

ROCKET NATION

WITH DIANE DUCEY



Fundraising efforts like the Elks Lodge #2497 (903 N Dunlap in Savoy behind Old Orchard) hosting a BINGO this Saturday February 7th 5-9pm for Catholic Charities of Champaign and Piatt Counties allows this non-profit group to help individuals and families in need and residing in Champaign and Piatt Counties.

Caller Mark Montgomery, the Exalted Ruler at the Elks Club will begin the 10 games at 6pm (\$30 to play, \$3 for dauber or bring your own). There will be a few auction baskets, desserts for a donation and fun games (like "Heads or Tails") plus raffles to increase the fundraising dollars at the end of the night. Participants can enjoy a cash bar and the Jurassic Eats Food Truck 5-6:30pm.

One of the main efforts of the fundraiser is to help the Food Pantry at St. Patrick's in Tolono (304 E Vine St) open from 5-6:30pm on Mondays and 9-10:30am on Fridays. Those needing items visited 10 times in the month of January to begin 2026.

With some of the regular volunteers out on vacation or with medical issues, the dozen people who helped

racked up 186 hours of service. 45 families visited the pantry (4 new) with 21 people coming a few times for a total of 107 served, plus a couple of deliveries to assist shut ins during the winter weather.

Donations came in from St Patrick and St Thomas churches, some individuals, plus Aldi in Savoy contributed as well as Philo, Tolono and Villa Grove Dollar General stores.

Eastern Illinois Food bank continues with their partnership and to celebrate the 100th day of school, the Billman Day Care families donated over 150 items (weighing 140 lbs!)

Donations of clothing and toys left over from December were redirected to give to those visiting the pantry, then given to the Giving Place (open Wednesdays in downtown Tolono 4-6pm) and the Knights of Columbus as St Thomas School plans their Lenten Fish Frys on Fridays and the Trivia Night coming on March 7th. Even expiring milk or produce is handed off to area farmers to use in the garden or bread for the chickens and then eggs are sometimes donated back to St Patrick's Food Pantry! Even

grocery bags are recycled to bag groceries and large garbage bags are used to break down some of the packaging. Nothing goes to waste!

The Senior Luncheon the 2nd Wednesday of the Month in the St. Patrick's Tolono Parish Hall had 25 guests present (some scared off by the 'snow squall' on January 14th).

The entree was soup and sandwiches and 6 people celebrated their birthday as well as 10 door prizes that were distributed. Entertainment was Bingo with caller Larry Kearns as "white elephant" prizes were picked out by the winners.

Participants over 55 years old share a side for the "pot luck" buffet (those who are able, can donate \$3) while the entree and drinks, plates and flatware are provided.

With a Valentines theme, the upcoming lunch on Wednesday, February 11th, will have a chicken entree as you bring friends and a dish to share as Owen Kneer (pianist) will be the featured entertainment.

God Bless people who help others in our community, meeting the needs of the poor living among us.

May God Bless our efforts

Election '26: 4 Democrats Seeking to Replace Mendoza cont'd from pg. 1

Cook County party over Villa, who is backed by Senate President Don Harmon and U.S. Rep. Delia Ramirez as she tries to carve a lane as the most progressive anti-Trump candidate in the race. Villa has been in the legislature since 2019 but does not have a financial background — her career was in social work.

"This is the people's money and a social worker who has this background, who has spent all of this time in the General Assembly combing through the budget and understanding how, at times, in order to balance budgets, we have to actually cut service line items that are so critical for everyday people to make ends meet — the social worker being the comptroller makes the most sense," Villa said.

Kim has no legislative experience in Springfield but spent four years on the Mundelein Village Board and has served as treasurer in Lake County — Illinois' 3rd largest county with more than 700,000 residents — since 2018. She boasts support from dozens of officials in local government and Democratic county chairs across the state.

"I'm in charge of billions of dollars," Kim told Capitol News Illinois. "All the checks go out with my name on it, which means out of four people running, I'm already doing the comptroller job. I'm definitely going to be a fierce protector of people and their money."

Budget philosophy
The comptroller does not directly deal with the legislative process of approving a budget, but the candidates had plenty of ideas on how the state should manage its finances.

Mendoza herself has been an outspoken supporter of boosting the "rainy day" fund and has continued to advocate for ways to increase its size. The fund's \$2.4 billion balance only funds about two weeks of state operations, and lawmakers suspended the monthly transfer to the fund this year to free up money for other priorities in a tight budget year.

