smith said. “An individual must have at least 2,000 hours of work experience in a specific career pathway and 60 completed college credit hours. Those college credit

hours do not have to be related to the college pathway, however. If you do not have 60 college credit hours, then 8,000 hours of work experience in a specific career pathway will suffice.”

There’s also the option to enroll in and complete a CTE Teacher Prep Program. In the Greater St. Louis region, programs are housed at Illinois State University, Eastern Illinois University, and the University of Central Missouri, as well as ag education programs only

at Southern Illinois University Carbondale and Western Illinois University.

Career technical education, or CTE, courses are career-focused high school courses that help students identify and prepare for success in a chosen career pathway. As a CTE teacher, a former industry professional can now lead the classroom, drawing upon their years of experience to help students learn about the work they are preparing to do. These hands-on courses are taught for students in grades 9 through 12 at local high schools and are aligned to local career paths and postsecondary degree programs.

In Madison County, the list of CTE programs and the careers they align to is impressive. It includes: Accounting and Finance; Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources; Apparel Textiles; Architecture and Engineering Technology; Automotive Technology; Building Trades and Construction; Business, Management, and Administration; Culinary Arts; Early Childhood and K-12 Education; Graphic Arts and A/V Technology; Health Science; I/T, Computer Programming and Computer Science; Law Enforcement; Marketing; Precision Machining; and Welding Technology.

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## Highland Emporium ‘fills the gap’

By CYNTHIA BUENGER  
For the Illinois Business Journal

As they say in England, “Mind the Gap.” And that is exactly what Carol Eckhoff accomplished when she delivered Highland Emporium LLC to the local business community just seven months ago.

Highland Emporium is now a place to call home for multiple micro-enterprise owners and their wares. It is a place of refuge from the storms of early-stage business development and, ultimately, a story of necessity.

“My original business concept was very simple. I wanted to open a CBD store,” Eckhoff said. After experiencing the benefits of Hemp Oil CBD in the management of her acute inflammatory arthritis, she wanted to share that experience with others.

“I only needed 250 square feet to operate a store and could not find a decent building in a nice location,” Eckhoff shared. “I thought I could not be the only person looking for a small retail space.”

After reaching out to multiple Chamber of Commerce groups and city business development managers as well as visiting farmers’ markets and craft shows, Eckhoff discovered there were many micro small businesses and startups that had a similar challenge.

“I changed my business to include providing rental space in a brick-and-mortar store so that local micro small business owners could have a retail space year-round to display and sell their products,” she explained further.

By mid-January 2022, Eckhoff was moving forward with the updated vision of her new business model and focused on finding the right location. “I researched demographic information, visited several locations and communities, and found a great location on the square in Highland. The space was virtually move-in ready and the doors opened on July 5th, 2022,” Eckhoff said. “By October 2022, I had already met my six-month financial goals.”

There are undoubtedly challenges for entrepreneurs when building a business and Eckhoff admits she struggled with self-doubt. “It is scary starting something new. You constantly ask yourself, ‘Am I doing the right thing? Will people come to shop at the store?’ Having a great business plan and a support team is critical,” Eckhoff said. “I have shaped my business around the fact that people buy the experience and not the product or service. We don’t ‘sell’ in my store. We make connections and offer solutions.”

Eckhoff’s advice to other entrepreneurs now: “Asking for help is not saying that you failed, it is saying that you are smart enough to know that you do not know everything. It is okay to be afraid, confused, and frustrated. Have a support group of other business owners and organizations for assistance.”

According to SCORE, the nonprofit organization that provides free business mentoring services, 82 percent of small businesses fail due to cash flow problems; However, the communal approach that Highland Emporium offers to local vendors may challenge that statistic in a manner that is still developing.



Highland Emporium LLC Owner Carol Eckhoff captured first place in the 9th Annual Metro East Startup Challenge (MESC) hosted by the Illinois Small Business Development Center at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Eckhoff’s top prize winnings will help expand her mission of hosting a brick-and-mortar space with other entrepreneurs so that they too might realize their dreams. (Photo by Melissa Crockett Meske/Illinois Business Journal)

In 2022, Highland Emporium celebrated an early victory by winning the 8th annual SIUE Metro East Start-Up Challenge business plan competition netting the first-place winner \$10,000 and a variety of in-kind professional services.

“I was surprised and excited! The challenge process was intense and took almost six weeks to complete. We started with 96 competitors and the last round included a total of nine small businesses. The finalists all had wonderful business plans and presentations,” Eckhoff reflected.

In January of this year, phase two of the growth plan was introduced by creating an event space dedicated to pop-ups, cookie decorating, painting classes, vendor demonstrations, and food tasting. “I am

always looking for items that are local, different, and creative,” she noted.

We may not give much thought to the stories behind our area businesses, and the passion and dedication required to get them up and running and keep them running is a tale often untold. Carol Eckhoff tells that tale, and she is dedicated to helping land that happy ending for every entrepreneur with a business dream at Highland Emporium.

The multi-entrepreneur dream incubator is located on the City of Highland’s square at 917 Main Street. For more information, call (618) 651-4061, visit online at [www.highlandemporiumil.com](http://www.highlandemporiumil.com) or follow Highland Emporium LLC on Facebook. Anyone interested in working with Eckhoff can send an email to [carol@highlandemporiumil.com](mailto:carol@highlandemporiumil.com).