"To continue to put money away for a rainy day when we're in the middle of a tsunami, that's not when we should be putting money away for a rainy day," Villa said, adding "there's no way to prioritize that in this budget."

Raising revenue is the central focus of Villa's campaign. She suggested the state implement a tax on digital advertising and retry implementing a graduated income tax raise more money for social services she said are inadequately funded. Such a measure needs approval from both lawmakers and the gen-

eral public, but voters rejected soundly rejected the proposed constitutional amendment that would have allowed it in 2020.

Kim took a similar approach and said the state's budget goals during Donald Trump's presidency should be focused on "maintaining" the state's credit rating, which was upgraded 10 times between the three major rating agencies under Mendoza.

"I would advocate for not only the progressive tax to be brought up as a longer-term solution, especially with years of rocky finances headed our way with Trump still in government for the next, you know, three years," Kim said.

Croke and Kifowit said they support reinstating regular funding for the rainy day fund.

"The comptroller's role is very vital in managing the finances and prioritizing and making sure that we're paying down our debt," Kifowit said.

Kifowit said the rainy day fund should be increased to at least \$5 billion. As the lead negotiator on pension reform for House Democrats, she also said that when bonds the state is currently repaying expire, she wants to dedicate those revenues to paying down pension debt. Pritzker has proposed a similar plan, but so far it hasn't gained traction in the legislature.

Croke said she wants those revenues to go to the rainy day fund, and she suggested the state consider refinancing its pension debt.

"It all goes back to the credit rating: If we can increase our credit rating showing that we have financial stability, that we have those reserves and it helps us in the long term with our long-term borrowing, it's something that we need to do," she said.

Role of the office
Each candidate presented a different vision for how they will lead the office, with some saying they will use it to push policies in the General Assembly and others saying they will focus more on the comptroller's administrative responsibilities.

Villa said many answers to problems in Illinois depend on the legislature, and the comptroller's job should be "to bring attention to the fact that even though we are passing balanced budgets, we are missing a significant amount of money in order to fully fund the services that people need."

Kifowit said the comptroller must balance legislative goals with administrative responsibilities. Her goals include creating a nonprofit division to make it

easier for nonprofits to track funds they will receive from the state.

Croke said her main focus will be on administrative responsibilities.

"I hope that everyone running just wants to make sure that this office continues to work because when it breaks down, state government breaks down," she said.

Kim said she wants to use the office to better connect with constituents about the office's responsibilities.

"The problem is government doesn't have really good, short explanation videos that are 'snacks,' and that's where we all are right now," she said. "And I think having more 'snack' videos of information of what's in the comptroller's office will help people to ... trust government and understand through transparency in those explanation videos."

Putting their mark on the office
Each Democrat complimented Mendoza's work but listed off changes they would make.

Mendoza's successor will have to be "nimble" to respond to constant federal uncertainty and be a "watchdog" over state finances to make sure the state isn't overspending, Kifowit said. She added that among her initiatives will be opposing any pension system investments in artificial intelligence or cryptocurrency.

Upgrading the office's technology is also a top priority for Croke and Kim.

"I've seen the software where you can follow appropriations within the budget and understand where taxpayer money is going," Croke said. "And I think at this critical time when you have household budgets that are, you know, really tight, and then our state budget is getting very tight, people want to know how you're using taxpayer money."

Kim said she will also focus on increasing privacy protections for personal data.

Villa didn't offer specifics about her initiatives beyond calling for new taxes, which is ultimately left up to the governor and legislature. She said the job can't just be about paying bills on time.

Villa, Kim and Croke said they support keeping the office separate from the treasurer — the state's chief investment officer — citing corruption problems in the office when the responsibilities were merged under one roof prior to the 1970 constitution. Kifowit, however, said she would be open to combining the offices if there were enough checks and balances to provide safeguards.

Rocket Rundown

By Olivia Witheft
Student Writer
Winter sports are starting to wrap up and post season is starting!

Boys Basketball played BCC last Tuesday; they won 66-52.

They played again on Thursday against Monticello and the team continued their winning streak.

The Rockets won 69-53. The boys played Maroa on Saturday for Alumni Day.

The team won 65-44. They will play PBL on Tuesday and St. Joe on Friday at home.

Girls Basketball played BCC on Tuesday as well. The girls lost 18-64.

The girls also played Monticello, but on Friday. The Rockets lost 37-45.

They will play PBL at home on Monday and St. Joe on Thursday.

Dance competed at state over the weekend, but did not qualify for finals.

Boys Wrestling spent the week in preparation for Regionals.

The team had six regional qualifiers: AJ Daly, Hayden Smith, Devin Glik, Ben Mullins, Abe Davidson, and Josh Heath.

Girls Regionals will be this Saturday in Mt. Zion.

Boys track and field has their first meet this Friday. They are starting their indoor season at the armory.



Dance at state this weekend. Photo by Olivia Witheft.

Giertz Gallery to Present New "Fragment and Layers" Exhibition

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — The Giertz Gallery at Parkland College presents a new exhibition, "Fragments and Layers: Works by Erin Furimsky and Tali Weinberg," beginning Monday, February 16.

Furimsky and Weinberg both explore the interconnection of systems and structures. Their work is enriched by the mastery of their material and by the way they inject meaning through process.

Short of Breath

A studio artist in Bloomington, Ill., Furimsky's ceramic sculptures explore the relationship of sculptural form with highly ornamented surfaces, delving into the relatable and astonishing nature of the mundane and the human body. Her forms, both full and flat, suggest the strength of the human body and spirit and are imbued with a gentle endurance through buoyant energy, playfulness, and fragility.

Furimsky received a BFA from Pennsylvania State University and an MFA from Ohio State University. Her work has been shown nationally and internationally at galleries and museums, including The Eutectic Gallery, The Canton Art Museum, and the Yingge Ceramics Museum in Taiwan.

Champaign-Urbana-based Weinberg creates interdisciplinary works primarily through weaving and installations, addressing interconnected systems, environmental motifs, and the impact of extraction on people and the earth. Her patterns, influenced by natural forms and microscopic life, seek to establish order through layered lines and solid color,



Erin Furimsky, Trying to Multiply, porcelain, decals, wood, 9 x 11 x 7, 2025

reflecting interconnection and the passage of time.

Weinberg received an MA and BA from New York University and her MFA from California College of the Arts. Her work is exhibited nationally and internationally and held in the collections of the Berkeley Art Museum, Denver Botanic Gardens, and Georgia Museum of Art.

Furimsky will give a lecture on February 20 at 10 a.m. in lecture hall C118 at Parkland, directly followed by a ceramics demonstration Trying to Multiply on surface design in Studio C193. Weinberg will also give a lecture on Wednesday, March 11, at 1:15pm in C118. Both events are free and open to the public.

A public reception for the artists will be held on Thursday, February 19, from 5:30-7 p.m., with a brief gallery talk by Furimsky and Weinberg at 6:15 p.m. The exhibition runs

until Tuesday, March 31.

The gallery is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Thursday, and noon to 3 p.m. on Saturday.

To find the gallery when classes are in session, use the M6 parking lot on the north side of campus. Enter through door X-7, turn left, and follow the ramps uphill to the highest point of the first floor, where the gallery is located.

The Giertz Gallery acknowledges support from the Illinois Arts Council Agency. All events in the accessible gallery are free and open to the public. Parkland College is a Section 504/ADA-compliant institution. For accommodations, please call 217/353-2338 or email accessibilityservices@parkland.edu.

Learn more about the exhibition at parkland.edu/gallery.

Parkland College Health Professions to Host Informational Night

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Health Professions at Parkland College will host an Informational Night later this month.

On Monday, February 16 from 4-6 p.m., guests will be able to learn about the Nursing and Allied Health Profession programs offered Parkland College Health Professions at Parkland. They'll also have the opportunity to:

Meet with faculty and current students
Discover health profession programs and career pathways
Explore hands-on activities and demonstrations
Learn more about admissions, prerequisites, and more!

The open house will take place

in Room U140 near the Student Union. Registration for this event is not required. The event is free and open to the public.

For more information, contact Michelle Roberts at mroberts@

parkland.edu or visit parkland.edu/healthprofessions.

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE OF SELF STORAGE SALE
Please take notice Savoy Self Storage located at 116 E Church St. Savoy, IL, 61874 intends to hold an Auction of storage units listed below to enforce its privilege against the following parties at the facility for default of payment of Rent. The sale will occur as an Online Auction via www.storage-reasures.com on 2/26/2026 at 11:00 AM. Heather Martin unit #104; Khalid Shawkat unit #109; Danielle Chenoweth unit #114. This sale may be withdrawn at any time without notice. Certain terms and conditions apply. 6095-961604 published 02/04, 02/11/2026

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